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## COMMUNICATING ETHNICITY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF CONSTRUCTED IDENTITY

Laura L. Pierson

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, [nordicgal@cableone.net](mailto:nordicgal@cableone.net)

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COMMUNICATING ETHNICITY:  
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF CONSTRUCTED IDENTITY

by

Laura L. Pierson

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of  
the Graduate College at the University of Nebraska  
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Major: Communication Studies

Under the Supervision of Professor Ronald Lee

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December 2006

COMMUNICATING ETHNICITY:  
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF CONSTRUCTED IDENTITY

Laura L. Pierson, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2006

Advisor: Dr. Ronald Lee

This dissertation uses phenomenology, along with a constructionist framework, to explore the ways an ethnic community in central Texas constructs and communicates its cultural identity. The first goal of this study (RQ1) was to describe how the people of Norse, Texas experience ethnicity. The second goal of this study (RQ2) was to discover how this ethnicity was communicatively constructed and maintained. The third goal of this study (RQ3) was to learn how the relationship between ethnic identity and communication contributes to the creation of shared meanings within the community. The fourth goal (RQ4) of this study was to describe the meaning(s) that the people of Norse attribute to the cultural practices that reflect their ethnicity. The fifth goal of this study (RQ5) was to discern how the people of Norse use language and communication to validate their identity. The first part of this dissertation is devoted to an explanation of how identity and communication are inter-related and dependent upon each other, the process of assimilation and its effects upon immigrants, ethnic revival, including among white ethnic groups, and other identity issues such as naming and land. Second, the ethnic Norwegian community of Norse, Texas is discussed. Third, phenomenology as descriptive framework, and the methods and procedures of the study are described. The

second part of this dissertation is devoted to the results of the study. Here, the cultural identity and the communication patterns of the people of Norse are discussed. The last two chapters are devoted to an analysis and summary of the study. Here, it is revealed that the people of Norse still strongly identify with their Norwegian heritage, and that they reaffirm this identity by sharing symbolic forms and by participating in cultural rituals with others. The most important of these symbolic forms and cultural rituals includes Christmas celebrations, *lutefisk*, and the Lutheran church, all of which are strong Norwegian cultural markers for the area. This section also discusses the marketing of ethnic identity to promote the area's cultural heritage as well as to bring in revenue for the community. Concluding the final chapter are the limitations and contributions of this study, and suggestions for future research.

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**Dedicated to**

**Alan**

**“Jeg elsker deg.”**

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*Ingen er barn av i dag,  
du er barn av dei tusen år,  
djupt gjennom lag etter lag –  
røtene går.*

-Knut Hauge

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, I seek to address the inter-related nature of identity and communication. More specifically, I investigate how ethnicity is constructed and communicated in a small Texas community. To introduce this research project, I start with an overview of the relationship between identity and communication. Then I outline ethnicity, emphasizing its relationship with assimilation and immigration, its revival, and white ethnicity, and I also include sections on other identity issues such as naming and land. Later in this chapter, I present my research objectives and research questions, describe the contributions of this study to the discipline of communication, and preview the remainder of the dissertation.

#### **Background/Context:**

##### **Identity and Communication**

The notions of identity and communication, both complex issues in and of themselves, are inter-related and dependent upon each other (Abrams, O'Connor, & Giles, 2002; Collier, 1997; Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003; Shepherd, 2001). They each influence the other, and both are crucial to the study of ethnicity. In this section I discuss the relationship between identity and communication, and then a section on ethnicity follows.

The words “communication” and “community” both arise out of the same Latin root word *munia*, “where the reciprocal giving and mutual service that takes place in communication works to make a common people, or *communis*, a community which is

bound together through gifts of service” (Shepherd, 2001, p. 30). It is through communication that people give something of themselves and interact in a variety of communicative contexts, whether these contexts be interpersonal, familial, small group, public, or organizational (Littlejohn, 1996).

Although similar in meaning, “community” and “identity” are not identical terms. “Community” refers to a “macrolevel social phenomenon” on the level of a larger “environment,” and “identity” alludes to a “microlevel social-psychological phenomenon” which occurs at the level of an individual’s worldview. Communities, though, offer the social frameworks necessary to create and sustain identities (Primeggia & Varacalli, 2000, p. 245; Lie, 2003).

Culture is the overarching concept that embraces both notions of community and identity. Culture is associated with race and ethnicity; the former being related to physiognomy, and the latter to more esoteric elements, such as “traditions, peoplehood, heritage, orientation to the past, religion, language, ancestry, values, economics, and aesthetics” (Hecht et al., 2003, p. 46; Collier, 1997; Eisenstadt, 1995; Ellis, 1999; Lie, 2003; Martin, Krizek, Nakayama, & Bradford, 1999; Petersen, 1997; Song, 2003). Identity is formed when individuals align themselves with particular social structures associated with race or ethnicity and then communicate ideas about who they are to others. In this process, identity is continually being clarified, deliberated, and reformulated (Abrams et al., 2002; Collier, 1997; Hecht et al., 2003; Lie, 2003; Martin, 1997; Spivey, 1997; Wood, 1997).

This type of constructed identity is symbolic and is centered around a set of cultural forms and symbols (Abrams et al., 2002; Lie, 2003). In fact, these cultural



forms and symbols are what ethnic groups use to distinguish themselves from other groups (Ellis, 1999). Both meanings and behavior are significant, so “identities function symbolically to convey the meaning of the cultural group and to establish uniqueness” (Hecht et al., 2003, p. 60). Ethnic identity is situated around a very particular set of cultural forms and symbols, and thus, it communicates uniqueness and solidarity to the outside world (Lie, 2003; Martin, 1997). Social behaviors, such as holiday celebrations, cultural rituals, and food customs [referred to as the “last bastion” of ethnicity by Steinberg (2001, p. 63)], can also be viewed as an enactment of ethnic identity (Ellis, 1999; Hecht et al., 2003).

Among the people of Papua New Guinea, for example, the social behaviors of sports and gambling have replaced war and trade. These new behaviors serve as “a framework for communication between groups,” for it is through these collective rituals that individuals see themselves as part of a larger group and are able to interact with others outside of that group. Social contexts influence identity, and vice versa. By participating in sports and gambling, the people of Papua New Guinea create their own groups and establish boundaries between themselves and others (Gustafsson, 1998, p. 175).

Because identity is dynamic and continually renegotiated (Collier, 1997; Martin, 1997; Spivey, 1997; Wood, 1997), a community’s language or discourse, especially that which references their identity, is a critical component of identity (Hecht et al., 2003, p. 57). Communication scholars, then, study meaningful cultural forms and symbols (i.e., forms of communication) as a way to better understand a particular group. Since these forms and symbols “find their public character in interaction, behavior, and all kinds of

acts,” they are directly observable forms of symbolic communication (Lie, 2003, p. 44; Collier, 1997).

For example, there are few words in the Chinese language that directly describe or communicate emotions. A person speaking Chinese does not pointedly say how she or he is feeling; rather, she or he employs the use of “body-rooted idioms” to convey shades of emotions. The Chinese word for “heart” – *xin* – is combined into a number of phrases to indicate the personal and ethical dimensions of a particular situation. The listener understands the individual’s emotions based on how the word *xin* is used with other phrases. For example, the Chinese word for sorrow is *shang xin*, or “the heart is wounded,” and to be discouraged is *hui xin*, or “the heart has turned to ashes” (Tung, 2000, pp. 69-70). In this example, body-rooted idioms in the Chinese language reference Chinese identity, and indeed, become part of that identity. Studying these cultural forms and symbols and their use offers insight into Chinese ethnic identity.

Other examples of the link between identity and communication can be found in the African American community. According to Jack L. Daniel and Geneva Smitherman (1976), elements of the traditional African world view, such as harmony, natural rhythms, non-linear time, and the balance between the spiritual and material, can be witnessed in contemporary African American communication, and are, in fact, the foundation of such communication. The rhetorical resolution of artificial conflicts, called “playing the dozens” (Garner, 2004), and black street speech (Baugh, 2004) are also examples illustrating how a group’s cultural forms and symbols construct identity.

The relationship between identity and communication can also be studied by observing the cultural forms and symbols found in the mass media. These media outlets

highlight the symbols that groups use to establish identity and to distinguish themselves from others. Turkish television programs in Amsterdam, for example, serve not only as a source of information and entertainment, but also as an ethnic identifier among a minority immigrant group (Ogan, 2001). Cummings (2004) also cites the changing image of blacks on television as an indicator of evolving attitudes about black ethnicity and the role of African Americans in contemporary American society.

While the inter-related nature of identity and communication is well understood, some scholars voice concerns for future research. Shepherd (2001) states that constructing a distinct identity in contemporary society may seem more difficult than before due to the challenges that communication brings, adding that people need to believe in “the possibility of communication” in order for them to form such an identification (p. 33). In addition, Abrams et al. (2002) claim that “[t]he influence of communication on ethnic identity...is often overlooked given the focus on individual processing, which fails to address the creation of shared meanings among group members” (p. 234). This distinct identity, or ethnicity, is discussed in the following section.

### **Ethnicity Defined**

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the United States has experienced major changes in its ethnic makeup. As a result, “ethnicity” has once again become a major topic of interest, both in academics and in the popular culture (Song, 2003).

In their seminal work, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan (1970) assert that ethnicity has become more important for self-definition and

other-definition because the emphasis on occupational identities has faded. They also suggest that international events and religious beliefs have less of an impact on identity as they once had in the past, and that groups are beginning to redefine themselves on the basis of common culture and descent. People, according to these authors, are more frequently using ethnicity, rather than other factors, to construct their identities.

But what exactly is ethnicity? The term is difficult to define, and no one generally accepted definition exists. In general, an “ethnic group” is a smaller, unified group living within a larger society. This group is unified by a shared ancestry, recollections of a shared history, and a focus on certain symbols which help solidify the group’s identity. Such symbols include, but are not limited to, kinship, geography, religious beliefs, language (Song, 2003), traditions, values, peoplehood, and economics (Martin et al., 1999). Petersen (1997) also describes an “internal sense of distinctiveness” and an “external perception of distinctiveness” as essential to membership in an ethnic group (p. 33). Members of a particular ethnic group also share the same values and participate in the same activities and cultural rituals (Colliers, 1997; Ellis, 1999; Petersen, 1997). According to Eisenstadt (1995), these components help build and strengthen boundaries between groups.

Barker and Galasiński (2001) outline three “markers of ethnicity” to facilitate defining the term. These markers are all points of reference used by individuals while engaged in discourse about themselves, their community, or their ethnicity. The first marker is a *personal reference*, where anthroponymic terms (i.e., ethnic labels) and personal pronouns (i.e., we, they) are used. These terms imply a personal relationship, or a perceived similarity with others. The second marker is a *spatial reference*, where

toponyms or geonyms (i.e., names of places) are used, and “spatial reference [is] constructed through persons” (i.e., “with us”). In this sense, familiarity is constructed through the use of identifiers of place. The third marker is a *temporal reference*, where prepositions (i.e., then) and “adverbs of time” (i.e., long ago) are used to create a sense of history and/or heritage within a group (p. 126). By identifying themselves with others through personal, spatial, and temporal references, individuals create a sense of shared ethnicity and community with others.

According to Reminick (1983), ethnicity “may be considered the largest social grouping in which sentiments are evoked and identity formed in the context of a primary group structure through the vehicles of particular symbols” (p. 2). Ethnicity is a distinctive marker of a group’s communal legacy, which is shared and passed down through the generations (Banks, 2002). In addition, the group’s members are conscious of their membership within that group (Ellis, 1999; Song, 2003). This identity, then, “is the source of people’s meaning and experience” (Berry & Henderson, 2002, p. 4).

Although usually central to ethnic identity, shared ancestry is not always a necessary component. Song (2003) argues that it is the “group’s belief in its common ancestry and its members’ perception and self-consciousness that they constitute a group which matter, and not any actual evidence of their cultural distinctiveness as a group” (p. 7). According to Petersen (1997), ethnicity consists of “ties that transcend kinship, neighborhood, and community boundaries” (p. 32).

Membership in an ethnic group implies inclusion, and hence, social identity. By interacting with others in the same group, an individual can learn the concepts and communication patterns that differentiate that group from others. “Ethnic groups are

symbolized, and individuals identity as members of them, by engaging in specific expressive patterns that are acquired in communication interaction” (Ellis, 1999, p. 146).

This identity can have varying degrees of significance (Song, 2003), a situation to which Steinberg (2001) refers as a “crisis of authenticity” (p. 63). These identities may be either “thick” or “thin” in nature. A “thick” identity suggests that an individual or group strongly relates to the culture of the home country. This person or group continues to celebrate old-world customs, speak the home language, and many times live in communities with other immigrants from that country. In other words, these people’s lives are dominated by aspects of their ancestral homeland (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998).

Cornell and Hartmann (1998) illustrate this “thick” identity at work in their example of pre-1990s South Africa. In this society, a person’s ethnicity determined whom s/he could marry, where s/he lived, and what jobs that person was eligible to work. In this case, ethnicity “dominated layer after layer of social organization with a comprehensiveness and power unmatched by any other dimension of individual and collective identity” (p. 74). In other words, a person’s ethnicity defined her/his life and thus forced that individual to identify strongly with that ethnicity.

A “thin” identity suggests that an individual or group may still be aware of and celebrate ethnicity superficially, but that no real direct ties to the homeland exist. Marriage outside the ethnic group, loss of the home language, and a wider geographic base all contribute to the dilution of ethnicity for these people. In a sense, they more or less blend into the larger American cultural landscape. Some individuals in this group may still proudly identify themselves as being from a particular ethnic group, but their

ethnicity has shifted to a more symbolic role. They have moved from *being* an ethnicity to *feeling* an ethnicity (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998; Song, 2003; Steinberg, 2001).

Contemporary Italian Americans provide a good example of “thin” identity (Alba, 2000b; Primeggia & Varacalli, 2000). In this case, ethnicity plays a much smaller role, if any, in the organization of social life. Many individuals within this community may be aware of and celebrate their ethnicity, but it does not determine the outcome of their lives. Italian Americans can and do marry outside their ethnic (and religious) group, move away from their families and communities, and take jobs not traditionally associated with their ethnic group. This is not to say, however, that ethnicity is without importance for these people. For many Italian Americans, their ethnic identity may not permeate their everyday lives, but it is still significant to the formation of their identity as a whole, albeit at a reduced level.

As social creatures, humans must interact to form their ethnic identity. People ignore differences and strive to fit better in a communication sense. Individuals use their communication to construct and negotiate their own identities (Ellis, 1999; Martin & Nakayama, 1997; Song, 2003; Ting-Toomey, 1999). This line of reasoning goes against the earlier assumption that ethnicity was a primordial aspect of our selves, occurring naturally in each individual (Geertz, 1963, 1973; Higham, 2002). This notion of ethnic primordality has been further criticized for assuming that identity is static and unchanging over time, and for being “culturally essentialist” (Song, 2003, p. 7; Martin et al., 1999). Instead, Ellis (1999) suggests that

a better way to examine ethnic groups is as the outcome of social interaction. The emphasis is not on the supposed unvarying content of ethnic groups, or some final

list of objective qualities of a group. The emphasis is on how ethnic identity is formed, confirmed, and transformed in the course of interaction amongst individuals and media. Differences and similarities are produced and reproduced by interaction with “others” that creates images of similarity and differences. This makes ethnicity a social identity that is both individual and collective, and places its generative nature in the communication process. (pp. 142-143)

But what happens when ethnic groups interact socially with other groups? How groups maintain, or lose, their sense of ethnic identity is addressed in the next section.

### **Ethnicity and Assimilation**

America has been, and will always be, a nation of immigrants. People from many different ethnic groups and nationalities came to this country to create new lives for themselves. What they found were other ethnic people striving for the same goal. The end result was an interesting mix of ethnicities and cultures, all trying to co-exist in the same space (Daniels, 2002).

Early Americans perceived these differences, but they felt that, over time, these distinctions would fade or blend into a larger, American cultural landscape. This idea of an ethnic amalgamation, where all cultures would blend into one, harmonious group, started when Europeans first began arriving on our shores (Glazer & Moynihan, 1970). They shared a common vision of all people in the new world speaking the same language, and living together and interacting with each other peacefully (Petersen, 1997).

The seeds for our modern understandings of this process were planted during the late 1800s and early 1900s, when the method which allowed for this blending to occur became known as “assimilation.” In 1908, this term became synonymous with “melting



pot,” which was derived from the title of a popular play by Israel Zangwill. In this play, ethnic distinctiveness was portrayed as fading and unimportant as the various different immigrant groups melted into one, larger group (King, D. 2000; Zangwill, 1908).

The American sociologist Robert E. Park (1864-1944) of the University of Chicago was instrumental in the development of assimilation theory in the first two decades of the twentieth century (1914a, 1914b, 1915; Park & Miller, 1921). He envisioned the process in four steps: contact, competition, accommodation, and assimilation. For him, the process was inevitable, irreversible, and desirable. For scholars, his theory had a lasting impact on how immigration and assimilation were studied (Petersen, 1997; Steinberg, 2001).

According to Alba (2000a), assimilation is the processes over time which diminish “the social foundations for ethnic distinctions” (p. 211), and it is the “cumulative byproduct of choices made by individuals seeking to take advantage of opportunities to improve their social situations” (p. 212). In other words, people make changes to adapt to their new environment, and as a result, elements of their ethnic distinctiveness are lost. As they are more absorbed into the macro-culture, their unique ethnic stamp becomes less important or visible (Lee, 2002). Others critical of the assimilation model focus on the oppressive and racial overtones of the process, questioning just how relevant personal choice is in the matter (Glazer & Moynihan, 1970; Hecht et al., 2003).

The assimilation model assumed that as cultural differences were reduced, assimilation could more easily occur. Cultural elements such as language (Steinberg,

2001), religion, place of residence, and levels of intermarriage were all viewed as indicators of an individual's or group's level of ethnic identification. Intermarriage, more so than the other indicators, was seen as the litmus test for the success of assimilation, because the act of marriage itself combines families and provides an environment for child-rearing. According to Alba (2000a), "[a] high rate of intermarriage signals that individuals of putatively different ethnic backgrounds no longer perceive social and cultural differences significant enough to create a barrier to a long-term union" (p. 218; Steinberg, 2001).

Traditionally, assimilation was viewed as a straight-line process (Gordon, 1964; Hirschman, 1983; Park & Burgess, 1969), one which lead from Point A (original ethnicity) to Point B ("melting pot" ethnicity). Ethnic homogeneity was the expected outcome (Kibria, 1999). A higher degree of assimilation supposedly predicted a lessening of ethnic diversity (Ellis, 1999) and a healthier economy (Zéphir, 2001).

This model of assimilation was based upon the expectations of white, European immigrants (Fouron & Schiller, 2001; Kibria, 1999; Song, 2003), particularly those from Britain (King, D., 2000; Steinberg, 2001). According to Walzer (2000), "'Americanization' was a political program designed to make sure that assimilation would not be too slow a process, at a time, indeed, when it seemed not to be a recognizable *process* at all" (p. 189). It was a way of life, one determined to boil down the various groups into one, homogenous group. Societal problems may not be totally eradicated by the process of assimilation, but early Americans believed that by absorbing others into the larger society and by giving them all the rights thereof, their new country would be a utopian civilization, compared to their countries of origin:

Based on the experiences of white European-ancestry immigrants to the USA, the straight-line assimilation model predicted that non-white immigrant groups and ethnic minority groups would also be able to assimilate into the mainstream fabric of America, once they had learned the English language and adopted American ways of living and behaving. It was believed that this, in turn, would contribute to the reduction of discrimination and prejudice against them. In this way it was believed that such groups' ethnicity would gradually wane in significance. (Song, 2003, p. 8)

These early thoughts on assimilation in America had a great effect on politics, particularly with regard to immigration policy in the first few decades of the last century.

According to D. King (2000), the government's concern was to

limit immigration to certain groups already assimilated into American identity.

Immigrants were to be selected on the grounds of their cultural, racial, and eugenic compatibility with the dominant conception of U.S. political culture and its people, an Anglo-Saxon conception. (p. 16)

Consequently, immigration within the last 100 years has been characterized by racist policies of elitism and exclusion (King, D., 2000).

Immigrants, then, were the focus of assimilation. Once they arrived in America, they were expected to adapt to the ways of their new country and to become "Americans." The next section outlines how assimilation affected these immigrants down through the generations.

### *Assimilating Immigrants*

Immigrant generations coped with assimilative forces in different ways. How an individual reacted to the pressures to conform depended largely upon to which generation s/he belonged (Diner, 1998; Steinberg, 2001; Walzer, 2000). The first generation, or original immigrants to America, responded in very different ways than their children and grandchildren, the second and third generations, did.

In general, the first generation, or, the immigrants that came to America, were still very much linked to the old world. Their childhood memories and “recurrent nostalgia,” along with ethnic organizations and churches here in America, kept their ties to their homeland intimate. Although proud to be living in America, they still liked the old customs and looked upon their homelands with favor (Petersen, 1997, p. 25; Steinberg, 2001). Nahirny and Fishman (1996) suggest that perhaps these immigrants took their ethnicity for granted, and thus were not overtly conscious of it. Walzer (2000) describes their America as

a country of immigrants who, however grateful they [we]re for this new place, still remember[ed] the old places. And their children kn[e]w if only intermittently, that they ha[d] roots elsewhere. They, no doubt, [we]re native grown, but some awkward sense of newness here, or of distant oldness, ke[pt] the tongue from calling this land “home.” (p. 187)

The children of these immigrants, the second generation, were more likely to be interested in becoming American. Although they grew up with parents who celebrated the old country, these children wanted to embrace the culture of their new homeland, America. They were not interested in knowing the language or culture so familiar to their

parents. Their children, the third generation, however, would reverse this trend and seek meaningful ways to recapture the ways of their grandparents, the original immigrants to these shores (Petersen, 1997; Steinberg, 2001; Walzer, 2000).

The second generation's interest in becoming all things American reflects the early attitudes held about immigration. During the formative years of American immigration, it was expected that immigrants, particularly those from northern and western Europe, would be assimilated into the larger American framework by the second generation. That so many immigrants' children seemed willing to do this almost guaranteed that this assimilation would occur (Fouon & Schiller, 2001; Zéphir, 2001).

Traditionally, this second generation has been regarded as the pivotal generation with regards to assimilation. It is these individuals who live in two worlds and who must make choices about their identity. According to Zéphir (2001), "children of immigrants constitute a marginal group standing between two cultures – that of the parents and that of the larger native society – and experience some alienation from both" (p. 49; Nahirny & Fishman, 1996). Song (2003) calls this "negotiation of ethnic identity" a "contentious issue" for second generation immigrants, pointing out that it is an issue not typically faced by the immigrant parents (p. 105; Tung, 2000). According to Fouon and Schiller (2001),

[e]ven the naming of immigrants' children as "second generation" reflected and contributed to the notion of the incorporation of immigrants as a step-like irreversible process and one in which immigrants' children were socialized solely by the forces within the land of their birth. (p. 63)

The second generation, then, lives between two worlds, but it belongs to the larger society. If necessary, however, these individuals can cross over the ethnic boundaries to reclaim their heritage (Anwar, 1998; Song, 1999, 2003), if only for a brief and symbolic moment. To help combat marginalization and discrimination, these individuals may opt to work with others from a similar background to create strength in numbers (Song, 2003). These second generation immigrants will ultimately define themselves ethnically based on their surrounding environment and its context (Zéphir, 2001).

The third generation, or the grandchildren of the original immigrants, belongs to America; they are the product of parents who willingly left behind the old ways. They interact on a level unimagined by their grandparents, marrying outside their ethnic group and religion and participating in society on a more inclusive level. Despite these facts, however, the third generation has experienced an ethnic revival of sorts. While unquestionably American, these people also want to be ethnic (Glazer & Moynihan, 1970; Zéphir, 2001), and they actively seek out elements of their ethnic heritage (Nahirny & Fishman, 1996). According to Mead (1996), “[t]his odd blending of the future and the past, in which another man’s great-grandfather becomes the symbol of one’s grandson’s future, is an essential part of American culture” (p. 229).

According to Petersen (1997), this interest in ethnicity by the third generation of immigrants has created “a succession of amateur historical societies, folklore associations, and other organized efforts to keep alive, revivify, or invent elements of the various overseas cultures” (p. 25). These ethnic revivals pay homage to the culture of the old country and allow individuals a chance to participate in ethnic events without having

to incorporate them into their daily lives. This symbolic ethnicity, then, is a generation's attempt at reconstructing their identity (Song, 2003; Steinberg, 2001). African Americans (Hecht et al., 2003) and Italians (Alba, 2000b; Primeggia & Varacalli, 2000) offer two good examples of this type of symbolic ethnicity in action.

What will happen when a fourth generation of immigrants begins? Steinberg (2001) suggests that it will be this generation that will determine the future of ethnicity in America, for it will be the first generation to be born to American-born grandparents. Zéphir (2001) agrees, noting that the success of the original immigrants' descendants will help establish contemporary perspectives regarding immigration and ethnicity in America.

Already, interesting patterns are emerging in modern immigration. Fouron and Schiller (2001) mention the "range of trajectories" (p. 63) currently available to immigrants. These authors state that newer immigrants now have "multiple, overlapping, and simultaneous identities" (p. 64), which they can call upon and use during different events, moving between identities to match the occasion (Stepick, 1998). As a result, new immigrants no longer have to choose one ethnicity over another, for they can successfully live in and travel between both cultures simultaneously, if necessary.

As witnessed in the previous section, many immigrants did not lose elements of their ethnic identity, despite concerted assimilation efforts. While some wholeheartedly embraced the American culture and lifestyle, others sought out the culture and ethnic identity of their ancestral homeland. This interest in ethnicity calls the effectiveness of the assimilation model into question, a topic which is addressed in the next section.

### *Questioning the Assimilation Model*

During the late 1800s, America experienced a new wave of immigration, receiving numerous immigrants from southern and eastern Europe and Asia. These people brought with them entirely different cultures, religions, and languages. Because these individuals were so different, Americans began to fear that the new arrivals could not be assimilated. What was even more troubling to Americans was that these new immigrants' children, the second generation, would not assimilate either (Zéphir, 2001). These later-arriving immigrants, along with the scores of other immigrants also resisting assimilation, caused people to re-evaluate the efficacy of the assimilation model.

First, Steinberg (2001) claims that modern scholars have misread Park's intentions with regards to an individual's or group's level of assimilation. According to Steinberg, Park did foresee a lessening of ethnic distinctiveness and a blending of groups, but he (Park) did not envision a complete melting of cultures and the total annihilation of cultural and ethnic symbols within those individuals or groups.

Second, the model's approach to assimilation is troubling to many. Critics point to the model's linear construction, claiming that its "ahistorical, individualistic, and incrementalist" nature prevents it from understanding identity change in a multi-layered, complex society (Alba, 2000b, p. 42; Song, 2003). Others cite concerns with the unidirectional bias of the model, claiming that the process of assimilation can, and does, work in both directions (Alba, 2000b; Petersen, 1997). In addition, both Alba (2000b) and Song (2003) outline concerns about the model's assumptions regarding the fluidity of the ethnic environment, acknowledging that it is neither static nor simple.



Hecht et al. (2003) and Alba (2000a) highlight another problem with the model: that for assimilation to occur, the minority ethnic group and its members must be willing to become part of the larger, more dominant group. Without the minorities' consent, assimilation will not occur, for their level of willingness is directly related to the saliency of their ethnic identity. For those who identify strongly with their ethnicity, there is no motivation to assimilate. Conversely, Alba adds that one should not make the mistake of assuming that assimilation was being forced upon resisting individuals determined to retain their ethnic identity.

In addition, D. King (2000) suggests that the term "American" was too narrowly defined to ensure assimilation on a broad scale. Because "white" was considered the norm, many groups were excluded from this process based on their skin color alone. African Americans, who for the most part did not voluntarily come to this country, were not credited or respected for their contributions to the American cultural landscape, and therefore, were not considered Americans for a certain period of time.

Fifth, Steinberg (2001) posits that the overall "success" of assimilation, as much as did occur, was over-inflated due to the unacknowledged similarities between groups. Proponents of the straight-line assimilationist model were too eager to point out the distinctiveness of each ethnic group, while in reality these groups had more in common with each other than previously discussed. Since many groups were fairly similar before they came to America, the level of assimilation for these groups was over-estimated once they arrived here.

And finally, Steinberg (2001) also takes issue with the cultural relativism embedded within the process, claiming that people do not question the attributes and

profundity of their new ethnicity. They may observe differences between groups, but no judgements are to be made. Steinberg suggests that a more critical look at the process of assimilation is warranted, and that the people involved should be more aware of the processes occurring around them.

The straight-line assimilation model, that of the “melting pot,” was a flawed theory and did not live up to expectations. While some assimilation did occur, many groups still maintained their ethnic identities. The next section addresses what assimilation professed to eliminate: ethnic identity and its concurrent revival.

### **Ethnicity Revived**

According to Alba (2000a), the fact that ethnic enclaves exist in America is proof that assimilation is not the grand cultural equalizer that it was once thought to be. Acknowledging that assimilation does occur to varying degrees, Alba notes, however, that it “need not imply the obliteration of all traces of ethnic origins, nor require that every member of a group be assimilated to the same degree” (p. 211; Steinberg, 2001). For many people, ethnicity continues to be an important aspect of their identity (Daniels, 2002), and for them, exploring these identities “is of prime importance today” (Song, 2003, p. 7).

There are several ways an individual or group can recognize and celebrate ethnicity. According to Halter (2000), “relearning one’s ancestral tongue, eating ethnic cuisine, displaying ethnic artifacts, fostering a hyphenated identity, and even reverse name-changes (back to the old-country original) have become the American way” (p. 9; Lieberman, 2000). Halter continues by adding that “ethnic festivals, commemorative events, museum and popular culture offerings, retreats, and courses of study have

provided a temporary sense of community that, in an intensive and optional way, gratifies such longings for meaningful interpersonal contact” (p. 13; Fabre, Heideking, & Dreisbach, 2001; Steinberg, 2001). Glazer and Moynihan (1970) add that

[e]thnicity is more than an influence on events; it is commonly the source of events. Social and political institutions do not merely respond to ethnic interests; a great number of institutions exist for the specific purpose of serving ethnic interests. This in turn tends to perpetuate them. (p. 310; see also Geertz, 2003)

For some groups, learning their ethnic language contributes to their feelings of revived ethnicity, since these languages become a symbol of their customs and ancestry (Smitherman, 2000; Øverland, 1996) and can influence behavior (Hecht et al., 2003). The language of a particular group reflects its ethnic structure, for each group has its own historical and cultural patterns of communication, many of which are taken for granted (Ellis, 1999).

Humans use their language as symbols of their culture to set themselves apart from others (Steinberg, 2001). In fact, ethnic identity “is constructed and maintained” by discourse, which, in turn stimulates ethnic behavior (Ellis, 1999, p. 158). However, speaking one’s native language is not necessarily crucial to retaining one’s ethnic identity. While fluency in one’s ancestral tongue may not be a necessary component in ethnic identity, certain words and phrases combined with English can show ethnicity sufficiently to others (Alba, 2000a; Steinberg, 2001).

The United States is home for many groups who celebrate their ethnicity and their American-ness. For example, Hungarian Americans living in the suburbs of New York still recognize the customs of their homeland (Steinberg, 2001); Chinese Americans

successfully blend into the larger, macro culture while still maintaining aspects of their own unique ethnicity (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998); Italian Americans continue to celebrate their heritage (Alba, 2000b; Primeggia & Varacalli, 2000); Laotian American Buddhists build a temple in rural Louisiana and reconfigure their religious beliefs to accommodate life in America (Bankston, 2000); Polish Americans continue to celebrate Easter and Christmas in the ways of the old country (Silverman, 2000); Vietnamese American women rebuild kinship networks and improve their economic security in Philadelphia (Kibria, 1999); Latino Americans adapt Spanglish, a mix of Spanish and English, as a metalanguage to recognize the impact both cultures have had on one another (Morales, 2002); and Scottish Americans attend the Gathering of the Clans in Scotland to search for their families (clans) there (Steinberg, 2001).

As evidenced in the preceding paragraph, white ethnic groups are also common across America. The next section deals with the relatively new resurgence in interest in white ethnicity.

### **White Ethnicity**

Early white Americans conceived of the “melting pot” idea, and their culture and ideals became the “norm” for successive immigrants. The lack of total assimilation among white ethnic groups, however, was problematical and contradictory to their model, and this gap spurred new thinking about the role of ethnicity in America (Alba, 1990, 2000a; Ellis, 1999; Glazer & Moynihan, 1970; Papajohn, 1999; Petersen, 1997; Song, 2003).

Historically, “whiteness” had been considered the ethnic norm, and as a result, many white Americans lost touch with their individual family heritages. They had cast

off the very elements of their identity which distinguished them from other white people. They no longer identified themselves as people from a particular European background; instead, they primarily saw themselves as Americans. It was this new American identity which defined their everyday existence (Martin, 1997; Song, 2003). This identification, was, no doubt, aided by the fact that many European immigrants possessed similar facial features and were fairly indistinguishable from each other (Zéphir, 2001).

In a sense, whiteness, rather than individual white ethnicities, grew in importance as a response to those who were not white. Whiteness, as a social construction, was defined and negotiated within this context. By identifying with a larger, more united group, whites felt more secure in an increasingly multicultural environment. This polarization of identities (white vs. non-white) has had a “profound effect on the ways we think about ethnicity and culture” in this country (Nakayama & Martin, 1999, p. vii).

This new thinking about ethnicity increased in the 1960s during a period of “ethnic fever” (Steinberg, 2001, p. 3), which originated in African American communities as a means to rediscover ethnic identity. Soon, other racial minorities were expressing an interest in learning more about their ethnic makeup. Whites, too, were affected by this process, and they also began to seek information about their various heritages (Alba, 2000b; Steinberg, 2001). Glazer and Moynihan (1970) noted this phenomenon in *Beyond the Melting Pot*:

The long-expected and predicted decline of ethnicity, the fuller acculturation and the assimilation of the white ethnic groups, seems once again delayed – as it was by World War I, World War II, and the cold war – and by now one suspects, if

something expected keeps on failing to happen, that there may be more reasons than accident that explain why ethnicity and ethnic identity continue to persist. (p. xxxiii)

Some whites, however, had retained elements of their ethnic identity, albeit in a somewhat diminished capacity. Alba (2000a) points out that although ethnic distinctiveness among whites had decreased to an extent, one should not assume that identification with a particular ethnicity would disappear. D. King (2000) offers a good example of this in the German American community. While most Americans of German descent are rather assimilated into the larger, American cultural landscape, many still identify themselves as German and enjoy the various cultural trappings associated with such a label. According to Thaler (1998), “these endeavors reveal the desire of at least part of the German community to allow for a culturally German expression of American identity” (p. 121).

Martin et al. (1999) posit that little attention has been historically paid to white ethnicity precisely because “whiteness” has for so long been considered the norm in American culture. It has been the standard to which all other groups have been measured. This “status” as the norm has historically placed whites in a position of power, and has granted them privilege and invisibility. For these reasons, the authors suggest, whites have been, until recently, largely excluded from the ethnic revival experienced by so many others (see also Martin, 1997).

Consequently, Martin et al. (1999) support the study of white ethnicity. They argue that since whites are still primarily in positions of power, that investigating the impact of their identity on themselves is just as relevant as studying how identity affects

other groups. In the process, whites learn more about themselves, and others can gain insight into the power imbalances found in contemporary society. A group cannot evaluate others without evaluating itself first (see also Stage, 1999).

Studying white ethnicity is crucial to the understanding of intercultural communication in a multicultural country such as the United States. According to Stage (1999), “[w]hite is a relatively uncharted territory that has remained invisible as it continues to influence the identity of those both within and without its domain; it affects the everyday fabric of our lives but resists characterization” (p. 71). Understanding the “changeability of identity formation through time” is also a critical element when considering the impact of ethnic identities on individuals and groups (Song, 2003, p. 17).

Other issues, such as naming and land, also have an impact on identity. These two topics are discussed in the following section.

### **Other Identity Issues**

As seen in the previous section of this dissertation, communication and ethnicity can greatly influence an individual’s or community’s identity. Other factors, such as naming and land, can also help to form identity. The act of naming is common to all cultures and carries great significance, for the names people choose to label themselves, other persons, or objects “reflect the strength of cultural traditions and the continuity of identity across generations” (Beit-Hallahmi, 1998, p. 195; Mardin, 2002; Nakashima, 2001). The emotional attachment to and the relationships formed with land can also influence identity by giving people a sense of place, or belonging (Airriess, 2002; Nostrand & Estaville, 2001). Both of these issues, naming and land, and their relationship with identity, are discussed in the following section.

### *Naming and Identity*

Naming is fundamental to being human, for to name something is to know it. The act of naming states something, connects ideas, and separates concepts. It is the organizing principle in people's lives (Hall, 2002). These names carry with them the values and traditions of the people who use them, and they help form identity for both individuals and communities (Ellis, 1999). Naming and its relationship with identity are discussed in this section. Included is a collection of naming traditions from different cultures around the world.

Names are “foremost a recognition of common humanity and kinship” (Miller, J., 2001, p. 154). In many instances, they identify people with a particular ethnic group (Glazer & Moynihan, 1970; Lowenstein, 2000). According to Beit-Hallahmi (1998),

[c]hoosing a name for a new baby, an intensively private matter, is determined by strong historical and cultural forces. Every name is a cultural product. Every individual carries with him, through the name, a message from those who gave him that name. Names, like any cultural product and any cultural production, are a text to be read and interpreted. The audience, or the addressee, upon hearing or reading a name, engage[s] in a decoding process, through which cultural codes are utilized, when known, to determine certain attributes of the bearer of the name. (p. 196)

Names, then, are what make us human. They can also serve as markers of our heritage by showcasing the values of our particular culture. Names communicate information about ourselves and our culture.



The act of naming, labeling, and categorizing the self creates identity, which is then validated or invalidated through interaction with others (Abrams, et al., 2002; Hecht et al., 2003; Yanow, 2003). This process allows a name to be “imbued with the beliefs, values, and expectations of the interpreter and the interpretation process” (Ellis, 1999, p. 159). According to Abrams et al. (2002), “[b]ecause no label exists outside of its relational meaning, these and other ethnic labels construct relational meaning within communication episodes” (p. 234). The contextual nature of naming suggests that no identity is static, and that each can have several meanings (Alba, 2000a). Hansen’s (2001) treatment of Bombay’s name change to Mumbai is a case in point.

As personal names are repeated, they create and cement individual identities. According to Hansen (2001),

[t]o be recognized by a proper name signifies respect for the choice and meaning of this name, just as proper names accord a measure of uniqueness and subjectivity to persons or groups. The right to name, and the entitlement to hold a name for oneself, shapes the style and ways that objects or persons are known and how their assumed properties are described. (p. 2)

The communication of a name, then, is crucial in solidifying its meaning and corresponding identity. Acting as a “cultural code, a discourse, [or] a text,” these names carry a message (Beit-Hallahmi, 1998, p. 195).

The evolution of ethnic labels for African Americans offers one example of this process. The progression from “Negro” to “Black” to “African American” illustrates the historical and political changes in identity experienced by African Americans (Collier, 1997; Glazer & Moynihan, 1970; Hecht et al., 2003; King, D. W., 1998; Rael, 2002).

Television newscasters adopting Latin or Asian ethnic surnames to garner more attention from the major networks (Nakashima, 2001) is another example. In both instances, these labels created their own identities, which were then validated, or invalidated, through interactions with other people. Each label carried with it an entire set of values and beliefs reflecting the cultural contexts in which the term was formed, thus representing a shift in thinking (Rael, 2002).

The process of naming can involve more than mere names. It can also include nicknames, anecdotal references, and kinship ties of the individual. In this sense, the family and community can name and rename an individual over and over (Miller, J., 2001). This process is especially visible in the case of adoption, where the very act of naming makes the individual kin, or part of the group (Bargach, 2002; Fienup-Riordan, 2001). Even anthropologists who have been working in the field for extended periods of time have experienced this phenomenon in their communities. In many instances, they are named and adopted by the community with all the benefits and obligations associated with such a membership, and they are considered a “sustainer of traditions, a resource for the community” (Miller, J., 2001, p. 154; Fienup-Riordan, 2001).

If names carry cultural messages, then the naming behaviors in the United States have historically been symbolic of assimilation, segregation, religious beliefs, and historical forces. Immigrants moving to America learned to adjust their naming patterns to insure that their children fit in. If their original ethnic name was hard to pronounce, or if it sounded too different, then they chose a more American one. Sometimes, the ethnic name was easy to pronounce, but it never gained favor. In some instances, the child would choose her/his own name, or adopt an American one (Lieberson, 2000).

Some names, however, cut across many cultures. They can be found in several different languages and can have many different pronunciations and spellings. The male name *John* is just such an example. John and its many variants (*Juan, Jean, Ivan, Jens, Johann, János, and Giovanni*, to name a few) are recognizable all over the world. The female name *Mary*, or *Maria*, is almost as recognizable. While these are two examples are exceptional in their global appeal, there are many other names which act in the same way. Consequently, moving between cultures is facilitated by possessing such a name (Lieberson, 2000).

Ideally, assimilation molded everyone to fit into the white ethnic model, and as a result, white norms and customs became the standard against which all other groups were measured (Fouon & Schiller, 2001; Kibria, 1999; King, D., 2000; Song, 2003; Steinberg, 2001). Because of this fact, whites in America have never been challenged to think of themselves ethnically (Martin et al., 1999).

To test this theory, some researchers asked several white people to choose which label they preferred for themselves, and to define its meaning. Their responses were ranked in order of preference. Regardless of the individual's background or gender, the responses were all quite consistent. "White" was the most commonly-preferred response, followed by, in descending order, "Caucasian," "white American," "Euro-American," "European American," "Anglo," and "WASP." The researchers claimed that this tendency revealed the "historical invisibility of white identity" and the lack of awareness about whiteness (Martin et al., 1999, p. 44).

In addition, the respondents generally did not discern between the labels they gave themselves and the labels provided by others. This fact, the researchers argued,

revealed the power traditionally held by the white group in American society. They argued that if whites held a lower position in the society, then the labels used to describe them would have greater impact. Since they were “in charge,” whites did not put much emphasis on labeling themselves; they did not need validation from others to define their identity (Martin et al., 1999). These labels served to categorically set apart whites from those “others.”

Names, then, are important ethnic and cultural indicators of identity. They all have meanings and carry their own messages to others. Through interaction with others, these meanings and messages are continually being reinforced and renegotiated, and then they are reintegrated with identity. Both individuals and groups are affected by this process.

Many groups around the world participate in engaging and symbolic naming traditions. To illustrate the variety of traditions that exist, several are listed below. African, Australian, Chinese, Islamic, Jewish, Native Alaskan, African American, and graffiti artists’ traditions are included.

#### *African Naming Traditions*

Africa is home to many different naming customs, as evidenced in the ritual naming celebrations of the Luhya ethnic group of Kenya. Here, infants can be named for the dead, usually a relative who has passed away. The names of important world figures, both positive and negative, living at the time of the birth can also be chosen. Names such as Hitler and Churchill were once possible because of this tradition. Important historical events, such as droughts, can also be chosen as a name. If the parents wish to name their child after a dead relative, the father visits a wise man in the community who talks to the

dead. This sage determines who would like her/his name to be given to the baby.

During the naming ceremony, there is a feast with a sacrifice (Watson, 2000).

Once older, the individual has the opportunity to earn another name. Boys or men are usually given “praise names,” names which reflect a particular strength of the person, or something that he has learned. Girls or women, on the other hand, can be given names which reveal the evils that occur to them. “One finds many unusual names in a Luhya village and the history of their existence usually has some connection with death, as when a woman who loses a child to death may be called ‘the biter’ or ‘child consumer’” (Watson, 2000, p. 252).

#### *Australian Naming Traditions*

Plumwood (2002) describes naming practices in Australia with regards to land. The author claims that the current naming practices reflect a Eurocentric approach to land, where the naming process is “non-interactive” (p. 364), and the land is viewed as silent and passive. Neutral markers, lack of cultural content, and mere numbers or labels do not encourage a relationship to the places being named. Instead, these names have a colonizing affect on the land and its people, and therefore, they become political.

Instead, the author argues for using narrative terms to interpret the land and name it, to tell “its story in ways that show a deep and loving acquaintance with it and a history of dialogical interaction” (p. 364). Aboriginal Australian naming customs for land and place reveal the soul of the land and people’s relationship to it. They believe that without meaningful names, man cannot hope to have meaningful interactions with the land (Plumwood, 2002).

### *Chinese Naming Traditions*

The Chinese, unlike people in Western societies, use the family name as the first name for the individual. Family names are based around themes, such as jewels, trees, animals, or cultural values. The second name of the individual is their generational name, and the third name is their personal name. Each name expresses meaning, and it is not given to an individual without much consideration. The person's entire name tells a story about to which family s/he belongs, where that person fits in that family's lineage, and then something unique about the individual. The Chinese believe that a person is automatically born into a group, and Chinese naming practices reflect this belief. They believe that naming someone after a dead relative is bad luck because it displaces the person being named (Tung, 2000).

Yiyuan (1998) expounds on this idea of luck in naming, claiming that the process can be affected by either good luck or bad luck. To avoid the latter, many people who are considering naming an infant will consult an almanac to choose the correct pattern of naming. Particular attention is paid to the relation between the name and the five elements: gold, wood, water, fire, and earth.

During the revolution in China, naming traditions changed. At this time, individualistic, social, or literary names were avoided, and there was no distinction between names for men and those for women. The names that were used mirrored the political characteristics of the revolution. New political vocabulary was mixed within a name, such as "New China" Wang (*Wang Xinhua*); political events and dates were also combined with a name, such as "Resist America" Zhang (*Zhang Kangmei*); different moods combined with names to produce, for example, "Stormy" Wang (*Wang Fengyun*);

and still other names were simply chosen by those individuals possessing high rank, usually to describe the battle against Japan. In this instance, names such as “Born in Yan’an” Liu (*Liu Yansheng*) were commonplace (Dongping, 1998b, pp. 169-170). Even cities were renamed to project this revolutionary attitude. “Red Peasant Militia” (*Hongnongbing*) is one such example (Dongping, 1998a, p. 168).

### *Islamic Naming Traditions*

Under Islamic belief, the naming ritual changes a newborn into a person, a part of the community. For a brief period, the newborn is kept in relative seclusion. Few people can hold or talk to the baby. The infant’s name becomes official once it is certified ceremonially after the seventh day following birth, and an animal is slaughtered. At the moment of the slaughtering, the baby’s name is pronounced, followed by its mother’s first name. The mother’s name is used in this instance, because “[t]he initial and founding tie of...identity, the second birth, becoming a social being, is and can only be done through the mother.” The surname ties the child to her/his father. This ceremony is performed even in the case of adoptions (Bargach, 2002, p. 108).

Bargach (2002) notes that converts to Islam experience similar circumstances. The convert is given a new name, which symbolizes her/his “rebirth” into the Islamic faith. The individual becomes a new person and a member of a new community.

### *Jewish Naming Traditions*

The Jews also have distinctive naming practices. Unlike Western peoples, Jews traditionally have not borrowed names from other languages. Biblical names have been historically used precisely because they had clear Hebrew meanings, and because one name was usually enough to distinguish one individual from another. If more

information were needed, the person's father, and sometimes entire lineage, could be named (i.e., Moses son of Joshua). People were described by their occupation, their father's name, or their place of residence. As a result, family names did not become common until the Middle Ages (Lowenstein, 2000).

Jewish first names are differentiated by gender. Boys' names customarily come from the Old Testament of the Bible, and they are Hebrew. They are usually priestly or tribal in nature. Girls' names, however, tend to be pet names with well-known and well-understood vernacular meanings (i.e., gold, rose, queen). This discrepancy exists primarily for two reasons: there are more male names mentioned in the Bible, while most women mentioned in the Bible are anonymous (i.e., Noah's wife), and men need sacred Hebrew names so that they can be called to Torah. Jewish names may also be abbreviations of longer names, since only Hebrew consonants are written, and hence, several variants of a name may come out of one abbreviation (Lowenstein, 2000). Lieberman (2000) lists several factors influencing the appeal of Jewish names: how religious a particular person is, which names are popular within a given community, the significance religion attaches to chosen names, and the religion's position in that society.

Once surnames became the norm, they took different forms. One class of Jewish surnames includes family names, and these are usually patronymic in nature. In other words, they are traced back through the father's lineage. The Ashkenazic Jews are the exception to this rule however, for they trace their lineage through the mother. Other surnames reflect the occupation of the individual, describe nicknames (usually about personal characteristics), or designate place names (indicating residence). These place names are more common among Jews than other groups because Jews were more likely



to be nomadic, either due to persecution or business, and because most Jews were not farmers. Contemporary family names are not necessarily Jewish any more, and many family names have changed over the years, due to assimilation or migration (Lowenstein, 2000).

According to tradition, the ancient Hebrew names of the ancestors are given to children so that these names can be perpetuated. These names date back to the time when the Jews distinguished themselves from the Egyptians by not changing their names (among other things). Biblical names and names of righteous, deceased relatives are most commonly used (Beit-Hallahmi, 1998; Witty & Witty, 2001), although secular names are becoming more popular. After a girl is born, as soon as possible, the father goes to the synagogue, when the Torah is read, to name her. A small celebration at the family's house usually follows. After a boy is born, family and friends gather on the first Friday after the birth to eat the Sabbath meal. On the eighth day after his birth, the male baby is circumcised and given his name (Witty & Witty, 2001).

Despite these centuries-old traditions, modern Israel is experiencing drastic changes in its naming traditions. Recent changes in the culture have spurred attempts to create a new identity, both individual and collective, and contemporary Israelis want to make a cultural statement with their new names (Beit-Hallahmi, 1998).

Traditional Jewish last names tell the story of the Jews' history in the Diaspora. Current thinking in Israel, however, links these names to a particular geography and exile, and it wants these names to be erased and replaced with Israeli last names, which reflect the local geography, nature, or the ideal of strength. The Zionist rebellion wants to use different names to represent the new national spirit and identity, and hence, it has

rejected the older, more traditional names. Newer names, not a part of the Jewish Diaspora tradition, and non-Jewish names are now being used. This rebellion desires to shift Israeli identity by changing the country's naming practices (Beit-Hallahmi, 1998).

### *Native Alaskan Naming Traditions*

The Yup'ik (Eskimo) people of southwestern Alaska participate in unique naming traditions. A new baby is named at birth for a recently deceased relative or community leader. At this time the "essence of the dead destined for rebirth enter[s] the newborn" (Fienup-Riordan, 2001, p. 226). According to Yup'ik beliefs, the name and the child must be a good fit, or illness and death may occur. When naming an infant, there is no distinction made between male and female names, so a female baby may receive the name of a man, and a male baby may receive a woman's name. It is through this recycling of names that "the essence of being human is passed on from one generation to the next" (Fienup-Riordan, 2001, p. 224).

For the Yup'ik, the birth of a new baby does not add another person to the group. Instead, it is a substitution of one person for another. People live through their namesakes, and new kinship ties are forged in this way. In acquiring a new name, one also acquires social connections and identity. According to Fienup-Riordan (2001), "[a]lthough human beings come and go, the names of the 'real people' remain the same" (p. 228). In this community, one's name, not her/his blood, determines the nature of being human. For this reason, adoption within the Yup'ik community is common and frequent (Fienup-Riordan, 2001).

*African American Naming Traditions*

African American names during slavery were used to denigrate the individual and to destroy her/his identity and to dehumanize her/him. Named by whites, most slaves were given simple names, such as Tom, much in the way animals were, and they were listed in the records along with the animals as property. Other slaves were given classical names, such as Caesar, which served to remind people of just who they were not. Some slaves, however, retained their ethnic or family name, which they kept secret from the whites. In this way, these individuals managed to hold on to their true identity (King, D. W., 1998; Lieberman, 2000).

For many slaves, their traditional naming practices, which originated in Africa, did not change once they were brought to America. Some babies were commonly named after recently-departed persons. Many other infants were not named until the parents were sure they would survive. The parents did not want to identify spirits to occupy the bodies if the babies were not going to live (King, D. W., 1998).

Other aspects of an African heritage are still evident in African American communities today. *Nommo*, or the “spiritual-physical energy of ‘the word’ that conjures being through naming” (King, D. W., 1998, p. 37; Asante, 1987, 1989), is a potent power, one which gives life to words through the act of speaking them. It is part of *nyama*, or the human force, and it calls *nyama* forth. By speaking one’s name, a person suggests who s/he is (King, D. W., 1998). According to Mackethan (2003), “to know one’s name, to tell it, accept it, insist on it are measures of one’s freedom and selfhood and fate” (p. 187).

Other examples of African American naming traditions can be found within literature. African American literature is a “quest for identity” in a culture which denies rights to name, identity, and humanity. In this context, names both reveal and conceal identity, and they testify to an individual’s self-worth (Mackethan, 2003, p. 187).

In this literature, names serve as interpretations of the text. Names are mentioned, and their meanings are subsequently subverted and deconstructed. In this manner, the names provide multi-leveled alternatives to interpreting meaning. A name may have a simple, straightforward meaning, but it also possesses many underlying shades of meaning that may initially be hidden from view (King, D. W., 1998).

The process of naming, in all its forms, also receives much attention in African American literature. A character may experience renaming, where the name stays the same, but its interpretation changes. When an individual is unnamed, a new name replaces the original. This process is not always a bad one, although receiving a negative nickname or becoming nameless are harmful. The negative aspect of unnamings, or stripping someone of their identity, “diminishes humanity,” and was common during slavery. In the process of supranaming, the individual receives a new name (King, D. W., 1998, p. 36).

Toni Morrison’s (1977) *Song of Solomon*, (1987) *Beloved*, and (1992) *Playing in the Dark*, along with Alice Walker’s (1982) *The Color Purple* and Zora Neale Hurston’s (2000) *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, are five works of African American literature that illustrate these traditions.

### *Graffiti Artists' Naming Traditions*

Graffiti artists represent a small, highly specific sub-group of the larger American culture, but the importance they place on names demands attention here. The act of choosing an artistic name for oneself is very important to New York City street graffiti “writers.” Readopting the naming practices of their African American and African Caribbean ancestors, these individuals create new identities for themselves by selecting a street name. According to I. L. Miller (2002), this

new self-given name is a way of bonding among other writers. This practice speaks of a desire to create personalized identities based on inner convictions and private realities, and not be limited to mass produced names or standardized identities. (p. 69)

Like the Luhya of Kenya (Watson, 2000), these street writers also use praise names, which have to be earned. They invoke the power of *nommo* when they call out (or write) these names, and in the process, they become more powerful (Asante, 1987, 1989; King, D. W., 1998). An artist’s signature represents her/his person, so to say or write the name is to invoke that individual. Like the characters in African American literature (Hurstun, 2000; King, D. W., 1998; Morrison, 1977, 1987 1992; Walker, 1982), they use multiple names, and like slaves they employ secret names (King, D. W., 1998; Lieberman, 2000) to hide from the law (Miller, I. L., 2002).

As seen in the above section, different cultures and sub-groups around the world have their own unique naming traditions. These traditions name the individual, and in the process, provide her/him with an identity. This identity is imbued with the ethnic and cultural values of the person, and these values are what is communicated to others.

Another element which can affect identity is one's relationship to land. This dynamic is discussed in the following section.

### ***Land and Identity***

An individual's or group's relationship with the land also influences ethnic identity. This involvement is also known as *place*, and it "describe[s] the emotional attachment or anchor individuals and groups possess toward landscapes" (Airriess, 2002, p. 229; Lie, 2003; Robertson, 2002). These landscapes can include both physical structures and artifacts, and they provide a sense of well-being and distinctiveness for those who attach sentiment to them (Airriess, 2002).

The United States is a land of immigrants. Groups of people assimilated to varying degrees and at different rates, but most people found a *place* in America. According to Nostrand and Estaville (2001), "[w]here they settled these immigrants also developed some kind of attachment to place, kind of individual homeland." Smaller homelands have also been called "ethnic islands" or "ethnic enclaves" (p. xv). Blickle's (2002) treatment of *Heimat*, which is German for "homeland," is a good example of this type of emotional attachment. According to Blickle, "[*Heimat*] is identity" (p. 66).

There are five components to a homeland: a people, a place, time, control of a place (i.e., ownership), and most importantly, bonding with a place. This bonding can be to the natural or cultural landscape, or to landmarks (Nostrand & Estaville, 2001; Robertson, 2002). Walzer (2000) notes that such homelands elicit high degrees of loyalty and sentimentality. Nostrand and Estaville (2001) also list the human values which are situated in place:

a love for one's birthplace and home; an emotional attachment to the land of one's people; a sense of belonging to a special area; a loyalty that is defined by geographical parameters; a strength that comes from territoriality; a feeling of wholeness and restoration when returning to one's homeland. (p. xxiii)

The notion of *place* also embodies an inter-relationship between individual persons, the community, and the place itself; in essence, the people share their identity with the *place* through their interactions with it. According to Berry and Henderson (2002), "[u]nderlying the theme that place and space are influential in the articulation of identity is our premise that identities are socially constructed" (p. 4).

For example, the Oglala Lakota's (Native American Sioux) relationship with their land intimately shapes their identity and informs their ethnicity. The land, part of their culture for generations, is a critical element of their identity (Robertson, 2002). The Vietnamese community in New Orleans, however, is no longer living in their homeland. But by attempting to reproduce their home environment in a new location, the Vietnamese people have made an effort to extend their identity to their new geographic home. They are attempting to create a new sense of *place* here in America (Airriess, 2002).

As seen in the previous section, naming and land can act as strong identifiers of identity for both individuals and groups. Names and their associated rituals can help define a person ethnically or culturally, while relationships with the land can anchor that person or group and provide a sense of home or *place*, itself a part of identity.

The remaining part of this chapter outlines the research objectives and research questions of this study, the contributions of this study to the field of communication studies, and the preview for the remainder of this dissertation.

### **Research Objective**

Martin et al. (1999) posit that little attention has historically been paid to white ethnicity because it was for so long considered the majority or norm. Stage (1999) adds that although understudied and culturally “invisible” (p. 71), white ethnicity still remains an influential element in a multicultural society such as the United States. Compounding this problem for white Americans is the fact that “[l]ittle attention has been directed toward the processual nature of the relationship between identity and communication” (Abrams et al., 2002, p. 225).

As previously mentioned, white Americans who are aware of their ethnicity are likely to engage in social activities and interchanges which allow for the construction and maintenance of this identity. Research is needed to explore the social activities and interchanges of these people, and the way their ethnic identity is created communicatively.

I began this research project with the assumption that ethnicity influences identity and communication. I also assumed that studying the patterns of communication of a particular group will elicit a better understanding of that ethnicity. I further assumed that ethnicity also influences the degree to which the group “invests” itself in activities that celebrate that ethnicity, and how that ethnicity is communicated to others.

Phenomenology was methodologically used to arrive at the essence of this ethnicity and its relationship to communication in Norse, a small Texas community



comprised of people descended from the original Norwegian immigrants to the area.

Operating within a constructionism framework, I conducted in-depth interviews with members of this community in order to create narratives in their own words. The goal of this study was to understand the residents' ethnicity as they experience it, as well as what communication patterns are used to construct that ethnicity.

### **Research Questions**

“A communication perspective emphasizes that the self does not create identities alone; instead they are co-created through communication with others” (Abrams et al., 2002, p. 226; Barker & Galasiński, 2001). These identities are emergent (Collier, 1997), are continually negotiated, reinforced, and challenged through communication, and are expressed through symbols (Martin, 1997).

With ethnicity currently experiencing a revival, even among whites, people are taking more of an interest in their ethnic and cultural identities (Alba, 2000a; Song, 2003). They want to celebrate their ethnic heritage and share it with others. Cultural events and festivals are two ways to express one's ethnicity to others (Halter, 2000; Lieberman, 2000; Steinberg, 2001).

The literature provides some insight into phenomenological interpretations of ethnic and cultural groups, but this work is written from the perspective of feminist theory (Martinez, 2000), the sociology of knowledge (Sands, 1981), and sociolinguistics (Dhillon, 1994; Haarmann, 1984). More research is needed in the field of communication to elucidate its relationship with identity. Investigating the true nature or essence of a group's ethnicity can help us understand the role played by communication

in the construction and expression of that ethnicity, so I conducted a phenomenological, constructionist study in one ethnic immigrant community, Norse, Texas. This dissertation sought to answer the following questions:

RQ1: How do the people of Norse, Texas experience ethnicity?

RQ2: How is this ethnicity communicatively constructed and maintained?

RQ3: How does the relationship between ethnic identity and communication contribute to the creation of shared meanings within the community?

RQ4: What meaning(s) do the people of Norse attribute to the cultural practices that reflect their ethnicity?

RQ5: How do the people of Norse use language and communication to validate their identity?

### **Contributions of This Study to the Discipline of Communication**

This study makes pragmatic and theoretical contributions to the discipline of communication. According to Hecht et al. (2003), “the language or discourse of a community, particularly that which references their identity, is an important component of identity” (p. 57). This identity is symbolically constructed through interactions with others and through social behaviors such as community celebrations. This study, then, will build upon existing knowledge about the links between identity and communication, and on how ethnic identity is constructed through communication and cultural practices. This knowledge can help others understand the importance of interaction for identity formation and the influence ethnic identity can have on communicative processes.

From a theoretical stance, this study is valuable in several ways. First, the treatment of social actors as agentive participants in the construction of their meanings and realities will give previously silent or ignored groups an opportunity to present their own view of themselves to the world (Hackley, 2003). Second, phenomenology can contribute to our understanding of the role of communication in everyday worlds, and how that communication creates relativist realities for its users (Barker & Galasiński, 2001; Jorgensen, 2003). Third, the interactive role of the researcher and the social actors can enhance our knowledge about how meanings are constructed through communication (Guba & Lincoln, 2004; Seale, 2003). Finally, this research can add to our understanding of how communication shapes ethnicity, and how that identity manifests itself in intercultural communication.

### **Preview of Dissertation**

This dissertation is divided into three main parts: the literature review, the methods section, and the results section. I have already provided an extensive look at ethnicity, with particular notice being paid to assimilation, immigrants, ethnic revival, and white ethnicity. Naming and place, other influences on identity, are also included in this discussion (Chapter One). At the end of this chapter, I list the research questions that guide this study. A detailed look at the community of interest follows (Chapter Two).

The first part of the methodology section (Chapter Three) introduces phenomenology to the reader and compares it to traditional ethnography. The Methods and Procedures Chapter (Chapter Four) outlines my approach to this research. Included in this section are discussions on the setting, participants, and the research procedures.

These procedures include the techniques for collecting data, the ethical considerations, and the procedures for analyzing and verifying data.

The final section of this dissertation contains the results of this research project. In Chapter Five I describe the ethnic identity of the people of Norse, explaining the phenomenon as they experience it. In Chapter Six I describe the communication patterns which construct and communicate this ethnicity. Chapter Seven contains my analysis of the previous two chapters, and Chapter Eight concludes the dissertation. This chapter includes a summary of the research project, and it also discusses the limitations of the study, how this project can aid other communication researchers, and suggestions for future research projects. The dissertation is rounded out by the references and various appendices.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE COMMUNITY: NORSE, TEXAS**

#### **Introduction**

Situated in central Texas, Bosque County is a rural county with 17,204 residents (U.S. Census Bureau [USCB], 2000a, Table DP-1). The Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex is to the north, Waco to the southeast, and Austin to the south. The region is known for its many streams and rivers, beautiful pastures, large hills (“mountains”), and groves of pecan, oak, and mesquite trees. The people there enjoy a quiet, unhurried life in the country, away from the big cities (see Appendices A, B, and C for maps of Bosque County and the Norse area).

#### **Norwegian Capital of Texas**

In the southwestern part of the county, approximately 19 miles apart, lie the two towns of Clifton, population 3,542, (USCB, 2000b, Table DP-1) and Cranfills Gap, population 335 (USCB, 2000c, Table DP-1). The land between the two towns is used for farming and ranching, and it is accented with unpaved, gravel county roads, lone rows of mailboxes, miles of fencing, and elaborate arched gates over private driveways (Robinson, 1984). Called “Norse,” this area was originally settled in 1854 when a small group of Norwegian immigrants moved into the area and established homesteads (Pierson, O. E., 1947/1979; Progressive Media Communications, Inc. [PMCI], 1982a, 1982g), some of which are still maintained and inhabited to this day. The area’s Norwegian history is still celebrated, and in 1997 Clifton was officially named “The Norwegian Capital of Texas” by proclamation of the 75<sup>th</sup> Legislature of Texas (Aase,

2003; Anderson, 1996, 1997a, 1997b, 1998; “Clifton: The Norwegian Capital,” 2000; Clifton Chamber of Commerce [CCC], n.d.d, 1997, 2002a, 2004a; “Clifton Chamber of Commerce Takes on Tourism,” 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006; Clifton Main Street Program [CMSP], 1995; “Clifton Named,” 1997; Huse, 1998; Løvoll, 1998; McConal, 1997; Myers, 1999; “Nordic Noshing,” 1999; Our Savior’s Lutheran Church [OSLC], n.d.c; Pierson, M., 1997; Robinson, 1999; Russell, 2004; Smith, R. L., 2000; “Welcome to Clifton,” 1997, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006; see Appendix D for the House and Senate Resolutions). Two large billboards greet visitors as they enter the area. One says, “Visit Clifton, Norwegian Capital of Texas,” while the other one reads, “*Velkommen til Clifton*” (Welcome to Clifton) (see Appendix R to see a photograph of the original 17 Norwegian immigrants, Appendix K for a pronunciation guide for Norwegian letters, and Appendix L for a glossary of Norwegian terms).

Although the southwestern area of Bosque County was originally settled by Norwegians, it is now home to people from many different backgrounds (“Clifton Offers Diversity,” 1997, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006; “CLSH Celebrates,” 2004; PMCI, 1982o). The 2000 census listed several ancestries, including “multiple” ancestries, in its ethnic profile of the Bosque County area. Although the vast majority of people (58.9%) claimed to be descended from white, European stock, another large group (13.6%) simply labeled themselves as “United States or American.” Another 26.8% marked “Other Ancestries,” which were not individually listed on the census (USCB, 2000a, Table DP-2).

People of Norwegian descent comprise 5.5% of Bosque County’s population (USCB, 2000a, Table DP-2), but in the Norse area, including Clifton and Cranfills Gap,

they total 9.3% (USCB, 2000b, Table DP-2; USCB, 2000c, Table DP-2). Only 0.6% of Texas's population claim a Norwegian ancestry (Løvoll, 1998; USCB, 2000g, Table DP-2). Other states, more known than Texas for their Norwegian immigrants, boast much larger numbers: Wisconsin (7.0%) (USCB, 2000h, Table DP-2), South Dakota (13.1%) (USCB, 2000f, Table DP-2), Minnesota (13.8%) (USCB, 2000d, Table DP-2), and North Dakota (23.7%) (USCB, 2000e, Table DP-2) are just a few examples.

Despite the influx and mixing of different ethnic groups, the Norse area of Bosque County still primarily identifies itself as a Norwegian community (Baskin, 1954; CCC, 2004a; Johnson, 2003; Løvoll, 1998; McConal, 1997; Mullins, 1969; Pierson, M., 1997; Robinson, 1999; Smith, R. L., 2000; Tolbert, 1962). In fact, it is the largest concentrated settlement of Norwegians in the south and southwestern United States, an unusual claim to fame since most Norwegian immigrants moved to the Midwest and Northern Great Plains ("Bosque Memorial Museum to Feature," 2002; CCC, 1997; Daniels, 2002; Hailey, n.d.; Johansen, 1970; Jordan, 1991; "King Olav's Speech," 1982; Løvoll, 1998; Radde, 1976; Reiersen, 1844/1981; Robinson, 1999). This fact, coupled with the history and traditions of the community, helps to perpetuate this feeling of ethnic identity within the Norse community.

### **Original Homesteads**

Because of its immigrant roots, the Norse area of Bosque County is rich in cultural history. The old settlement homesteads add a sense of historical architecture to the area, and they give visitors a sense of what it was like to live on a Texas farm or ranch 150 years ago. While many of these stone and plaster buildings are in ruins, several others have been restored and are inhabited, in a few cases by descendants of the

original families who built them. Several of these homesteads also have other buildings or features on their properties, such as rock fences, well-houses, or barns (“150-Year-Old,” 2005; Anderson, 2004c, 2006a, 2006b; “Anz Farm,” 2006; Baskin, 1954; “Bosque Chapter Makes Donation,” 2006; “Bosque County Christmas 2005,” 2005; “Bosque County Christmas CD,” 2005; “Bosque County Christmas Music,” 2005; “Bosque County Farms,” 2006; “Bosque Norwegian Society Offering,” 2005, 2005/2006, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2006d; “Cardigan,” 2006; CCC, 2003, 2004a; “Cornerstone Ceremony,” 2006; “Cornerstone Marks,” 2006; “Dahl Farm,” 2005; “Entire Norse Area,” 1982; “First-Ever,” 2005; “First Steps,” 2006; “Four Bosque County,” 2006; “Gala Gathering,” 2006; “Gap Students Help,” 2005; Hewitt, 2002; “Historical Commission,” 2006; “Historical Marker,” 2006; “Jens Ringness House Restoration Committee,” 2004; “Jens Ringness House Restoration Deadline,” 2004; “Lefse,” 2004; Løvoll, 1998; Mathews, 2006a; Moulton, 2000a; “Norway in Texas,” 1981; “Norwegian Society Offering,” 2005; Norwegian Society of Texas [NST], 2005a, 2005b, 2005c; Norwegian Society of Texas, Bosque County Chapter [NST-BCC], n.d.a, n.d.b; “NST Offering,” 2005; Pierson, M., 1997; Pierson, O. E., 1947/1979; “Preservation Luncheon,” 2006; “Progress,” 2006; “Public Invited,” 2006; Radde, 1986; “Ringness Cardigan,” 2006a, 2006b; “Ringness Committee Announces,” 2005; “Ringness Committee Confirms,” 2006; “Ringness Cornerstone,” 2006; “Ringness Project Begins,” 2005; “Ringness Project Reconstruction,” 2005; “Ringness Reconstruction,” 2006; “Ringness Restoration Committee Considers,” 2005; “Ringness Restoration Committee Looking Ahead,” 2005; “Ringness Restoration Committee Looks Ahead,” 2005; “Ringness Restoration Committee Meets,” 2005/2006; “Ringness



Restoration Cornerstone,” 2006; “Ringness Restoration Project,” 2006; “Ringness Restoration Topic,” 2006; “Ringness Site,” 2006; “Ringness Work Day,” 2005; Robinson, 1984; Ryan, 2006b; “Seljos Shady Oaks,” 2006; “Sign Marks,” 2005; Stokley, 2004b; “Texas Department,” 2006; Tindall, 2004, 2005/2006; Torrence, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006; “The Walls Came Down!,” 2005; “Walls, More,” 2006; see Appendix R to see a photograph of the Pierson homestead mid-20<sup>th</sup> century).

The Norse Historic District, as this area is called (Baskin, 1954; CCC, 2002a, 2004a; “Clifton Named,” 1997; CMSP, 1995; “Entire Norse Area,” 1982; “Norwegian Heritage,” 2000), is dotted with other historical and cultural locations. The Cleng Peerson Memorial Highway (FM 219) stretches from Clifton to Cranfills Gap, winding through scenic, pastoral farm lands. On the drive, one can see over long, gravel driveways elaborate, arched gates, many with names reminiscent of the Norwegian influence of the area: *Fjell Hjem* (Mountain Home), *Norse Hjem* (Nordic Home), *Norse Vind* (Nordic Wind), Norse Forty, Norse Ridge, and *Valhalla Ranch* (hall of dead heroes, according to pagan Norse mythology). Other gates display the names of their owners, such as the Aars, Bekkelund, Grimland, and Omenson families.

### **Immigrant Churches**

An important part of Norse’s historic architecture includes the two immigrant churches, both constructed on land donated by the original Norwegian settlers to the area. These churches are very important and highly symbolic to the people of Bosque County because of their history and connection with the immigrants.

### ***Our Savior's Lutheran Church***

Built in 1869, Our Savior's Lutheran Church is still in use today (Banta, 1967; Baskin, 1954; "Brief History," 1969; CCC, 2002a, 2004a; CMSP, 1995; Edgar, 1996; Mathews, 2005p; Moulton, 2000d; "New Organ," 2005; "Norwegian History," 1997, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006; OSLC, n.d.c, 1969a, 1969b, 1975, 1979, 1998, 2004; "Our Savior's Dedicates," 2006; "Our Savior's Lutheran Church Offers," 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006; Our Savior's Lutheran Church Women [OSLCW], 1960, 1990, 2000; PMCI, 1982e; Robinson, 1984, 1999; Rystad, 1967; Tolbert, 1962), and up until 1941, pastors occasionally delivered their sermons in Norwegian ("Clifton Named," 1997; Johansen, 1970; "Norwegian Heritage," 2000; OSLC, n.d.b; Pierson, O. E., 1947/1979). Originally made of wood, the building has had some modern amenities added, such as air conditioning, plumbing, and seat cushions, and it now has a brick exterior. Worship services, weddings, and funerals are held there, and outside the church is a cemetery, which is still being used. Many of the original immigrants to the area and Cleng Peerson, an important leader in Norwegian immigration to America, are also buried here (Anderson, 2000, 2002, 2003a; Banta, 1967; Baskin, 1954; Bosque Memorial Museum [BMM], n.d.a, n.d.b; "Bosque Memorial Museum," 2000a; CCC n.d.d, 2002a, 2004a; "Cleng Peerson's," 2005; "Clifton Named," 1997; CMSP, 1995; Holmes, n.d.; Hunt, n.d., 1975; Jordan, 1991; Løvoll, 1999; "Norwegian History," 1997, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006; OSLC, n.d.b, n.d.d, 1998; "Peerson's Trek to America," 2004; "Peerson's Trek Established," 2006; Pierson, M., 1997; Pierson, O. E., 1947/1979; PMCI, 1982c; Radde, 1976; Robinson, 1984, 1999; Smith, R. L., 2000; Tolbert, 1962; Visiting Layman, n.d.; Wiland, 2001). Throughout its

history, Our Savior's Lutheran Church has also been called *vår frelsers kirke* (Our Savior's Church), the Lutheran Church, the Norse Church, and the Norwegian Church.

### ***The Old Rock Church***

*St. Olafs kirke* (St. Olaf's Church), or the Old Rock Church, was built in 1886 ("Annual Rock Church," 2006; Edgar, 1996; Finstad, 1996; "Historic Old Rock Church," 2005; Hunt, 1979; "Norwegian Heritage," 2000; "Norwegian History," 1997, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006; "The Old Rock Church," 1997, 1998, 2000; "Old Rock Church Offers Glimpse," 2005, 2006; "Old Rock Church Offers Services," 2002, 2003, 2004; PMCI, 1982m; Robinson, 1984; "Rock Church Cemetery," 2006; Sherley, 1993; "St. Olaf Cemetery," 2006; "St. Olaf Church," 1974; "St. Olaf Congregation," 1962; "Workday Set," 2006). It was regularly used until 1917, when a newer and larger building was built in Cranfills Gap. Like Our Savior's, sermons at St. Olaf were also delivered in Norwegian, but they were phased out by 1922 (Cantwell, 1986; Johansen, 1970; Pierson, O. E., 1947/1979). The Old Rock Church, like Our Savior's, is a one-room church with a steeple and a cemetery. However, unlike Our Savior's, it has had no improvements, for it is still without electricity or running water. Today the cemetery continues to be used, and weddings and funerals are occasionally held at the church. More notably, the Christmas Eve candlelight service has become an annual tradition at the Old Rock Church ("Christmas Services Planned," 2005; "St. Olaf Lutheran Church to Hold," 2005). The Old Rock Church has recently begun holding Saturday worship services ("Old Rock Church Offers Services," 2002, 2003, 2004; see Appendix E for a list of pastors who served the Lutheran [ELCA] Churches of the Norse area, and Appendix F for a sampling of Norwegian Lutheran hymns).

### Historical and Cultural Sites

In addition to these two immigrant churches, there are several other historical places throughout Norse that highlight the Norwegian immigrants' influences on the area (Bosque County Historical Commission [BCHC], 2002). With a map of the historic area, one can take a self-guided tour of the old homesteads and churches (CCC, n.d.c, 2004a). Also of interest is Norway Mills, the mill built by the early settlers for grinding their grain ("Norway Mills," 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006; "Norwegian Heritage," 2000; PMCI, 1982i; Robinson, 1999), and the First Election Oak, the tree that marks the spot where the first election was held after Bosque County was organized in 1854 ("Bosque County Sesquicentennial," 2004; "Election Oak," 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006). At Our Savior's Lutheran Church is a granite memorial honoring the 17 original immigrants. It is displayed outside the cemetery, where most of those individuals are buried. At the unveiling ceremony, descendants of these pioneers presented the memorial ("Granite Memorial," 2001; OSLC, n.d.a; Shipley, 2001a).

The cities of Clifton and Cranfills Gap also acknowledge their Norwegian background in various ways. In Clifton, Norwegian names grace a couple of streets: Olsen Blvd. and Tyssen St. Cranfills Gap has one street with a Norwegian name, Bronstad St., and another simply named Norway St. Because of the size and rural character of these two small towns, the vast majority of the streets are either numbered, lettered, or are farm-to-market (FM) roads, although some streets have simple names, such as Maple St. and Bishop (Bosque County 911, n.d.; "City of Clifton," 1997, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006; "City of Cranfills Gap," 1997, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006; PMCI, 1996). Clifton also boasts the Hendrick C. Dahl Park,

Olsen Park, and Heritage Plaza (CCC, 2004a; “Clifton Main Street Project,” 2005, 2006; “Clifton’s Main Street Project,” 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004). Inside the local antique mall is a sizable Norwegian shop, and any day of the week Norwegian flags can be seen flying along Ave. D, the main street through town. Lamp posts also boast banners which read “‘*Velkommen* to Clifton,’ The Norwegian Capital of Texas.” The Nordic Nook was once a local coffee and gift shop which promoted the Norwegian heritage of the area (“Nordic Nook,” 1998). According to the Clifton Chamber of Commerce (2003), there is even a bed and breakfast in town called *Lite Norsk Hus* (Little Norwegian House) (Graham & Graham, n.d.). In 2005, Best Western completed an inn in Clifton, and they named it “Velkommen Inn” (Mathews, 2005g; “New Best Western,” 2005; “Velkommen Inn,” 2006).

### ***Bosque Memorial Museum***

In Clifton is the Bosque Memorial Museum (BMM, n.d.a, n.d.b, n.d.c, 2000, 2003; “Bosque Memorial Museum,” 1998, 2000a, 2000b; “Bosque Memorial Museum, Conservancy,” 2006; “Bosque Memorial Museum to Feature Clifton,” 2002; CCC, n.d.d, 2002a, 2004a; “Christening Gown Exhibit Now Open,” 2005; “Christening Gown Exhibit Unveiling,” 2005; “Christening Gown, Sheriff,” 2005; Davis, B., 2005a, 2005b; Diebenow, 2005; Mathews, 2006b, 2006d; Moulton, 1998, 2000a; “Museum Receives \$63,333,” 2005; “Museum Receives Grants,” 2006; “Norwegian Heritage,” 2000; Robinson, 1984; Sherley, 1993; “Thrivent Awards,” 2006; “Treasures of History,” 1997), which exhibits the largest collection of Norwegian memorabilia and artifacts in the south and southwestern United States (BMM, n.d.a, n.d.b, 2000; “Bosque Memorial Museum Features,” 2003, 2004, 2005; “Bosque Memorial Museum is Ongoing,” 2006;

CCC, 2003, 2004a; Robinson, 1999). One interesting exhibit features the disc plow, which was invented by Ole Ringness, son of one of the first immigrant couples to Norse (Banta, 1967; BMM, n.d.b, 2003; “Bosque Memorial Museum to Feature Clifton,” 2002; “Clifton Named,” 1997; Hewitt, 2002; Ringness, 2002; Robinson, 1984; Sherley, 1993). The Bosque Memorial Museum also loaned historic Norwegian artifacts to the Institute of Texan Cultures in San Antonio for a permanent exhibit (BMM, n.d.a, 2000a). The museum also supports an extensive Norwegian gift shop (BMM, n.d.b, 2000, 2003; “Bosque Memorial Museum to Feature Clifton,” 2002; “Bosque Memorial Museum Features,” 2003, 2004, 2005; “Bosque Memorial Museum is Ongoing,” 2006).

### ***Clifton College***

Clifton College, also in Clifton, is a testament to the importance placed on religion and education by the Norwegian immigrants (Bronstad, 1933/2004; Brown, D. A., 1974; Johansen, 1970; Løvoll, 1998; McConal, 1997; Radde, 1986). Begun in 1896 as the Lutheran College of Clifton, Texas, the school served as a Lutheran high school. In 1922 college courses were offered, and by 1924 it officially became Clifton College, an accredited institution. High school courses were discontinued in 1938. Fire and a weaker war economy damaged the college in 1942, but within a few years funds were raised and the school was refurbished. In 1954, Clifton College merged with Texas Lutheran University in Seguin, Texas (Pierson, O. E., 1947/1979; Wiland, 2001).

### **Visitors**

Over the years, the history and architecture of the Norse area have attracted many visitors, both local and foreign (Hunt, n.d., 1975; “Norwegian Family Visits,” 2004; “Norwegian Rotary,” 2005; “Norwegian Tour Group,” 2005; “Norwegian Tour Stops,”

2005; “Norwegians to Pay Visit,” 2005; “Norwegians Tour Museum,” 2005; PMCI, 1982j, 1982k). The Norwegian General Consulate of Houston paid Norse a visit, wanting to learn more about the area (“Clifton Named,” 1997). In 1998, a group of Norwegian exchange students came to learn about Norwegian immigration to America. They visited the museum, heard the history of the area, and toured the historic churches and many of the homesteads. They were treated to Texas-style food and fun, and each student stayed in a host-family’s house. They all left with a better understanding of what the pioneers had to endure to make new lives for themselves in a hot, strange land (Anderson, 1998; “Exchange Students,” 1998; Moulton, 1998). This tradition of welcoming Norwegian students continues to this day (Anderson, 2004a, 2005a, 2005b; Diebenow, 2004). In recent years, Norse has also been host to a youth choir from *St. Svithuns domkirke* (St. Svithun’s Cathedral) in Stavanger, Norway (Anderson, 2004b; “Bosque County Receives,” 2004; “Norwegian Choir Visits,” 2004; “Norwegian Youth Choir,” 2004), and to other ethnic Norwegian musical events (“Gap’s ‘Old Rock Church,’” 2005; “Norwegian Hardanger,” 2005; Tindall, 2005a).

### ***King Olav V***

On October 10, 1982, Norse was also host to King Olav V of Norway. He came to central Texas to commemorate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Cleng Peerson’s birth, to learn more about the area, and to celebrate the positive ties America and Norway have shared over the years. A full schedule was planned for the day. The King began the day, a Sunday, by worshipping at Our Savior’s Lutheran Church. Afterwards, everyone gathered in the cemetery for a brief ceremony at Cleng Peerson’s grave and a short speech given by the king. After the speech, everyone retired to the church fellowship hall

for lunch. A tour of historic Norse and a parade in Clifton followed, both of which the king enjoyed. The day was wrapped up by a stop at the museum, where King Olav looked at the exhibits and helped plant a commemorative tree on the museum grounds. In his honor, the mayor named the week of October 4-10 “King Olav V Week” (BMM, n.d.b, 2000; “Bosque Memorial Museum to Feature Clifton,” 2002; CCC, n.d.d; “Clifton Named,” 1997; Hailey, n.d.; Holmes, n.d.; “King Olav’s Speech,” 1982; Moseley, 1982; “Norwegian Heritage,” 2000; OSLC, n.d.d, 1982; OSLCW, 1990, 2000; Pierson, M., 1997; PMCI, 1982b, 1982d, 1982f, 1982n; Reeder, 1982a, 1982b; Robinson, 1984, 1999; Smith, W. L., 1982; Visiting Layman, n.d.; see Appendix G for a copy of the king’s speech).

### ***TV2 Norway***

A few years later, shortly after Clifton received the “Norwegian Capital of Texas” designation, the town received international recognition again. TV2, a television station in Norway, came to Clifton to do a documentary-style piece on the historic nature of the community. They were pleasantly surprised to find such strong Norwegian roots in a small Texas town (Anderson, 1998; “Clifton Named,” 1997; Stenstrøm, 1997).

### **Norwegian Society of Texas, Bosque County Chapter**

In 1997, a group of people in Clifton interested in celebrating their Norwegian roots founded the Bosque County chapter of the Norwegian Society of Texas, which itself was founded in 1975 (Hewitt, 2002). In the first year, the Bosque County chapter enrolled over 200 new members (“Bosque Chapter Participates,” 2005; “Bosque County Chapter, Norwegian Society of Texas,” 1997, 1998, 2002, 2003, 2004; “Bosque County Chapter of the Norwegian Society of Texas Celebrating,” 2006; Finstad, 2005; Hewitt,



2002; Løvoll, 1998; May, 2006d, 2006h, 2006i; “Membership Hits 200,” 1997; “Norwegian Booth,” 2005; “Norwegian Society of Texas’ Bosque,” 2005; “Norwegian Tales,” 2006; Pierson, M., 1997; Robinson, 1999; Shipley, 2000a, 2000b, 2005i, 2005j, 2005k, 2005l; “Study Guild,” 2005). The Society’s main purpose is “[t]o promote, preserve, and enjoy our Norwegian heritage” (NST, 1997; “NST Booth,” 2003), and the group sponsors many activities which aim to accomplish that goal. The Society’s members participate in activities such as genealogical research, folk dancing, Norwegian arts and crafts, language classes, and socializing with other people with similar interests. The Society also restores historic buildings, dedicates memorials and markers, maintains a small library, and offers a scholarship to its members or their children (“Bosque Norwegian Society Participates,” 2004). Most notably, the Society recognizes and celebrates certain Norwegian “holidays” throughout the year.

### *Society Celebrations*

The Bosque County chapter of the Norwegian Society of Texas celebrates four Norwegian days: *sankthansaften*, or summer solstice, Leiv Eiriksson’s birthday, *juletrefest*, or winter solstice/Christmas (literally translates as Christmas tree party), and *syttende mai*, Norway’s Constitution Day. The Society celebrates *sankthansaften* in late June, usually meeting for some kind of a gathering with a program. In 2002, for example, the group honored past pastors from the area. In previous years, the group has met at a historical site to picnic and play games (Allen, 2004; “Norwegian Society Enjoys,” 2004; “Norwegian Society to Host,” 2004; Oswald & Allen, 2004; “Sankthansaften Picnic,” 2005; “Sankthansaften Summer Solstice,” 2004; Stokley, 2004a). On October 9, the Society members meet to celebrate Leiv Eiriksson’s birthday

and to “honor the discoverer of America” (NST, 1997). There is usually a short program of some kind, food, and visiting (“Come to Cranfills Gap,” 2004; “Join Us,” 2005; “Leif Erikson,” 2006). In late December, the Society celebrates *juletrefest*, or the winter solstice. (For some people this festival translates as a Christmas celebration.) The activities on this day vary according to who has planned the occasion, but one can usually expect a lively gathering with food, singing, dancing, and games (“Be Silly,” 2005; BMM, n.d.d; “Come to the Juletrefest!,” 2004; Huse, 1998; “Jultrefest Was Kinda Silly,” 2006; “Norwegian Society Chapter,” 2003; Smith, R. L., 2000).

The Society’s biggest celebration falls on May 17, or *syttende mai*, Norway’s Constitution Day. Traditionally, there is a large gathering in the park. People bring their lawn chairs and Norwegian flags to join in the celebrations. Hamburgers and Norwegian cookies are served as refreshments. During the official ceremony, the Norwegian flag is raised, the Norwegian national anthem is sung in Norwegian, and then a prayer is said. Then speakers address the importance of May 17 and discuss the history of Bosque County. After the speeches, *leikarringen*, or Norwegian folk dancers, entertain the crowd. Both children and adults perform traditional folk dances, and they wear *bunader*, or traditional Norwegian folk costumes. After more music is played, contestants compete in an “Ole and Lena” joke contest, where all the jokes are good-natured jabs at the Norwegian American stereotype family. Following the jokes and a few recognitions, the flag is lowered, and Taps is played. The rest of the day is filled with a birthday celebration for Cleng Peerson (whose birthday is May 17), a *bunad* show, heritage tables, and more food and visiting (“100 Norwegians,” 2004; “100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary,” 2005; Bakke, 2004; “Bosque County Chapter Celebrates,” 2004; CCC, 2002a, 2003, 2004a;

May, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2006e, 2006f, 2006g; NST-BCC, 1997, 1998, 2005; Oswald & Allen, 2004; Pierson, O. E., 1947/1979; Seljos, 1998; Shipley, 2001b, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d, 2005e, 2005f, 2005g, 2005h, 2006a, 2006b; “Syttende Mai,” 2004).

Over the past few years, these celebrations have become quite popular with the people in the Norse and surrounding areas. Two other celebrations, however, have transcended their humble beginnings and have become more engrained within the cultural fabric of central Texas, if not the entire state. The Norwegian Country Christmas Tour, along with its corresponding *lutefisk* dinner, and the annual *smørgåsbord* have established themselves as cultural traditions, and they serve as testaments to the strong Norwegian ethnic identity still present in the area.

### **Norwegian Country Christmas Tour and Lutefisk Dinner**

The Norwegian Country Christmas Tour is held in Clifton on the first Saturday in December. Homes, businesses, restaurants, and even the museum are dressed in festive Christmas decorations reminiscent of old-fashioned Christmases in Norway. A tour is offered through many of the homes and old homesteads, and the history of the area is told. Even Our Savior’s Lutheran Church and the Old Rock Church are decorated and lit by candles. In town, there is a Gallery of Trees, *leikarringen*, and a presentation on *bunader*. Local artists are also present, many dressed in period costumes, demonstrating the arts and crafts of yesteryear, such as soap-making, needlework, weaving, glassblowing, candle-making, wood-carving, and cookie-making. Visitors to the Norwegian Country Christmas Tour experience an old-fashioned Christmas much like one the Norwegian immigrants to the area would have celebrated (“13<sup>th</sup> Annual,” 2005;

“2005 Norwegian Country,” 2006; Anderson, 1997c, 1997d, 2003b, 2005f, 2005g, 2005h, 2005i, 2005j; “Artisans,” 2005; “The Bee Hill Farm,” 2005; CCC, n.d.a, n.d.b, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2005; “Chamber Slates,” 2003, 2004; “Christmas Music,” 2005; “Christmas Tour Offers,” 2005; “Clifton Chamber Slates,” 2005; “Clifton Chamber’s,” 1997; “Come to Norwegian,” 2005; Diebenow, 2003; “Early Settler’s,” 2006; “Gallery of Christmas Trees,” 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005; “Gallery of Trees Accepting,” 2005a, 2005b, 2006; “Gallery of Trees Compliments,” 2006; “Gallery of Trees Guaranteed,” 2005; “Historic Norway Mills,” 2006; “Homes on the Tour,” 2000; “Leikarringen,” 2005; Mathews, 2005h, 2005i, 2005j, 2005k, 2005l, 2005m, 2005n, 2005o, 2005q, 2005r, 2005/2006, 2006f, 2006g; May, 2006j; “Meetings Slated,” 2006; Moulton, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2000e, 2000f, 2002a, 2002b; Myers, 1999; “Norwegian Cookies,” 2005a, 2005b, 2005c; “Norwegian Country Christmas,” 1997, 2004a, 2004b; “Norwegian Country Christmas December,” 1998; “Norwegian Country Christmas Tour of Homes,” 1997; “Norwegian Country Christmas Tour Hosted,” 2006; “Norwegian Home Tour Impacts,” 2005; “Norwegian Luncheon,” 2005; “Norwegian Society Seeking,” 2005; “Our Savior’s Lutheran Church Offers,” 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006; Pierson, M., 1997; ““Questad Place,”” 2006; Robinson, 1999; Russell, 2004; Shipley, 2005m, 2005n; Smith, R. L., 2000; “The Solberg Home,” 2005).

The *lutefisk* dinner in Cranfills Gap is held in conjunction with the Norwegian Country Christmas Tour. Started in 1936, the dinner was held off-and-on until 1965, when the celebration was revived in earnest. The event became known in the central Texas area, and people would drive for hours just to eat the fish meal. Some folks even

traveled from other states. The dinner became so popular that recently the organizers had to resort to selling reservations on a first come, first serve basis. (One year so many people showed up they ran out of food.) They even offer more than one sitting to accommodate all the guests. The men of the church prepare the fish, the women cook and serve the food, and the children in their *bunader* dance and entertain the diners.

Not traditionally considered a delicacy, *lutefisk* is thought of more as a “survival” food, one that harkens back to the hard times endured by the immigrants. *Lutefisk* is basically dried cod, or “lye fish.” It is imported from Norway in 99-pound bales, and the whole town of Cranfills Gap is involved in preparing the fish for consumption. First the fish is cut into chunks and is skinned. Then the pieces are soaked in a mixture of lye and water for 72 hours. After being rinsed and cleaned, the pieces are soaked for another 72 hours in a mixture of lime and water. After this time, the pieces of fish are cleaned thoroughly. Then they are soaked in clean water for 96 hours. (The water is changed frequently.) Once they swell five to seven times their original size, the pieces are ready for cooking. The pieces are placed in cheesecloth bags, which are then placed in salted, boiling water for five to ten minutes. At this point, the fish is ready to be eaten. *Lutefisk* is traditionally served with white sauce, melted butter, and potatoes. For those who do not like the fish, turkey and dressing are also served. Green beans, cranberries, bread, pies, tea, and coffee round out the meal (Anderson, 2006c, 2006d, 2006e; “Annual Cranfills Gap,” 1997; CCC, 2002a, 2004a; “Clifton Named,” 1997; CMSP, 1995; “Cranfills Gap: Experience Lutefisk!,” 2000; “Cranfills Gap Lions,” 2004 “Cranfills Gap Lutefisk,” 2000; “Cranfills Gap a Thriving City,” 1997, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006; Epley, 1982; “Gap Community,” 1997, 1998; “Gap Residents

Ready,” 1997; Garland, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d; Hunt, 1979; Løvoll, 1998; Myers, 1999; “Nordic Noshing,” 1999; “Nov. 19 Deadline,” 2005; Olsen Fish, n.d.; “Order Deadline,” 2005; Pierson, M., 1997; “Reservations Now Being Taken,” 2005; Robinson, 1984, 1999; Russell, 2004; Sherley, 1993; Smith, R. L., 2000; see Appendix H for the *lutefisk* dinner menu).

### **Smørgåsbord Dinner**

Of all the festivities and events in the area, the annual *smørgåsbord* held at Norse is the ultimate expression of the community’s cultural heritage. Begun in 1949 at Our Savior’s Lutheran Church, the *smørgåsbord* is the most beloved tradition of the area. Despite the fact that they do not advertise the event nor allow pictures to be taken there, its fame has spread far beyond Texas’ borders. During this event, the locals take great pride in showing off their community. The popularity of the event belies the small, rural community from which it sprang.

Like the *lutefisk* dinner of Cranfills Gap, the *smørgåsbord* involves everyone in the community. The men of the church set up the tables, assist with the parking, and some even help prepare the food. The women of the church, wearing their *bunader*, cook and serve the food. Teenagers assist with serving the food, helping the guests, and clearing the tables. Held in mid-November, the *smørgåsbord* has become so popular that the organizers have resorted to drawing names to determine who could pre-purchase tickets. (The locals do not like to call this a “lottery.”) Those whose names are not drawn get their money refunded. As with the *lutefisk* dinner, there are several sittings to serve all the guests.

In a sense, this meal is more Norwegian than the *lutefisk* dinner, save for the *lutefisk* itself. At the *smørgåsbord*, salmon, ham, and turkey are served, along with pickled herring, *kjøttboller* (meatballs), and *rullepølse* (sausage). Various vegetables, salads, cheeses, soups, and breads are also on the menu. The desserts, however, are the main attraction. Norwegian cookies of every shape and size are presented: *sandbakkels* (sand tarts), *fattigmannsbakkels* (poor man's tarts), *Berlinerkranser* (shortbread wreaths), *krumkaker* (cone-shaped wafers), and *rosetter* (rosettes) are all on display, served fresh with hot coffee ("57<sup>th</sup> Annual," 2005; Banta, 1967; Baskin, 1954; CCC, 2002a, 2003, 2004a; "Clifton Named," 1997; CMSP, 1995; Hewitt, 2002; "Nordic Noshing," 1999; "Norse Church Serves," 1997, 1998, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006; "Norse Smørgåsbord Always," 2002; "Norse Smørgåsbord Returns," 2006; "Norwegian Smørgåsbord," 2000; "Orders to be Accepted," 2005; "Orders to be Taken," 2006; OSLC, n.d.c, n.d.d, n.d.e, 1998; OSLCW, 1960, 1990, 2000; "Our Savior's Lutheran Church Serving," 2006; Pierson, M., 1997; Robinson, 1984; "Saturday Deadline," 2005, 2006; Sherley, 1993; Smith, R. L., 2000; "Smørgåsbord," 2006; "Ticket Mail-Order," 2005; "Ticket Orders," 2006; Tolbert, 1962; see Appendix I for the *smørgåsbord* menu and Appendix J for prayers).

### Summary

By preserving buildings and artifacts from the past, and by perpetuating the Norwegian culture through participation in certain "holidays" and festivals, the people of the southwestern region of Bosque County, otherwise known as Norse, have maintained and celebrated their ethnicity through the generations. Always willing to share their history with others, these individuals are proud of their heritage, and their identity is

shaped in part through the immigrants' experiences in a strange, new land. The Norse area of Bosque County, set apart in its geography for Norwegian immigrants, celebrates its uniqueness of being the largest concentrated settlement of Norwegians outside the Midwest and Northern Great Plains. This uniqueness, and its corresponding pride, help construct the ethnic identity of the people still living in the area today.

The next chapter is devoted to presenting an overview of phenomenology.



### **CHAPTER THREE**

## **PHENOMENOLOGY**

Since phenomenology is situated in the interpretive paradigm (Hackley, 2003), an overview of this paradigm is outlined in the first part of this chapter. Included in this section is a discussion on constructionism as worldview. Next, phenomenology is covered, along with its underlying assumptions, and then it is compared to traditional ethnography. A discussion on phenomenological methodology is included in the second part of this chapter.

### **The Interpretive Paradigm**

The aim of interpretive research is to develop a better understanding of a particular phenomenon, and to view it through the eyes of those experiencing it. Rather than using numbers and percentages to explain a particular phenomenon, the interpretive paradigm seeks to describe it with the words and experiences of those being studied (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004; Seale, 2003).

The interpretive researcher is concerned with how people situate themselves in their world and how they make sense of it through “symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles, and so forth” (Berg, B. L., 1998, p. 7). Of particular interest to the interpretive researcher are how meanings are expressed, and how they create reality for those who expressed them. In short, these researchers study how communication comprises the rituals and functions of contemporary life (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Martin & Nakayama, 1999), and they interpret the “meaningful

interactions” which create social meaning for these people (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004, p. 5).

Interpretive research accomplishes these goals by focusing on selected issues or on small numbers of people, and by gathering a large amount of detailed descriptions (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Patton, 2002). The diverse range of epistemological positions and research methods found within the interpretive paradigm allows for different kinds of questions to be asked, and thus, richer data to be collected. These highly detailed descriptions of a selected phenomenon or of a particular community are referred to as “thick descriptions” (Clair, 2003; Geertz, 1973, 2003; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Patton, 2002).

The purpose of gathering and generating these thick descriptions is not to explain, predict, or control “human phenomena,” as is the purpose of the positivist paradigm (Jorgensen, 2003, p. 20; Guba & Lincoln, 2004; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004), but rather to describe the phenomena within their own contexts to better understand them. These idiographic portrayals elucidate the phenomena and allow for cross-comparisons to similar events or groups (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Patton, 2002).

In addition, researchers within this paradigm operate from different assumptions than do the positivists. In interpretive research, the researcher is not the all-knowing, rational, objective, or neutral observer and over-seer. Instead, s/he develops her/his knowledge along with the research subjects; together, they uncover the essence of the phenomenon being studied (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004; see also Sprague & Zimmerman, 1993). As a result, the researcher is intimately and inductively involved in the discovery process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

Because of its focus on detailed descriptions of small groups and on the role of the researcher during research, the interpretive paradigm has been able to address some of the criticisms directed at positivist research and its approaches. Guba and Lincoln (2004) state that positivist research, while beneficial for gathering statistics for proving or disproving hypotheses, is lacking in other areas. First, it strips the context from the variables it studies, and as a result, reduces those variables to mere categories, thus excluding the meaning and purpose of human behavior. In addition, it ignores the influence of the researcher on the phenomenon or on the data, and it discounts the discovery process of research. Finally, positivist research, while generalizable to other groups, can't generalize on the individual level. Guba and Lincoln assert that interpretive research can, and does, accomplish these tasks.

According to Guba and Lincoln (2004; see also Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, 2003), constructionism is a major research paradigm within the field of interpretive research. Constructionism is discussed in the following section of this dissertation.

### ***Constructionism as Worldview***

The theoretical framework of constructionism, as developed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) in their seminal work *The Social Construction of Reality*, is a major interpretive paradigm or worldview in qualitative research. Under this framework, humans are “active, creative, and reflective,” but they still “operate within certain structural and cultural restraints” (Primeggia & Varacalli, 2000, p. 246). Constructionism is outlined here.

As an interpretive paradigm, constructionism possesses its own ways of viewing and interpreting the social world. These unique and distinct ways comprise a worldview

that distinguishes constructionism from other research paradigms. Guba and Lincoln (2004) expound on these two terms:

A paradigm may be viewed as a set of *basic beliefs* (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimates or first principles. It represents a *worldview* that defines, for its holder, the nature of the “world,” the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts, as for example, cosmologies and theologies do. (p. 21)

Worldview encompasses the beliefs and values of a particular paradigm, and it concerns itself with the patterns of interaction between people and others, and with the world (Pennington, 1985). Worldview also includes the ontological, epistemological, and methodological questions of interpretive research (Goulding, 1999; Guba and Lincoln, 2004).

In research, ontological questions are concerned with the nature of the world and with the individual’s place within that world. For example, these questions may ask, “What is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it?” Epistemological questions deal with ways of knowing and they ask, “What is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known?” Methodological questions are concerned with all the different possible relationships to that world. An example of a methodological question may be, “How can the inquirer (would-be knower) go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known?” These methodological questions determine the methods used (Guba and Lincoln, 2004, pp. 21-22; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004; Pennington, 1985).

Within the constructionism worldview, ontological questions are relative.

Relativism indicates that meaning depends upon context, so multiple meanings and realities are possible. According to Guba and Lincoln (2004),

[r]ealities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature (although elements are often shared among many individuals and even across cultures), and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions. Constructions are not more or less “true,” in any absolute sense, but simply more or less informed and/or sophisticated.

Constructions are alterable, as are their associated “realities.” (p. 26)

Consequently, reality is dependent upon the individual or group and the relevant context.

This reality reflects the nature of the everyday world, and the individual’s or group’s place within it (Barker & Galasiński, 2001; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2003; Ellis, 1999; Gergen, 1994, 2001; Jorgensen, 2003; Schwandt, 1994, 2003; Seale, 2003).

In addition, epistemological questions within the constructionism worldview are subjective. The knower, or inquirer, and the subject create understandings and discover realities together; this understanding is transactional. Realities are revealed during this discovery process (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 2004; Seale, 2003). The subjects take an active, rather than passive, role in the revealing of these realities (Freeman, 2001; Schwandt, 2003).

Furthermore, within the constructionism worldview, methodological questions are hermeneutical and dialectical; they are designed to interpret and to interact. In fact, it is this interaction with others that allows for the interpretation of the construction to occur:

The variable and personal (intramental) nature of social constructions suggests that individual constructions can be elicited and refined only through interaction between and among investigator and respondents. These varying constructions are interpreted using conventional hermeneutical techniques, and are compared and contrasted through a dialectical interchange. (Guba & Lincoln, 2004, p. 27)

Meanings and realities are constructed and interpreted through interactions with others and within particular contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2003; Patton, 2002; Seale, 2003). As a result, interpretation and analysis are ongoing processes, and theories can be generated (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004).

Communication provides the context and subjectivity necessary for construction. Because communication is not static, meanings can vary across cultures and through time (Ellis, 1999; Gergen, 1994; Hecht et al., 2003; Littlejohn, 1996). Relationships with others can also described and understood through communication (Schwandt, 1994, 2003). Because communication continually constructs the everyday world, it therefore becomes cultural in and of itself (Barker & Galasiński, 2001) According to Knoblauch (2001),

since the culture of the world of everyday life is constructed by means of communicative acts, it is essentially a *communicative culture*. By communicative culture we want to stress that culture cannot be reduced to knowledge, meaning,

or sign-systems only. Communicative culture is neither located in the mind nor in the objectified system or discourse: it is produced, realized, and transformed in communicative actions. (p. 25)

Constructionism, then, looks at the role of communication in the everyday construction of realities. These realities are relative, or dependent on context, and subjective, or contingent upon people's interactions. Methodologies within this interpretive worldview seek to describe and interpret these realities. Phenomenology is one such interpretive methodology, and it is outlined in the following section of this dissertation.

### **Phenomenology**

Phenomenological research seeks to describe and interpret socially constructed realities by understanding how people experience certain phenomena. By studying the feelings, thoughts, and perceptions of those directly involved in the phenomenon, the phenomenological researcher can uncover the essence, or true nature, of that event for those people. The goal of phenomenological research, then, is to uncover this deeper meaning of social events as experienced, constructed, and understood by their participants (Hackley, 2003; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Orbe, 1998, 2002; Patton, 2002; Thomas, 2003).

Phenomenological philosophies and methodologies have been utilized in various communication contexts over the years. Many discussions have focused on the phenomenological nature of communication (Deetz, 1973; Macke, 1991; Stewart, 1983), rhetoric (Tucker, 2001; Warnick, 1979), fashion (Bailey, 2002), and mass media (Davis, D. K., 1987; Eason, 1984; Haynes, 1988; Peterson, 1987; Stadler, 2002;

Traudt, Anderson, & Meyer, 1987). Other treatments address the issues found in speech therapy, such as stuttering (Cream, Onslow, Packman, & Llewellyn, 2003) and speech fluency (Susca & Healey, 2002). Other communication constructs, such as silence (Ehrenhaus, 1988) and anxiety (Hyde, 1980), have also been studied.

Ethnicity and culture have been phenomenologically studied, but from outside the field of communication. In her study of Chicana women, Martinez (2000) used feminist theory to understand the transformative nature of communication, history, and literature on Mexican American women's identity. Sands (1981) utilized the parameters of the sociology of knowledge along with phenomenology to understand the different language content of two groups of industrial workers employed by the same company, and how this content shaped their realities. Operating from a sociolinguistics perspective, Dhillon (1994) phenomenologically investigated the multicultural communication context of India, and Haarmann (1984) studied the roles of ethnocultural stereotypes and foreign languages in Japanese commercials. In this endeavor, he considered the relationship between language and ethnicity, for a group's ethnic identity is also influenced by their views of others.

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is traditionally considered the founding father of descriptive phenomenology as a means of studying social behavior. He believed that philosophy was an exact science, and that it was based on certainties, such as knowledge. This knowledge, he asserted, should be studied as truth and as part of the conscious mind. Doing so, he believed, would reveal the meaning of behavior (Husserl, 1928/1964, 1970, 1929/1980, 1931/1982, 1975/1982, 1950/1999, 1913/2001) (Goulding, 1999; Hackley,



2003; Isa, 2000; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Littlejohn, 1996; Maggs-Rapport, 2001; Patton, 2002; Tucker, 2001).

The work of the Danish existential philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), however, is generally regarded as the foundation for phenomenological thought. He focused on the meaning of existence and investigated the purpose of social processes (Kierkegaard, 1983, 1985). In addition, his thoughts on the links between knowledge and the roles of God and faith inspired other great thinkers, such as Nietzsche (Goulding, 1999).

Another major figure in phenomenological thought is Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), a proponent of hermeneutic, or interpretive, phenomenology (sometimes referred to as existential phenomenology). Developing Kierkegaard's ideas further, he argued that philosophy's main purpose was to uncover the nature of being, which he believed was housed in the consciousness and in the different types of existence that humans experience. These different types of existence were determined by the way the world was structured and formed by the choices made by humans (Heidegger, 1957/1969, 1988, 1991, 1992, 1927/1996, 1985/2001, 1943/2002, 1950/2002, 1982/2002, 2003). Heidegger influenced the writings of Jean Paul Sartre (1939/1948, 1972, 1977, 1938/1979, 1989/1992, 1943/1994, 1940/2003), who, expounding on Heidegger's theories, focused on how emotions lead to action (Goulding, 1999; Hackley, 2003; Littlejohn, 1996; Maggs-Rapport, 2001; Thomas, 2003).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) is another central figure in phenomenological thought. He took Heidegger's notion about the nature of being and expanded it to include an embodied element, emphasizing the relationship between the

structure of an experience and the embodied, or physical, nature of human existence (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, 1960/1964, 1964a, 1964b, 2004) (Hackley, 2003; Patton, 2002; Stadler, 2002; Thomas, 2003; Tucker, 2001). He also emphasized the importance of communication to the experience of these individuals (Littlejohn, 1996).

Modern thoughts on phenomenology were shaped in part by sociologist Alfred Schutz (1899-1959). He combined Husserl's philosophical phenomenology with a social phenomenology, and in the process acknowledged the importance of language as a transmitter of meaning and as a describer of social events and realities (Schutz, 1970, 1932/1972, 1982) (Goulding, 1999; Hackley, 2003; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Littlejohn, 1996; Patton, 2002). Amedeo Giorgi (1970) has also contributed to psychological understandings of phenomenological thought (Maggs-Rapport, 2001; Patton, 2002; Thomas, 2003).

As evidenced in the preceding paragraphs, phenomenology is more than a methodology; it is also a philosophy (Goulding, 1999; Hackley, 2003; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). As such, it believes that reality is found in the relationships between social actors and particular phenomena, and that it is to this lived experience that people ascribe meaning. In this sense, phenomenology reveals its existentialist roots by emphasizing the "experience of being and existing" (Hackley, 2003, p. 111; Bailey, 2002; Orbe 1998, 2002).

As a methodology, "[p]henomenological social research takes the embodied, experiencing agent as the starting-point and explores the mutually constructed 'life-world' of the participants, the world of lived experience from which all others derive" (Hackley, 2003, p. 112; Maggs-Rapport, 2000; Thomas, 2003). Here people are viewed

as active in social processes, as individual thinkers with agency who try to attribute meaning to their experiences so they can better interpret them. This socially constructed reality is the focus of phenomenological research (Hackley, 2003).

Phenomenological research is descriptive, or eidetic, and it examines phenomena and their underlying structures (Isa, 2000; Thomas, 2003; Tucker, 2001). Since the experiences of social actors are the focus of this type of research, their feelings, thoughts, and perceptions reveal the meanings they create for things in their consciousness (Hackley, 2003; Maggs-Rapport, 2000; Tucker, 2001). In this sense, the phenomenological approach is “relational,” or “non-dualist,” for it is concerned with the actors’ descriptions of their experiences (Bailey, 2002, p. 85). Uncovering these meanings is central to revealing phenomenological knowledge (Hackley, 2003; Tucker, 2001).

The phenomenological approach developed as the desire for a “richer model of the person” in research evolved. This methodology considers the impact of social events on human emotion and agency, and it recognizes the human need to ascribe meaning to experiences. Consequently, phenomenology provides different ways of approaching research and allows researchers to view topics in new light (Hackley, 2003, p. 116).

The assumptions of the phenomenological approach are discussed in the following section of this dissertation.

### ***Assumptions of Phenomenology***

There are several fundamental assumptions which theoretically and methodologically guide phenomenological research. The first assumption states that researchers using phenomenological research do not specify before they carry out their

research what they want to discover. They take an “open, unrestrict[ed]” look at phenomena” (Orbe, 2002, p. 78), valuing a more natural approach to collecting data. As a result, ambiguity becomes valuable information. These researchers seek answers to *meaning* questions, or questions that seek to learn about the importance of a particular phenomenon. According to Orbe (2002), “[I]n a sense, research is not reported via preconceived notions of clearly stated hypothesis, but rather inductively in terms of the descriptive lived experiences to which the person gives consciousness.” These conscious experiences are pre-reflective activities (p.79; Bailey, 2002; Deetz, 1973; Goulding, 1999; Hackley, 2003; Isa, 2000; Littlejohn, 1996; Maggs-Rapport, 2000; Orbe, 1998; Thomas, 2003; Tucker, 2001).

These “lived experiences” are the focus of the second assumption of phenomenological research: that its objective is to “gain a deeper understanding of the nature and meaning of one’s everyday experiences” (Orbe, 2002, p. 78). Here, the researcher studies everyday, often times trivial, occurrences in order to shed light on the taken-for-granted experiences that occur in our subconscious. “By eliciting experiential descriptions of everyday life, phenomenologists can begin to understand cultural practices and how they operate in the larger context” (Orbe, 1998, p. 37; Hackley, 2003; Patton, 2002; Thomas, 2003).

The third assumption of this approach regards the nature of the social actors and how they are viewed. Phenomenological research is interested in “persons,” not “individuals.” The term “persons” can apply to anything, but the term “individuals” hints at the uniqueness of each human being. In addition, this type of research prefers to view its research “subjects” more as “participants,” “narrators,” or “co-researchers” (Orbe,

1998, 2002). Persons are seen as “experiencing, reflective, and agentive actors who collectively produce social events” (Hackley, 2003, p. 113). “In this regard, persons can be viewed as multidimensional and complex and from a particular social, cultural, and historical life circumstance – an important consideration when exploring the lived experiences of those groups traditionally marginalized in research and theory” (Orbe, 2002, p. 79; see also Orbe, 1998).

The last assumption of phenomenological research is that the researcher is considered an active participant in the construction of the research. The researcher “is fully immersed in the lifeworld” being studied, and thus, s/he is not an objective observer (Orbe, 2002, p. 78). This type of research forces the researcher “to acknowledge the ways in which [s/he is] positioned within the discourse that [s/he is] seeking to understand” (Orbe, 1998, p. 36; Hackley, 2003). Realities are constructed and their meanings are interpreted in an interactive process between the researcher and the agentive social actors (Goulding, 1999; Hackley, 2003). Through language and social interaction, the social actors and researchers work together to construct meaning and reveal the essence of everyday lived experiences (Deetz, 1973; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Littlejohn, 1996; Orbe, 1998, 2002).

As seen in the above description of this approach’s assumptions, phenomenological research is guided by research questions concerning meaning, rather than by hypotheses making a statement; by the ordinary, everyday lived experiences of social actors; and by the active participation of both agentive social actors and researchers in the co-creation of meaning and reality. How these assumptions differ from traditional ethnography is briefly outlined below.

### *Differences from Traditional Ethnography*

Phenomenology and ethnography are both prominent traditions of interpretive research, and in many ways, they are very similar to each other. Both traditions are exploratory, both employ the researcher as the data collection instrument, and both promote a self-conscious stance to research. In addition, both phenomenology and ethnography utilize interviews, using a combination of open-ended and structured questions, and both traditions look for meaning in narrative. Differences do exist, however, between the two traditions (Clair, 2003; Hackley, 2003; Lackey & Gates, 1997; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Maggs-Rapport, 2000, 2001; Patton, 2002; Rapport & Maggs, 1997); these differences are briefly outlined here.

The primary difference between phenomenology and ethnography concerns the role of the researcher. The phenomenological researcher tries to understand the world through her/his own existence in it, and through conducting in-depth interviews and participating in dialogue. The ethnographic researcher, on the other hand, tries to understand the meanings people give to their social world by totally immersing her/himself in that culture or group for extended periods of time. This immersion is known as “participant observation.” In this environment, the researcher collects data primarily through ethnographic interviews and through observation, focusing on interactions, events, and speech (Lackey & Gates, 1997; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Maggs-Rapport, 2000, 2001; Patton, 2002; Rapport & Maggs, 1997).

Phenomenological researchers are part of the interpretive process, allowing their personal biases and historical understandings to influence their interpretations. These interpretations, in turn, build on one another and better inform the researcher,

empowering her/him with awareness and new meanings. The ethnographic researcher, on the other hand, looks for broad themes to explain social processes, and s/he works from a standpoint of grounded theory (Goulding, 1999; Lackey & Gates, 1997; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Maggs-Rapport, 2000, 2001; Patton, 2002; Rapport & Maggs, 1997).

The primary aim for the phenomenologist is to understand and interpret phenomena by revealing the hidden meanings behind them. Central to this process is the implicit understanding of the nature-of-being-in-the-world, or the interconnectedness of individuals and their social environments. The phenomenologist uses speech, language, and narrative to ascertain this nature of being and to arrive at these understandings (Lackey & Gates, 1997; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Maggs-Rapport, 2000, 2001; Patton, 2002; Rapport & Maggs, 1997). The ethnographer's aim is to describe social settings and cultural knowledge, which are understood through examining the relationships between social actors and their world, and individual and shared cultural values (Clair, 2003; Geertz, 1973, 2003; Hackley, 2003; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Patton, 2002; Saville-Troike, 2003). As a result, the ethnographer seeks to understand the world of social actors as they describe it, because for the ethnographer, meaning is cultural (Clair, 2003; Geertz, 2003; Hackley, 2003; Lackey & Gates, 1997; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Maggs-Rapport, 2000, 2001; Patton, 2002; Rapport & Maggs, 1997).

While similar in many ways, phenomenology and ethnography are two distinct methodologies, the former originating from philosophy and operating within a constructionism framework, and the latter emanating from symbolic interactionism and performing within the parameters of grounded theory (Goulding, 1999; Hackley, 2003).

Phenomenology's methodological approach is outlined in the next section of this dissertation.

### **Methodological Approach**

For the phenomenologist, uncovering the meanings embedded within narratives involves three different stages: Epoche, description, and imaginative free variation. The first stage is Epoche, a Greek word meaning the suspension of judgement. In this stage, the researcher reflects on her/his own personal experiences with the phenomenon at hand. S/he may or may not have had much experience with the topic, but a certain level of self-awareness is necessary before beginning analysis. The researcher then “brackets” and sets aside these presuppositions so they are nonreductionistic (Goulding, 1999; Isa, 2000; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Maggs-Rapport, 2000, 2001; Patton, 2002).

Husserl and Schutz advocated the practice of “bracketing” because they felt that by setting aside one's prejudgments, a researcher would be better able to describe the true nature or essence of a phenomenon, or the “invariant character of a pre-reflective experience.” This process would allow the researcher to circumvent traditional ways (i.e., science, religion, philosophy) of understanding things and to see phenomena in a new light. Because limited theories and presuppositions would be eliminated, bracketing would also allow talk about emotion, feelings, attitudes, dreams, and motives, as well as other phenomena (Stadler, 2002, p. 238; Goulding, 1999; Isa, 2000; Orbe, 1998, 2002; Thomas, 2003).

The second stage is description. In this stage, the phenomenological researcher classifies the phenomenon by analyzing the raw data. S/he reads one interview transcript, looking for key words or phrases. Then, other transcripts are read in the same way and



are compared to each other. This process is repeated several times, if necessary. The researcher looks for patterns within the data, and then s/he groups similar patterns into larger themes or categories (Goulding, 1999; Hackley, 2003; Isa, 2000; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Maggs-Rapport, 2000, 2001; Thomas, 2003). This grouping of patterns helps the researcher understand her/his own experience, or potential experience, with the phenomenon. S/he develops the structure of the phenomenon, which then aids in the development of theory (Bailey, 2002; Thomas, 2003).

The third stage is imaginative free variation. In this stage, the researcher conducts thought experiments, or systematical and logical processes involving the empirical data, which are then linked back to the theory. These data can also be cross-culturally compared to other similar phenomena. In this stage, the phenomenological researcher reveals the essence of the phenomenon being studied. S/he utilizes direct quotes and metaphors pulled from the narrative to accurately depict the phenomenon from the social actors' point of view (Goulding, 1999; Hackley, 2003; Isa, 2000; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Maggs-Rapport, 2000, 2001; Orbe, 1998, 2002; Patton, 2002).

Uncovering the meanings embedded within narratives involves both the phenomenological researcher and the agentive social actors. Together, they reveal the essence of particular phenomena in the words of those who experienced them. This dissertation, then, is concerned with the meanings of certain phenomena within a particular community.

The following chapter, Chapter Four, covers the methods and procedures of this proposed study. Included is information on the setting, the participants, and research procedures.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **METHODS AND PROCEDURES**

#### **Introduction**

The goal of this dissertation was to explore the link between communication and identity in the rural community of Norse, Texas. I felt that this link could be better understood by tapping into people's notions of ethnicity, and by investigating the communication patterns that helped construct it. Consequently, the first goal of my research was to understand how the people of Norse experience ethnicity. The second goal was to reveal how this ethnicity is communicatively constructed and maintained. My third goal was to investigate how the relationship between ethnic identity and communication contributes to the creation of shared meanings within the community. The fourth goal of this research was to reveal the kinds of meaning or meanings the people of Norse attach to the cultural practices that reflect their ethnicity. Finally, my fifth goal was to understand how these folks use language and communication to validate their identity. To answer these questions, I phenomenologically used a constructionist framework to conduct my research project. In this chapter, I outline my experiences with the topic, along with the research setting, the participants, and the research procedures, which include data collection techniques, ethnical considerations, and procedures for analyzing and verifying data.

#### **Investigator's Experience**

My interest in the connection between communication and identity resulted from my experiences with the community of Norse and from my coursework in graduate

school. Norse, Texas is a small, rural community, but it has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. I was not born there, nor have I ever lived in the community. I do have family there, however, so I was raised with a certain level of awareness about the area. I was born in Houston, but from the ages of three to 22, I lived in Waco, which is about 35 miles southeast of Clifton.

My father is 100% Norwegian; he is the great great grandson of Ole and Anne Pierson, one of the original Norwegian couples who came to Texas in 1854. He was born on a farm in Norse and lived in the area until he was eight, and then he and his family moved to Waco. His family has always been aware of their cultural heritage, and they have acknowledged and celebrated it down through the years. Because they are direct descendants of the original pioneers, my dad's family is somewhat considered one of the "cornerstones" of the Norse community, and in general, they are quite respected for that.

My mother, however, is not Norwegian; in fact, she does not know what her ethnic heritage is. She was born and raised in Waco, and she has always been familiar with Norse and the surrounding area. She identifies with the Norwegian heritage of the area vicariously through her husband, and she has unofficially "adopted" the identity for herself. She calls this identity "Norwegian by proxy."

When my siblings and I were young, our parents took us to Norse for various functions, such as church services, weddings, funerals, family reunions, visiting with family and friends, and the *lutefisk* and *smørgåsbord* dinners. We were educated about our family's role in the settling of the area, and we became familiar with the local museum and different historic homes, particularly the original Pierson homestead. My father was always proud to show off his cultural roots to his children, for he believes that

a person who is grounded in her or his history has a better foundation for facing the future.

I discuss my connections with the community to inform the reader of my own experiences with ethnic identity. Although I am half-Norwegian, I profess to be Norwegian, and I strive to celebrate that part of me, much in the ways my parents have through the years. (Despite my family's awareness of its ethnic heritage and its efforts to celebrate it, however, I was never exposed to the Norwegian language. Consequently, I cannot speak, read, or write Norwegian.) I am proud of my heritage, and I am especially grateful that I am aware of my roots and have been given the opportunity to learn more about where I came from. I know so many white Americans of European descent who are not aware of their ethnic makeup, so in a sense, I feel especially unique in that I know so much about my family.

That being said, however, I am curious about my mother's side of the family. No research was ever done on her family tree, so any ideas about ethnicity on my mother's side are pure conjecture. (We think there's some Welsh blood on that side of the family.) She and I have agreed to investigate this at a later date when we both have more time at our disposal. I look forward to filling in the gaps in my ethnic identity and experiencing a whole new "ethnic revival" of my own.

### **Setting**

This study focused on Norse, an ethnic community of less than 4,000 people, in the southwestern part of Bosque County, Texas (discussed in Chapter Two). This setting is unique in that many of the people in the community strongly identify with their Norwegian roots, and that they celebrate this ethnicity in a variety of ways. Ethnic

celebrations, parades, festivals, holidays, and special ethnic dinners all serve to recognize the heritage of the area.

Although there is also a considerable German element in the area, the towns of Clifton and Cranfills Gap, along with the Norse area in between, generally identify themselves as Norwegian. In 1997 Clifton was named the Norwegian Capital of Texas by the Texas government, and the town has promoted itself as such. It is notable that the people of German descent in the area, while numerous, do not recognize and celebrate their ethnicity to the same extent, although this trend has been changing in recent years.

The community can lay claim to being the “Norwegian Capital” of Texas because the Norwegians were the first white Europeans to settle the area in significant numbers. Seventeen people (eight couples and a single man), along with all their children, came to the area in 1854 and named it Norse. Here they established their homesteads and made a living for themselves. More Norwegians followed in subsequent years. Other immigrants representing various other ethnic groups, including the Germans, arrived later.

In addition, the area of Norse is ethnically unique because many of the original buildings built in the 1850s onward are still standing. Many have been kept in good shape and are still inhabited, in a couple of instances by descendants of the original pioneers. It is notable that these old homesteads and their surrounding lands have been altered, bought, and sold over the years, but yet they are still generally referred to by the names of the original owners, such as the “old Jenson farm,” or “the old Pierson place.” People in Norse understand their relationships and connections with others through their knowledge of the immigrants’ original homesteads.

## **Participants**

The ethnic community of Norse includes the two towns of Clifton and Cranfills Gap, and although many ethnic groups now reside there, many people identify themselves as Norwegian. For this study, I focused on those individuals who claim a Norwegian ancestry (with at least one Norwegian grandparent) and who generally participate in communicative or cultural events which celebrate that ethnicity. It was also helpful if these individuals knew a little about the history of the area, or about how they are related to others within the community. There are a few members of this community who serve as unofficial “experts” or “historians” for the area. In conducting my research, I began with these individuals. I also spoke with a few non-Norwegians from the community to get a broader picture of the cultural landscape of the area. In all, I met with people who participate in the community on a variety of levels: social, religious, political, and cultural.

## **Research Procedures**

### ***Data Collection Techniques***

The primary method for collecting data involved semi-structured in-depth interviews. I used an interview guide comprised of closed-ended identifying questions and open-ended, grand-tour questions. I asked my Norwegian participants approximately 120 questions, and I asked my non-Norwegian participants roughly half that number of questions. My aim was to focus on specific, intimate topics so that I could create a narrative of the experience in the social actors’ own words (Fontana & Frey, 1994, 2003; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Miller & Crabtree, 2004; Patton, 2002; Spradley, 1979, 2003).

First, I called the unofficial historians of the community and asked if they would participate in my study. (I identified these experts by asking different people in the community to define who is knowledgeable about my subject.) After they agreed to the interview, I made an appointment with them so that we could meet face-to-face. I conducted these interviews in person, and at a time and place that were acceptable to the person being interviewed. When I arrived to conduct the interview, I explained my research project and obtained their signed consent. I also made sure to obtain their permission to tape-record the interview.

I began with the community experts, asking them about their experiences with ethnicity and communication. Then I used the snowball sampling technique to recruit more interviewees by asking these experts if they knew anyone else with whom I could talk. In all, I conducted 45 separate interviews over a two year period. In the summer of 2002, I conducted a pilot study where I interviewed nine different people in the course of 12 interviews. Eight of these interviews were preliminary ones, while the remaining four were conducted as a follow up. In the summer of 2004, I conducted the rest of my interviews. I interviewed 37 different people, some of whom I previously interviewed in 2002, and I conducted 33 interviews.

I called everyone my local experts recommended to me. In identifying myself to these people on the phone, I told them my name, and who recommended that I call them. To help them understand my connection to the community, I further added the names of my father, and his parents, being sure to add my grandmother's maiden name. In a few instances, depending on the person with whom I was speaking, I also mentioned my

grandmother's parents. I then explained my project to them, and asked if they would be willing to speak with me.

I was lucky in that I had very good access to this community. First of all, my last name opened many doors for me. The Piersons were one of the first pioneer families to the area, so most everyone living in Norse now is aware of the family and its involvement in the development of the community. Second, the people of Norse, in addition to being very friendly and nice, are highly interested in education, so many of the people whom I called were willing to help me because of that factor. Third, people in Norse are genuinely interested in sharing the ethnic history of the area with others. They want the local stories and histories to be shared and passed on to future generations, so for these reasons, they also wanted to speak with me. Many people told me they were excited that some of this information was being recorded. They were concerned that a lot of these memories would be lost, and they were glad I was pursuing them as a topic.

Most people were interested in my project and were thrilled about my graduate studies, but many individuals stated that they did not think they could help me. They seemed to think that I wanted them to tell me the history of the area, or that I wanted detailed discussions on family trees. Once I assured them that that was not the case, they were more willing to talk with me. Only two people whom I called did not agree to speak with me, and I suspect it was because they really did not think they could help, and not because they did not value what I was doing. Most people when I called them were very humble, stating how much they wanted to help me, but that they did not know if they could, but that they would try.



Once I met with these people, I asked them if they could recommend someone else for me to interview. Almost everyone, including the two people who turned me down, were very helpful in this regard. They would suggest two, three, sometimes up to five individuals for me to call. It seems that once they understood what I was interested in, then they were able to think of others who could help. After the course of all my interviews, I began to hear the same names over and over again. In this regard, I feel that I exhausted the pool of possible informants in the community. I called everyone recommended to me, and I interviewed almost all of them. The few people I did not interview were either on vacation, not feeling well, or lived in another city too far away to justify traveling there. I even had a couple of people volunteer to be interviewed. In all cases, I had my participants sign the University of Nebraska letter of intent, or consent form.

Most of the time, I met people in their homes. (This includes a few people who lived at the Clifton Lutheran Sunset Home.) They welcomed me into their residences, which were almost always tidy and had plenty of seating. Some people even set out some materials for my visit. They had photo albums, old letters, family trees, books, and the like all waiting on their dining room table for me. (They all said they wanted to be prepared!) In many cases, I was served sweetened ice tea or lemonade, and a few women made Norwegian cookies for the occasion. One woman and I even shared a shot of *aquavit* (potato liquor) at the end of our interview! She had been talking about it, and when she found out I had never tried it, she brought out the bottle. Needless to say, we had a good laugh about that!

I also conducted a few interviews at other places. I spoke with eight people at their place of business, and one person at a family reunion. In all instances, I came prepared to spend as much time as that person was willing to spend. In general, I blocked out half a day for an interview, so on most days I had one scheduled for early morning and another for early afternoon, although I certainly deviated from this arrangement on occasion. I arrived with a pile of informed consent forms, my questions, a notepad for taking notes, two tape recorders, and a small purse full of micro-cassette tapes and backup batteries. (See Appendices M, N, O, and P for copies of my interview protocols and for sample pages from my interview transcripts, and Appendix Q for my consent statement.) I also made sure to bring along my 35mm camera and several roles of film, along with detailed maps of Clifton and all the surrounding county roads, and my cell phone. I must say that despite this precaution, however, I still got lost a number of times! By the end of the summer, however, I was pretty good at finding my way around, even out in the country.

Since Norse is such a rural community, I had to ask for detailed instructions on how to get to some houses, and I would call ahead to remind people to unlock their gates for me. For the most part, despite getting lost a few times, I was on time for all my interviews. I had one woman forget that we had scheduled an interview, but she went ahead and spoke with me anyway, since she was the one who forgot, and I had driven so far out to her house. Another individual was not home when I arrived for the interview. I knocked on the farmhouse door, and I even called the phone inside, but no one was there. I left a note on the door and left, letting this person decide if she wanted to contact me or not. I did not hear back from her, so I decided not to pursue it any further.

In all cases, I made every effort to reduce background noises and to get a quality sound recording. I had purchased a tape recorder with an attachable microphone, so I clipped this microphone onto a tall recipe holder and placed the whole contraption in front of the person talking. This recipe holder was a handmade craft item given to me by my grandmother many years ago. Looking like a giraffe, it was a good ice breaker when I showed up for my interviews. It came in especially handy when I interviewed some of my more elderly participants, because I could place the microphone right in front of them and get a good recording.

While conducting these interviews, I tried to be as professional yet as friendly and accessible as possible. Most of the time, despite the number of interviews I conducted, I experienced no difficulty remaining interested in the topic at hand. Even though I had been jokingly warned that Norwegians are traditionally stoic people and therefore not very talkative, I was pleasantly surprised at the wealth of information my interviewees were willing to share with me. People were very candid with me, and I with them. Many times our interviews became personal and somewhat emotional, both for my participants and for me. On a few occasions, I was asked to turn off the tape recorder so someone could pull themselves together. I was also asked to turn it off so a few people could say some things “off the record.” In both instances, I complied. A few people cried in the course of their interview, but I believe they were crying out of nostalgia, rather than out of pain. In the end, everyone told me how nice it was to remember old family members and friends and to reminisce about the old days. In this sense, my interviewees were talking to me to help me with my school project, but they were also doing it for themselves. I even had one elderly gentleman speak to me in Norwegian for the first 20

minutes of our interview, because somehow he was under the impression that I understood the language. The next day when I saw him again and thanked him for speaking with me, he thanked me for the opportunity to talk in Norwegian again, saying he had missed doing that so much.

Word about me and my school project spread like wildfire through the community. I had more than one individual tell me, “Oh, I heard you talked to so-and-so, and also to her sister.” My typical response was, “Well, I *have* talked to several people.” I did not reveal to everyone the people with whom I spoke, but people in the community did talk to each other about it, so I am sure some knew who was helping me.

Throughout the course of these interviews, I learned much about the connections within the community and how people are all related to each other. This knowledge served me well, because my interviewees did not have to fill in a lot of blanks for me, so to speak, when they were telling me their stories. Sometimes I surprised myself at the connections I was able to make with the information I had. Many of the people with whom I spoke said how pleased they were that I was able to make the links, but they also helped me when I did not know the connections.

These connections are very important to the people of Norse. My interviewees, in addition to being interested in my family lineage, were also curious about how we were related to each other. So, the first few minutes of our interviews were usually spent determining our relationship. Most of the time we were able to figure it out, but when we could not, I had a friend more knowledgeable about the lineage of the area calculate the relationship for me at a later time. Because I am a direct descendant of one of the original pioneer families to the area, I was related, even if quite distantly, to the vast

majority of my participants. Meeting second and third cousins, once removed, and so on, was not uncommon during my interviews. In a few cases, my interviewee and I were related through marriage. For example, I spoke with a gentleman who was a direct descendant from one of the other original pioneer families. In our case, his great uncle had married my great great great aunt, so we were cousins in some way. What amazes me is not only are the people in Norse interested in these connections, but in many cases they are able to calculate them!

The people with whom I spoke seemed very interested in my project, and they were eager to help out in any way that they could. They would ask me questions pertaining to what I was doing, and if I did not know the answer right away, I made sure to look it up once I got home and to call them with that information. I also had some interviewees call me at home several days after our interviews. They had remembered something that they had left out of the interview, and they wanted to be sure that I had that information. I also had several individuals state that they were interested in obtaining a copy of my dissertation once I was finished, and I also plan on following through with that promise as well. Many of my participants also gave me things at the time of our interviews. Some people gave me family trees, old maps, or other documents that they thought I could use. Many individuals said that those documents would probably be put to better use with me, rather than collecting dust in their homes.

In all, I conducted 45 total interviews with 37 different people. This latter number includes two women who joined in the interviews with their husbands. In order to ensure that all ethical considerations were followed, I had these two women also read and sign the informed consent form. Most of my interviewees came from the Clifton and Norse

area, and a handful lived in Waco. A few others came from Cranfills Gap, and one lived in Meridian. These 45 interviews totaled more than 3100 minutes, or approximately 53 hours. The shortest interview lasted 17 minutes, while the longest two ran for two hours, 20 minutes. Each interview averaged 70 minutes in length. I am quite confident to say that after all these interviews, I reached theoretical saturation. At the end, I was not really hearing any new information, so I concluded that I had done enough interviews.

I was fairly successful at interviewing both men and women. Initially I was concerned that my sample population would be predominately comprised of women, but the field ended up being more balanced. In all, I interviewed 15 men and 22 women (this number includes the two wives who joined in). The youngest person I interviewed was 50 years old, and the oldest was 95, with the average being 73 years old.

I had wanted to interview some people younger than 50, but I encountered some problems in doing so. Most people in that age bracket have not yet researched their families enough to be considered good sources. They may be knowledgeable about and interested in their heritage, but they did not know enough about it to share with me. In addition, many of the descendants of the Norwegian immigrants who fall into this age bracket do not live in the central Texas area anymore, and the ones that do were very busy with their children and their careers. As a result, scheduling was a problem.

For some of my more elderly interviewees, I shortened the interview protocol. In these cases, I had to take into consideration the individual's health, her/his hearing, and how s/he was feeling that day. In addition, for some of the people living in the Sunset Home, scheduling was a consideration. While the Home has flexible visiting hours, I had

to be aware of when the residents ate their meals, took their naps, or were administered their medications. Many of my interviewees living at the Home also had roommates, so I had to take them into consideration as well. For these interviews, I mainly focused on their memories about their families, the community, and their church. In spite of these efforts, however, these interviews still ran anywhere from 30 to 40 minutes, which under the circumstances, I was quite satisfied with.

Of the 37 people with whom I spoke, 30 claimed a Norwegian heritage. For the purposes of my study, I determined that a person had to have a least one Norwegian grandparent to be considered “Norwegian.” Thus, this person would at least be 25% Norwegian themselves. Of the 30 Norwegians whom I interviewed, 16 were 100% Norwegian, 12 were between 50 and 100%, and two were between 25 and 50%. Despite their low numbers, however, these two individuals identified strongly with their Norwegian side, and that is why I included them in this study. Most of the individuals who were less than 100% Norwegian and who had other ethnicities in their families came from German stock. The seven non-Norwegians whom I interviewed came from different European backgrounds.

I also attempted to interview people from different generations. Of my 30 Norwegian interviewees, two were second generation, 11 were third generation, 11 were fourth generation, and six were fifth generation. I felt that this was a good distribution across the different generations, and that I got a fairly accurate picture of the ethnic background of the area as experienced by different individuals.

I should include one final note about my interviewees. Since conducting my interviews, I have learned that eight of the people with whom I spoke have died. Even

though I only knew one individual before my research project started, I was deeply affected by all of their passing. These individuals were kind enough to meet with me and to share their personal stories, and for that I will always be grateful. It is my hope that I have accurately represented their thoughts and words here, and that this dissertation can serve as a testament to their love of their heritage and their community.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

In conducting these interviews, I had to keep certain ethical considerations in mind. My first ethical consideration was to obtain informed consent from the participants. This consent implies that the individual understood her or his rights as an informant, and that s/he did not participate under situations of duress. The subject must have been a willing participant, and s/he must have been at least 19 years of age (Miller & Crabtree, 2004).

The second ethical consideration involved the notion of confidentiality. It was my job to assure participants that their names (or other personally revealing information) would not be divulged in the final treatment of my dissertation. If I had wished to identify a particular person, I would have needed to get her/his permission to do so. In addition, only I had access to research records such as audio-tapes, typed transcripts, and signed consent forms. These items were and are stored in my home under lock and key. The transcripts have been kept in a separate location to further protect participants' identity. While interviewing people, I did not reference what others have said in such a manner that they could be identified (Guba & Lincoln, 2004; Miller & Crabtree, 2004; Patton, 2002).



### ***Data Analysis Procedures***

The objective of phenomenological data analysis is to uncover the meanings embedded within narratives. In this sense, I used the words of my interviewees, or the agentive social actors, to help construct their experience of a particular phenomenon, ethnicity. Analysis and interpretation were ongoing processes, and I as the researcher was an integral part of the construction.

Once I conducted the interviews, I transcribed, analyzed, coded, and interpreted their narratives. This process began with “bracketing,” or me setting aside my preconceived notions about the topic being studied. During this phase of analysis, I reflected upon my own personal experiences with ethnicity and its connection to communication. Since I had some experience with this topic, it was important that I understand how these feelings may have affected my ability to accurately interpret these narratives. After recognizing my biases, I temporarily set them aside so that I did not unintentionally limit analysis of the data.

The next stage of data analysis involved description. During this phase of analysis, I analyzed the raw data, the interview transcripts, looking for key words and phrases. Then I read other transcripts, doing the same. All told, I had read over 1300 pages of typed interview transcripts. During this process, I highlighted all key phrases. Then, using a pair of scissors, I cut the individual phrases out of the transcripts and glued each separate thought onto a 5x8” notecard. In this way I created over 1600 notecards full of data.

Once all transcripts were read, I compared them to each other, repeating all of these steps as necessary. During this process, I looked for patterns in the data. I then

grouped these patterns into larger categories or themes. This grouping allowed me to see where my own experiences with the phenomenon fit in, and it started to develop the structure of the phenomenon. After reading the 1600 notecards, I categorized them into 45 different topics or themes.

Once themes were revealed in the data, I conducted imaginative free variation, or thought experiments, with the data. In this sense, I was able to link the findings back to the theory driving the research, or I could compare them to other groups. By using direct quotes and metaphors pulled directly from the data, I was able to reveal the essence of the phenomenon being studied.

### ***Verification Procedures***

To increase the validity of my research findings, I needed to utilize different verification procedures. According to Maggs-Rapport (2000), a combination of verification procedures is the best way to ensure that data are seen as trustworthy.

One way to increase the validity of my findings was to rigorously adhere to the methodological principles of phenomenological research. My abilities and skills as a researcher determined the effectiveness of imaginative free variation, since I was involved in the co-construction of realities for the participants. Any limitations on my part methodologically could affect the range of possibilities of understanding that particular phenomenon (Hackley, 2003; Maggs-Rapport, 2001; Thomas, 2003). During the course of this research project, I made every attempt to follow the principles of phenomenological research and to let the agentive social actors' words and thoughts guide the project.

Another way to determine the validity of my representation was to subject my analysis to others. By doing this, I could see if my interpretations of the data matched the participants' descriptions of social phenomena as they saw them. The themes presented were written from the social actors' point of view, and so they were therefore subject to critical evaluation by an outside, interpretive group (Goulding, 1999). Maggs-Rapport (2001) suggests using the subjects themselves as judges of the authenticity of the data. Since the analysis was written from their viewpoint, they were able to confirm or deny the analysis' authenticity (see also Thomas, 2003).

In several instances, I conducted member checks of my data by asking my interviewees to review what I had written. In some cases I mailed the information, while in others I sent out e-mails. In a few instances, I managed to clear up some discrepancies or confusing areas over the phone. In any case, my interviewees were more than willing to help clarify my writings and help me get my analysis as accurate as possible.

**CHAPTER FIVE****“A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH:”****ETHNIC IDENTITY IN NORSE, TEXAS****Introduction**

Various ethnic groups across America define themselves by the beliefs they hold and through the cultural activities in which they participate. Although several generations removed from their immigrant ancestors, these groups celebrate a symbolic ethnicity, one which expresses their unique cultural identity situated within the larger American framework (Song, 2003; Steinberg, 2001). One way to understand how an ethnic group sees itself is to investigate the group's views about the evolution, adaptation, and development of its own ethnic identity.

Two goals of this project were to describe how the people of Norse, Texas experience their ethnicity (RQ1), and to explain the meanings they attribute to the cultural practices that reflect that ethnicity (RQ4). In Chapter One I reviewed the literature to better understand the link between identity and communication. In that chapter, I also looked at the assimilation processes faced by immigrants to this country, focusing on the effects experienced by the different generations of immigrants. My research findings corresponded to that research. Although there was some overlap in the transitions between generations, the general progression of “Americanization” and the subsequent rediscovery of ethnicity followed the patterns outlined in the current literature. In this chapter, I discuss this progression of ethnic identity in Norse, Texas. In

addition, I present the people's ethnicity as they experience it and the meanings they attribute to it.

The quotes used here and in subsequent sections of this dissertation come directly from the people whom I interviewed. The utmost care was taken to represent their thoughts and ideas in their own words, even when Norwegian was being used. In general, I removed my questions and interjections, along with excessive and repetitive conversation fillers, such as "um," "you know," and the like. Some quotes are the combination of statements from different parts of an interview. In these instances, I would use each quote in its entirety, and then follow it with another whole quote, as long as they seemed to compliment each other and to complete each other's thought. I never interchanged sentences or ideas from different parts of an interview to manipulate what was said. All quotes printed here are the exact words and sentences of the interviewees. I only removed or edited information which would identify the person behind the quote. Since I conducted so many interviews, I chose quotes that would serve as a representative sample for the group as a whole.

### **First Generation Immigrant Identity:**

#### **Strangers in a Strange Land**

The first generation of Norwegian immigrants to arrive in central Texas left Norway with mixed feelings. Although these people had known nothing else, they were willing to risk everything to come to a new, strange land to make a better life for themselves and their families. They desired to become Americans, and thus they were eager to start new lives in a new place. On the other hand, they were nostalgic for the mother country, so they continued many of the old world customs that they had practiced

in Norway. These old world traditions carried their Norwegian culture across the Atlantic, and defined these new arrivals in Texas as uniquely Norwegian.

The first Norwegians arrived in Bosque County in 1854, but more people continued to immigrate to the area, most notably in 1868, when the population of Norse nearly doubled due to the influx of new immigrants. For several years beyond that, up until the late 1800s or early 1900s, Norwegians were still arriving, albeit in smaller numbers. For this reason, the definition of “generation,” as it is used in this dissertation to describe the evolution of immigrant ethnic identity, must be viewed as a fluid one, one whose edges are blurred somewhat. It might be more constructive to think of a generation in terms of a phase, or a period of time, rather than as the actual lifetime of a particular group of people. So when I discuss the “first generation immigrant identity,” I am referring more to a period of time, rather than to specific individuals. Based on when the immigrants began arriving, there could be multiple generations within one phase of development.

In addition, many of these families had numerous children spread out over several years. It was not uncommon even 50 years ago for families to be large. Also, spouses would die, leaving their surviving husband or wife to remarry and have more children. Consequently, there could be a wide age gap among members even within the same family. Because of these reasons, for example, I was able to interview a third generation woman, a fourth generation woman, and a fifth generation woman all within three years apart in age. For future reference, whenever I use the term “generation” directly with a person, I am referring to their individual lineage and to their relationship to the first people to come over. That is why it is possible to have third, fourth, and fifth generation

individuals all within the larger framework of “first generation immigrant identity,” for example.

For the purposes of this discussion, the first generation period roughly corresponds to the period of time between the arrival of the Norwegian immigrants up to the 1920s, 1930s, and even up until World War II in the 1940s.

### ***Ethnic Enclaves***

When the Norwegians arrived in Bosque County in 1854, they established the community of Norse. Other European immigrants, most notably Germans, had also settled in the area, but in small numbers as well. Because of the rural nature of the county, the transportation available at the time, and the language barrier, these groups, at least initially, did not interact frequently. As a result, small ethnic enclaves developed. People lived, worked, worshipped, and went to school in their own little communities.

Many people whom I interviewed discussed the ethnic divisions in the Norse settlement and the surrounding areas as experienced by their grandparents, great grandparents, and so on. One third generation gentleman in his early 80s explained how insular these ethnic settlements were:

Well, they [were] clannish. Back in those days, they were very clannish, and they stuck to their own church, their own community affairs, and things like that. And their association with one another was really sort of close, and it was all right. (1, 2004, p. 16)

Even though this man acknowledged the “clannish” nature of the early settlers to the area, he seemed to think that it was understandable given the circumstances under which

they initially came to Texas. A third generation woman in her mid-80s explained how people living in these isolated groups became accustomed to them:

Well, they never thought about any other [ethnicity], you know – when you live around Norwegians you just accept it! You don't think about anything else, anybody else. They were more in groups, you know, the German settlements and the Norwegian settlements and different areas. And they kind of more or less walked together [with their own groups], you know. (8, 2004, p. 9)

The early settlers to the area settled in small groups and gravitated towards like-minded people. Interactions with people from other groups were generally not done, and altogether not very desirable for the early immigrants (regardless of their ethnicity). The biggest concern for the Norwegians in the 1850s and beyond were the Germans, who settled on the other side of the Bosque River.

A third generation man in his early 70s further explained the divisions in the pioneer settlement by making a distinction between the different ethnic groups in the area. “Uh, I hate to say this, they were kind of, I don't want to use the word ‘cliquish,’ but I mean, Norwegians associated with the Norwegians, and the Germans with the Germans, and never the twain shall meet” (16, 2004, pp. 11-12). This sentiment was echoed in the response of another gentleman, a fifth generation Norwegian in his mid-70s descended from one of the original pioneer couples to the area:

I know when I was growing up, my mother used to think – and I think this was a common way of thinking back then – there were Norwegians, there were Germans, and then there were Americans. In this area [southwestern Bosque County], the Norwegians lived on the west side of the river, the Germans lived



over on the east side of the Bosque River, and then those that didn't claim to be of Norwegian or German ancestry were called "Americans." (27, 2004, pp. 7-8)

This division among the ethnic groups created a certain way of thinking among the early immigrants to Bosque County. People began to not only think of themselves as a particular group, but rather as a particular group which was situated *apart* from someone else. Cultural lines were drawn, and people operated within their own little groups. Several interviewees mentioned this phenomenon in their discussions with me. One third generation woman in her early 70s simply stated, "We had sort of a dividing line – we called it [an] imaginary line, and the Norwegians lived on one side of it, and the Germans lived on the other side" (31, 2004, p. 1).

When asked about the divisions in the community, all of my interviewees speculated that language differences were initially the cause. One woman, the wife of a fourth generation man in his late 80s, said, "The Norwegians used to – so many of them came – so they couldn't speak [English] for a long time and would talk in Norwegian, and so they didn't really mix with other people that much" (13, 2002, p. 16). Her husband continued her thought:

Well, I don't know so much about this generation, but I think the first generations – the first or the second or third generations – they were more, I guess, sort of independent and self – at first, I think they were sort of clannish, you know, didn't mix well, until, I guess, maybe the second generation, which is, I guess, a natural thing. They felt more at home with their own people. Of course, after they – well, they had to learn to – in order to trade with the – like, many of the

businesses were owned by, you know, what we call Americans, I guess, so

they had to learn to [speak English]. (12, 2004, pp. 16-17)

Since most, if not all, of the early Norwegian immigrants did not speak any other language other than Norwegian, it is a safe to assume that language was, indeed, the primary barrier for the pioneers to communicate and interact with the other ethnic settlers of the area.

However, even though language differences were named as the primary reason for the social divisions within the settlement, some people in the community continued to divide the ethnic groups even after English was adopted. A fourth generation woman in her late 70s told this story about how ethnic divisions were still being communicated in her early childhood:

There was one person in the Norse community who had been to a function. And see, in the early days, they talked about Norwegians and Swedes and Germans, and the others they lumped into a category called "American." OK. This was probably in the early [19]40s or late [19]30s. And they'd gone to this function and my good friend heard her daddy ask her mother when they got home, "Who was that man there that looked like an American?"! And, of course, they were all Americans, but he had grown up using these categories. (7, 2004, pp. 10-11)

Even though this conversation occurred a long time after English had been adopted by the Norwegians in the community, the father in the story was still referring to another man as an "American." Of course, the father had learned these terms as a child from his parents, but as an adult he himself had not abandoned these categories.

The third generation woman in her mid-80s, mentioned above, even used this terminology when referring to herself. “When I was growing up, you know, they were all Norwegian and Americans when I was around” (8, 2004, p. 3). It seems, based upon the responses of some of my interviewees, that people in the Norse community tended to divide themselves ethnically, even if only in their minds, until well into the twentieth century.

### *Endogamous Marriages*

The “clannish” nature of the first generation of Norwegians to Bosque County was also evident in their choice of marriage partners. This was due, mostly, to a common spoken language (Norwegian) and religion (Lutheranism), but also to the fact that the original pioneer families knew each other in Norway before they emigrated to Texas. Since no one else in central Texas spoke Norwegian, it only made sense for the children of those first immigrants to marry each other. One fourth generation woman in her early 50s explained the situation:

That whole community in Bosque County, they all kind of knew each other over in Norway. Because if you ever look at the Norway map, then you see all the same family farms, the same names that you see in Bosque County. And because they were clannish and they hung out with each other, they all married each other, too. So if you look very hard at any one family, they’re probably related in some kind of way to another one. (36, 2004, pp. 2-3)

Because the first generation immigrants’ children married each other, over time, all the original families became inter-related and connected to each other. The influx of new Norwegian immigrants eventually added to the marriage pool, but because Norse was a

small community with many large families, eventually almost everyone was somehow connected to everyone else, either through blood (however distant) or through marriage.

A third generation man in his early 80s believed that this type of relationship is what allowed the first generation immigrants to survive in their new world:

Well, first of all, if there was any real identity factor that instilled [in] them to persevere where the rest of [the other ethnic immigrants] failed, [it] was the unity of relationships in the families and the closeness of the families. Of the 17 pioneers that we have a [memorial] marker out here at Norse now, these people were closely-knit people. They associated with one another, and they were all very religious. And I would say that, most of all, the ethnicity and the closeness and the love that they had for each other was probably the greatest contributing factor to [their success]. (1, 2004, p. 30)

A third generation woman in her early 60s added:

I think a lot of [their success] was because they were related. You know, all those 17 that came originally were somehow kin – somehow. And family is a pretty strong unit, and I think they kind of watched out for each other. (9, 2004, p. 24)

For these early Norwegian immigrants, marriage within the group was a necessity, but it also became a survival tool. By connecting all the families together through marriage, the community became one large family that looked after its own.

Over time, even as more people in the Norwegian community began to speak English and began to interact with the other ethnic and religious groups, particularly the German Lutherans, some individuals still clung to the notion of marrying within the ethnic group. A fourth generation woman in her late 70s explained:

[They wanted to] keep the blood pure. And the Norwegians, you see, had an identity. They were God fearing, family loving, highly moralised working people, and they wanted their children to marry like people. And they weren't so sure they'd run into [those qualities] in another race. So yeah, it was definitely important. In the early years of, well, let's say in the early 1900s up to about the 20s and 30s, they just still pretty much intermarried – Norwegian marriage. But even, what I'm saying, even into the 1900s, the 20s and the 30s, it was still considered intermarriage if a German married a Norwegian and vice versa, or quote, an "American." Now, some were beginning to do that. And Lutheran, too. I mean they didn't want them to marry Baptists, or Presbyterians. They wanted [their children] to marry a Norwegian Lutheran. In the early 1900s and in the late 1800s. (7, 2002, pp. 24-25)

As long as the early immigrants thought of themselves as different and separate, endogamous marriages, or marriages within the group, remained the norm. Once the ethnic barriers began to dissolve, however, the boundaries around the ethnic enclaves and the corresponding requirement to marry within one's group began to fade as well.

### *Norwegian Church Services*

One of the most important things to the early pioneers to the area was the establishment of Norwegian Lutheran churches. From the beginning, the services were held in Norwegian, and this continued regularly up until 1922 at St. Olaf's Lutheran Church (Cantwell, 1986; Johansen, 1970; Pierson, O. E., 1947/1979) and until 1941 at Our Savior's Lutheran Church ("Clifton Named," 1997; Johansen, 1970; "Norwegian

Heritage,” 2000; OSLC, n.d.b; Pierson, O. E., 1947/1979). After these dates, the Norwegian was slowly phased out, and English more and more became the norm.

Many of my older interviewees remembered attending church when the services were spoken in Norwegian. One third generation man in his early 80s reminisced:

I remember sitting in church, for example, at St. Olaf the Rock Church, with my father on [the] right side and my mother on the left [side] pews. The women were on the left, the men on the right. And we had a Norwegian service. And I couldn't understand a word of it! So, I'd go through the hymnal and try to find the oldest hymn in the book. But I [didn't] want to make a bit of noise!

The thing I remember very well is that all the men had blue, royal blue serge suits. And, I mean, they were thick wool. And they all wore a shirt and a tie and a blue serge suit to church on Sunday. In the middle of the summer. And they would sweat and sweat and sweat. I know my daddy sweated through his belt practically every Sunday, but they never took that coat off. This was a house of God, and they were looking as good as they possibly could. Dressed to the nines to be in the house of the Lord. The women wore hats. And they were pretty. And they were dressed up. Everybody was. I had to shine my shoes. I had one pair of shoes that I had to shine for Sunday. (33, 2002, pp. 3, 38)

Although this gentleman did not know why the men and women sat on different sides of the church, a third generation woman in her early 60s explained what someone had told her about the seating arrangements:

But the one thing that I remember some people talking about was how the men and women used to march in church instead of just going and sitting down when

they got there. Like the men would march on – the men were on one side, and the women were on the other. And I never did understand why that was. But recently, I've been told that the women were on their own side because they had to change the babies and feed them before they went into church. And then if they had to do something with the children, like feed them, they could feed them in church, and there wouldn't be a stranger sitting right beside them – not the husband sitting there on the other side of them. They went into the church, and then men sat on one side, and the women sat on the other. (9, 2004, pp. 46-47)

The seating arrangements, then, were created to accommodate the care and feeding of small children. The very religious Norwegians would have considered it inappropriate for a woman to breast-feed a baby in church if there were the chance that a man other than her husband was sitting nearby. To solve the problem, the men sat on one side, and the women on the other. In fact, the man who remembered shining his shoes for church (see above quote) remembered the significance of moving over to sit on the side with the older boys and men. He said it was a big day for him, and that he remembered feeling like such a big boy.

Other interviewees related their memories about Norwegian church services. At the time these individuals were hearing the Norwegian, it was, of course, being phased out, and English was becoming more common. For them, the Norwegian was being used to satisfy the older members of the church. A fourth generation man in his early 80s remembered:

Well, I think the church, they, the Rock Church, they preached Norwegian then.

And then sometimes they would have Norwegian services even whenever I was

young, you know, just to kind of satisfy the Norwegians – the older ones. And once in a while they would have services down at the Rock Church. That's whenever they would, you know, preach Norwegian. It was something that the old folks really did like to hear. (11, 2004, pp. 6-7)

A third generation man in his early 70s had similar memories:

Well, they had Norwegian services, church services in Norwegian for many years. I think I was baptized in the Norwegian language when I was born in [the early 1930s]. And they had church services, I believe, once a month in Norwegian at the Rock Church. They had their Norwegian church services, and I think that [was] an accommodation to the immigrants. Many of the people came over here, and they retained that as their only language – they didn't speak anything but Norwegian. (37, 2004, p. 12)

A fourth generation woman in her late 70s also talked about Norwegian being preached in the church, and about her parents deciding whether to get confirmed in Norwegian or in English:

Well, when my parents were young, though they were third generation, they did on occasion have Norwegian services for the old-timers at the church. But – and they both knew Norwegian. But Daddy had a terrific memory and even when he was old, he could sing some of those Norwegian hymns by heart. [Mother] was confirmed in Norwegian, but she wanted an English hymnal. Daddy was confirmed in English, but he wanted a Norwegian hymnal, to tie in with the past. But see, that's when it was changing, you know, in that decade before the [19]20s. (7, 2004, p. 7; 7, 2002, pp. 33-34)



All three individuals remembered the Norwegian church services, but they felt like it was something that was done for the “old folks,” the “immigrants,” or the “old-timers.” Of course, these “old folks,” “immigrants,” and “old-timers” were the parents, grandparents, and great grandparents of these individuals, or, in other words, the first couple of generations to settle in Bosque County. When these three interviewees were children, English was already taking over as the primary language in the community, so these Norwegian church services did not mean anything to them when they were young. But for the first group of Norwegians to Bosque County, that was all they knew.

#### *After-Church Family Suppers*

Several interviewees mentioned that sometimes after church there would be a church supper and fellowship. On the days when that was not the case, family or friends would invite them over to eat at their house. While these suppers with family and friends were not necessarily Norwegian in origin, enough people mentioned them to me that I felt it was important to include a discussion here. These suppers served to solidify the bonds of family, church, and community in Norse, and since all three of those institutions *were* initially Norwegian, these suppers, by default, were reinforcing the Norwegian ethnic identity of the community.

It is also important to consider the context in which these suppers were held. In a rural community where family farms were miles apart, when transportation was not reliable, and there was always work to be done, people looked forward to Sundays because they could worship, rest, visit with others, and the kids could play with their friends. I had many people tell me that they could easily go an entire week and not see anyone outside their immediate family. People on the farm worked from sunup to sunset;

there was no free time, and if there were, they would be too tired to take advantage of it. People back then *did* look upon Sunday as a day of rest, and everyone looked forward to it. A third generation man in his early 80s, the one mentioned above, recalled those visits from his childhood:

Everybody visited, but everybody was invited to somebody's house for dinner. And they might have 10 to 20 people over there for dinner. And then the next week we would go to somebody else's house. And then the next week it might be our house to have them over for dinner. But Sunday was a big family gathering for dinner. And it was bountiful. Wow! The lady of the house loaded down the table [with food]. We'd have about three or four kinds of meat, and about 12 pounds of vegetables, about four different kinds of pies and cakes. Oh, man! The table was almost broken in two, it was so heavily laden. I mean, it's the home cooking! Now these women could cook. On a wood [-burning] stove. From scratch. (33, 2002, p. 39)

This gentleman's comments were similar to what I heard from other people regarding the after-church suppers at someone's house. Everyone commented on the number of people that were there, how much food was prepared (this was not a pot-luck!), and how the lady of the house managed to pull that off from scratch, on a wood-burning stove, with no electricity. Despite Sunday being a day of rest, a lot of work went into preparing those suppers.

The fellowship, however, was the main point of these get-togethers. This was the time for the extended family to gather and catch up on all the news, and for all the little

kids to have someone to play with. One fourth generation man in his late 80s commented:

Well, of course – I guess the most things that I remember was, like, on Sundays families would get together, sort of like a reunion, so to speak. All the brothers or the sisters and their families would invite them home from church on Sunday, you know. And a lot of times, there would be 15 – anywhere from 15 to 30 or more people, and so it was just like a family reunion, sort of.

And, you know, when you're a kid, it seems like when you're at home all week and nobody around except your own family, and you was working all the time, when you got out to meet somebody else, it was an occasion. You met all of your cousins and everything. And that was just something there that kind of grew on you. You felt like everybody was – what a family is like.

Well, when I was a small kid, when we didn't even have a car, we went to see more people – visited more – than today. We knew everybody in the community, knew all their kids and their birthdays and so forth. And now you don't know your next-door neighbor hardly. But you don't see that anymore. Nobody invites you home for lunch anymore. (12, 2004, pp. 49, 26; 12, 2002, p. 26)

Based on the importance of these after-church suppers, one can see why people looked forward to Sundays. The loneliness of rural life, combined with the hard work of farming, made people work harder to establish the bonds of family, despite the challenges of transportation or of cooking such a large meal without modern conveniences. People were genuinely grateful to see other family members or friends, and they looked forward

to a true day of rest. The early Norwegian settlers to Bosque County counted their blessings every Sunday by spending the day at church and with family and friends.

### *Norwegian Summer School*

The Norwegian immigrants to Bosque County were intent on creating a better life for their children. As a result, they were interested in their offspring learning English, so English was taught in the public schools almost from the very beginning. In addition, when Clifton College was founded, it offered instruction in English. However, in an effort to promote the Norwegian language and their Lutheran beliefs, a Norwegian summer school was created to instruct the kids through the eighth grade (Johansen, 1970).

This summer school was basically a parochial school, what would today be called Confirmation Class or Vacation Bible School. The Norwegian summer school met for four to eight weeks, Mondays through Fridays, from 9:00 in the morning until 4:00 in the afternoon at the local country schoolhouse. (School was conducted between grain harvest [June] and cotton harvest [late September]. As a result, harvest time would sometimes affect the school schedule.) Classes were conducted in Norwegian, although sometimes English was used, usually by request. Students studied Luther's *Small Catechism* (1968), hymns, and Norwegian reading and writing. Sometime during the 1930s, the summer school was discontinued (Wallace, 1980). It is also worth mentioning that Clifton College offered Norwegian as an elective language along with German and Latin (Brown, D. A., 1974).

Many of my older interviewees mentioned attending the Norwegian summer school. One third generation woman in her mid-80s remembered:

When I first started going to Bible school, or summer school, in the summertime, well, they were teaching Norwegian. But I didn't learn very much of it. I think [they were] teaching the Norwegian, and [we all] start[ed] talking English. Well, they tried to [teach us Norwegian] when we went to summer school, but I didn't learn to speak it – just a very few words that I could learn to speak. (8, 2004, p. 1)

This woman and her classmates were in one of the last groups to attend the Norwegian summer school. The instructors were trying to teach the children Norwegian, but the kids had already learned English at home and in regular school, and therefore, they didn't feel the need or have the desire to learn the language of their ancestors.

A fourth generation woman in her late 70s related a similar story based on the experience her mother had in the Norwegian summer school:

Mother even taught Vacation Bible School, she taught some Norwegian. But they didn't dwell on the past. They had Norwegian instruction in the vacation church school, but not in the public school. And the vacation church school, they tried to hold onto their heritage by teaching the children Norwegian. But then, since it wasn't used in the public school, and it wasn't used at home, you know, it's hard to hold onto it. (7, 2004, p. 7)

With the adaptation of English, both in the schools and in the homes, the Norwegian summer school fell by the wayside. Only the oldest of my interviewees attended the summer school; the rest remember hearing about their parents' and grandparents' experiences with it. But those were the first generations to emigrate to Texas, and for them, it served a purpose. The Norwegian parochial school taught the new immigrants'

children fundamental Norwegian, along with religious instruction. It also reinforced their belief in education and living a life of continual learning.

### *Norwegian Christmas Traditions*

The first generation of Norwegian immigrants to central Texas also carried on with traditional Norwegian Christmas celebrations. While no one mentioned celebrating these particular traditions today (at least, not to the extent that they did in the past), a few people remembered their families celebrating them when they were children. Based on how long these three traditions lasted in the community, I feel safe in assuming that they were once common among most or all Norwegians in Norse, and that they have just fallen victim to time. Now, they only remain in people's memories. These three Norwegian Christmas traditions are *lillejulaften*, *julekveld*, and *jul*; *julenek*; and *julebukking*. They are discussed in the following section.

#### *Lillejulaften, Julekveld, and Jul*

While most contemporary Americans celebrate Christmas on Christmas day, Norwegians, and the first generation of Norwegian immigrants to Bosque County, celebrated Christmas on December 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>. Not many activities, if any, occurred on December 25<sup>th</sup>, but the significance of the day was acknowledged. These days are, respectively, *lillejulaften* (Little Christmas Eve), *julekveld* (Christmas Eve), and *jul* (Christmas). A fourth generation woman in her early 50s remembered celebrating Christmas during these three days as a young girl:

In fact, [my family] would celebrate what they called "Little Yule [Eve]." I think that's what they called it. Or "Little Christmas [Eve]" was December 23<sup>rd</sup>. So, on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, even Christmas was starting. And then Christmas Eve everything

happened. We opened gifts, we had the meal, everything. Christmas day was kind of dead. You just stayed home and relaxed with your family. There wasn't anything going on that day. And that's so – that would be the very opposite of other Americans, because they did everything on Christmas day. You know, like other kids got up on Christmas day and opened their presents and stuff. But in a Norwegian household, it took place on Christmas Eve, or even on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, "Little Christmas [Eve]." (36, 2004, p. 42)

For this woman and her family, Christmas celebrations did start on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, or Little Christmas Eve, and lasted through the next day, the 24<sup>th</sup>. A fifth generation man in his mid-70s shared his memories of celebrating on Christmas Eve:

I guess originally, we celebrated Christmas on Christmas Eve most of the time. That was the big supper. That's when all the family got together and exchanged gifts. That's when the gifts were given, and the children hung up their stockings for Santa Claus to come during the night of Christmas Eve. And then on Christmas morning, the thrill of the children was waking up to find their stockings filled with gifts and fruit and so forth.

[We] enjoyed getting together. It was common practice back in my early days when I lived on the farm and was – and these great uncles and aunts were still living – at Christmastime we would get together for about two weeks, you know, for what we call "supper," what we refer to now as "dinner." And some of them served *lutefisk*, which is kind of an old, I guess, Norwegian staple. But we got together and just enjoyed family fellowship.

That's not the way we do it anymore. Now, our schedule generally is that we go to the Rock Church service on Christmas Eve and go home and have our supper and open one gift on Christmas Eve, and then most of the gift giving celebration, then, is on Christmas day. (27, 2004, pp. 30, 16, 30)

Although this gentleman grew up celebrating Christmas on Christmas Eve, he and his family no longer carry on that tradition, except for opening one gift the night before. He also mentioned visiting family and eating large meals, which usually included *lutefisk*, for a two week period during the Christmas season. This sentiment was mentioned by a few people in the interviews, so like the after-church family suppers, large gatherings were held during the Christmas season to allow families and friends to spend more time together.

A third generation man in his early 70s also talked about seasonal suppers and the old tradition of celebrating the twelve days of Christmas, which begin on Christmas day and last until January 5<sup>th</sup>, the day before Epiphany:

[My family] did have, like, twelve days of Christmas, they would go visiting people, you know, for dinner. Go to someone's house for dinner or supper. And uh, we would, well, we might have *lutefisk*. And then, as far as Norwegian traditions – we sang [singing], *Jeg er så glad hver julekveld, for da ble Jesus født; da lyste stjernen som en sol, og engler sang så søtt*. “I am so glad each Christmas Eve, the night of Jesus' birth – ” (37, 2004, pp. 19-20)

This gentleman's story was unique in that he could sing the entire hymn, or at least its first verse, in Norwegian. This is a traditional Norwegian Christmas hymn or carol and is sung in Norway even today (Knudsen & Wexelsen, 1978).



*Julenek*

The old Norwegian tradition of the *julenek* (sheaf of oats) originated in the family's preparing the home for Christmas. On the family farm, all the animals to be eaten in the following year were slaughtered and preserved before Christmas, and candles and soap were made from the animals' fat. Nothing was to be wasted. Breads and pastries were baked, beer was brewed, the house was cleaned, and enough firewood was brought in to last the entire holiday. Finally, the *julenek* was placed outside for the birds. It was believed that if the birds sang and chirped loudly, then the following year would be a good one. In addition to feeding the birds, the family would give their farm animals a little extra hay and feed (Mellbye, 1996).

A fourth generation woman in her early 50s, the one mentioned above, told me about the Christmas traditions she shared with her grandfather with regards to the farm animals:

Like at Christmas, my grandfather and I would always go out and put up the *[jule]nek*. You would take a bundle of oats, and you would put it on a - we had a long stick. We did. And we would tie it on the top of it. And then we would take the stick and put it up, so it would be up high. And for Christmas – before Christmas Eve, you would do that.

And then all the animals got extra food on Christmas Eve, too. Well, that's clearly Norwegian. I mean, what matter does it make to an animal if they get more or less food on a certain day or not? But that was a real ritual for me, is that [it] would come time, and Grandpa and I would do the '*nek*' every year for the birds. Well, you know, really and truly, birds have plenty to eat. That was just a

real Norwegian thing. Because it was getting to be Christmas, so you had to put up the '*nek*. But it definitely had to be up for Christmas Eve. And you would – I know you would give the animals extra food, too, around Christmas. (36, 2004, pp. 40-41)

Putting out a sheaf of oats for the birds and giving farm animals extra food are definitely old world Norwegian customs that had been continued in Norse, Texas well into the middle of the twentieth century, at least by one family. When telling this story, this woman enjoyed the fond memories of her grandfather and of the rituals they had performed together at Christmastime.

### *Julebukking*

Several of my older interviewees mentioned an old-fashioned Norwegian Christmas tradition called *julebukking*, a term derived from the words *bukk* (billy-goat) and *julebukk* (Christmas billy-goat, a.k.a. Christmas fool). In Norway, *julebukking* traditionally began on the second day of Christmas, December 26<sup>th</sup>. Groups of children and adults, dressed in costumes, would travel from farm to farm. Traditionally, they would be led by a billy-goat, hence the term *bukk* being attached to the festivity. Much like our contemporary American Halloween traditions, *julebukking* involved wearing costumes and “scaring” up some treats during the winter holiday season between Christmas and New Year’s (Mellbye, 1996; Pierson, O. E., 1947/1979).

A third generation man in his early 70s, mentioned above, explained how his parents carried on this Norwegian tradition when they were young:

And they talked about having Christmas things, my parents did as young people, and they call it *julebukking*. They’d go from home to home, you know, and just

come up in the middle of the night and maybe disguise themselves and just expect a treat from the home owner. They were usually well received, but I think sometimes they weren't so well received! They might play a prank on someone. (37, 2004, p. 20)

A fourth generation woman in her late 70s told a similar story about the "old-timers" participating in the ritual:

Old-timers, they had their *julebukking*, which means they'd dress up in costumes and go to each other's homes at Christmas and knock on the door and make a lot of noise. And people were supposed to identify who they were. So, they put a lot of emphasis on costuming. And then they'd sit around and have refreshments. And then they'd go to the next house, so by the time the night was over they'd had a lot of refreshments. (7, 2004, p. 13)

While these two individuals did not participate in *julebukking* themselves, I did get the opportunity to speak to a woman who had as a young girl. Now in her early 80s, this fourth generation woman reminisced about how much fun it was:

The young people – we would get together, and we'd dress up with masks and try to disguise ourselves, and we would go around singing Christmas carols. And the people, most of the time, would invite us in – we would do this between Christmas and New Year – and they would invite us in and give us refreshments and try to guess who we were. And that was awful fun. They don't do that anymore. The pastor always went [with] us when I was going. And uh, it was usually cold, but you bundled up, so. Because you didn't make costumes – you just used old clothes, you know. Some of the girls dressed like boys and to stay

warmer, you know. And back then [girls] didn't wear slacks like you do now.

(35, 2004, p. 12)

This woman was probably one of the last people to participate in *julebukking* in the Norse community. She remembered it as an integral part of her Christmas celebrations and seemed almost sad that it was no longer continuing today.

As with the other Norwegian customs mentioned in this chapter, by the 1930s or 1940s, these Christmas traditions had all but died out. Only a few people talked about these old world traditions, but the fact that the customs lasted as long as they did tells me that they were once popular and common in the Norwegian community. The people who described them to me did so with a lot of fondness in their hearts, and an almost wistful longing that the traditions would return to the community.

### ***Ethnic Tensions***

With the spread of the Texas frontier and the influx of more and more ethnic immigrants, ethnic tensions between groups began to rise. The “clannish” nature of all such groups led to many negative encounters with others, and the Norwegians were not excluded from the harassment. Although generally good-natured, the Norwegians found themselves in some precarious situations in which they had to defend themselves and fight back.

A third generation man in his early 70s talked about such encounters in his interview:

But uh, they, you know, they had some conflicts, you know, in school, and fights about somebody cotton headed [white-haired] Norwegian. You know, that's kind of an uncomplimentary comment, you know, and people would just react and start

a fight. And uh, they would, you know, they would go to parties. I've heard my dad talk about those things. They'd have fights at dances, you know, and just people would try to put down the Norwegians, and so the Norwegians – they'd fight back. (37, 2004, p. 12)

I found this statement interesting because the gentleman used what would ordinarily be considered a compliment within the Norwegian community ("cotton head") as an insult. What the Norwegians liked about themselves, I suppose, is what the other ethnic groups chose to use in a derogatory manner to insult them. The three other people who mentioned "cotton-headed" in their interviews used the term in a positive light, referring to the platinum blond, white hair of the Norwegians. (It is most prevalent among children.) If a non-Norwegian called someone from Norse a "cotton-head," it was meant to be hurtful and usually instigated a fight.

A fourth generation woman in her late 70s related this story about her father and some of his negative experiences with people from other ethnic groups:

You know, any ethnic group always suffered some discrimination. And this group was no exception. And my dad talked about how the Norwegians were not given any respect. And when [the Norwegians] came to town, neighbors – I mean people that had been here longer and called themselves the "Americans" – they were really given a hard time, and they were insulted. My dad said when he walked down the sidewalk you could prepare yourself to be insulted. And my dad knew how to fight. And he said, "All of us knew that we were going to have to, because we could not continue taking these insults." So he was not a tall man, but he was very muscular, and he built himself up, and he said after a few pops to the

jaw and to the nose of some of these people that were slinging the insults to them, you know, they learned that they'd better respect some of these Norwegians. (26, 2004, pp. 16-17)

In this man's case, the insulting and fighting had apparently become so troublesome that he had taken steps to be able to defend himself, when necessary. The fact that he experienced these troubles when he went into town exemplifies what happens when people from isolated, ethnic enclaves, complete with their own unique language, worship, and cultural traditions, run across others from a different group with their own traditions.

Unfortunately, not all people were able to defend themselves. A fourth generation man in his late 80s related this story about one of his ancestors and his problems with an "American:"

I don't know how you would put it. I'm sure when they first came over, they would run into some opposition, so to speak, or were kind of ridiculed of being Norwegian by – one of my – my grandfather's, one of his brothers was murdered when they came – on their way over here. Well, when they first came over they got as far as Nacogdoches [Texas], I understand. And I guess they laid over there for a little while. And one of the boys went into a barbershop. And I guess when they found out he was Norwegian, one of these nuts had a small pistol, and I don't know whether he did it accidentally or on purpose, but he shot him, hit [him] in his throat here [pointing to the side of his neck], and severed his jugular vein, and he bled to death.

And during that time, you know, they wore these collars. I think some of them was what they called a cellulosic collar, or maybe it was really heavy

starched. But they could take the collar off, you know? And he had taken that collar off. I don't know whether he was to get a hair cut or a shave or something. But if he had left that collar on, it wouldn't have killed him. Because evidently the pistol [the other man] had wasn't much a gun to start with, but. (12, 2004, pp. 37-38)

Even though this incident did not occur in Norse or even in Bosque County, it still illustrates the problems faced by the Norwegians on the Texas frontier. The story made enough of an impression on my interviewee, because he said his grandfather had told him that story many, many years ago. The grandfather, being second generation, probably faced some incidents himself.

Not speaking any English, and looking somewhat different with their "cotton heads," many Norwegians were persecuted by some of the people from the other ethnic groups in the area. The early Norwegians to central Texas had to learn to defend themselves and their culture or experience the consequences. Such incidents were, no doubt, part of the reason why the Norwegians both clung to their ethnic enclaves and tried to evolve out of them (Løvoll, 1999).

### *Letters Home*

As with many other ethnic immigrants who came to America, the Norwegians in central Texas wrote to family and friends back in the motherland. Many people missed their families and encouraged them to also come over to America. Others wrote older family members who had decided to remain in Norway to keep them abreast of current happenings in Texas. In addition to providing their readers with up-to-date-news, the immigrants also requested information and news from Norway, and they asked for some

young people to be sent over to serve as seasonal farm workers. (These workers would usually work off the cost of their passage by helping for two years.)

Because most of the early immigrants were highly literate, they also requested books to be sent over. As stated earlier, the Norwegians placed a high value on education, and they needed books written in Norwegian, at least initially. They were hungry for news and for knowledge from the old world.

A fourth generation Norwegian woman in her late 70s commented on how isolated the Norwegians felt in their new Texas home, and how important correspondence with family back in Norway was for them:

The letters were few and far between. I think the people in Norway failed to realize how important it was for the immigrants to hear about the families from Norway. And the letters I have read, they, you know – maybe someone would have died three or four or six months before when they would finally get the word that they had died. Or, if somebody married, and somebody had a baby – and they were hungry for all of this, and not always did they hear – at least my aunt would say, “Please write! We have so little news from Norway.” (26, 2004, p. 11)

This interviewee further adds how important books were to the immigrants, and how they were always asking for their families to send books over or to bring them with them when they emigrated. A third generation man in his early 70s echoed that sentiment in his statement:

Uh, the people who came [to] Clifton, and, you know, your ancestors, [and] so forth, were learned, educated people. They brought books with them, and as soon



as they got here, they asked for books to be sent from Norway. And so eventually they established a lending library here for people in the Norse settlement, you know, to read. So, I mean, you are talking about not some one just sitting in the middle of the Texas wild country without nothing to do – these were people who [wanted] to read and to keep up with what’s going on. (16, 2004, pp. 5-6)

For these immigrants, communicating with family and friends back in Norway was a lifeline to the old ways. They longed to hear about recent news, and they encouraged others to come to America as well. Their love of knowledge also drove them to collect books, I assume not only to feed their love of learning, but also to give the early settlers something productive to do in the winter months when there was less farm work to be done.

The first generation of Norwegian immigrants who came to America were definitely interested in creating a better life for themselves and their children, however, they were still attached to the old ways. The familiar Norwegian customs were all that they knew, so it seems natural that initially, that is what they continued once they arrived in America. In another sense, because their group was so small and isolated, forming a tight-knit community with its own customs and traditions was necessary for their survival. While they were learning about life in America, they were still carrying on with the old world traditions. Cornell and Hartmann (1998) referred to this type of identity as “thick” in nature. The Norwegian immigrants were, at once, happy to be in America and also proud to be Norwegian. For this reason, many of the Norwegian traditions persevered within the community of Norse well into the twentieth century.

## **Second Generation Immigrant Identity:**

### **“Americans” Under Construction**

As time moved on, the first generation of Norwegian immigrants gave way to the second. This generation, born in America, was very interested in shedding the old traditions and ways and in living a new life in a new country. For the most part, they did not talk about the “old country,” the pioneers’ experiences coming over to Texas, or their families’ histories. For them, the “old times” were not important; they wanted to move forward. Besides, they were working too hard to waste any time retelling such old stories. They saw their main task as adapting to the new customs and becoming Americans. Song (2003) has referred to this process as the “negotiation of ethnic identity” (p. 105; Tung, 2000).

Part of becoming American involved changing the old ways within the Norwegian community. Over time, the Norse community became more integrated, with Germans and “Americans” also residing there. The Norwegian church services dwindled down to twice a month, and then once a month, and then they were eliminated. Because church itself was still important, the after-church family dinners continued, however. The Norwegian summer parochial school was discontinued, and the churches took over the duties of Confirmation and Vacation Bible School (in English). During this time, many of the old world Christmas traditions also faded into memory, although family gatherings and church remained important. Ethnic tensions were beginning to ease somewhat, but some people in the German community had been negatively affected by the events surrounding World War II. Ties to the motherland were also fading, as

immigration to America ceased, and the Norwegian language fell into disuse. This generation was very much one in transition (Fouron & Schiller, 2001; Zéphir, 2001).

Based on my interviews, this period of time seemed to run from approximately the 1920s, at the earliest, until the 1960s. Once again, the fluid nature of a “generation” and its boundaries should be remembered here. Although this generation represents a shorter time frame than the previous one, all of the Norwegian immigrants had arrived by this period, and the Norwegian community of Norse had been already well established. The children and grandchildren, and perhaps great grandchildren of the earliest immigrants, were establishing themselves as Americans during this time.

### *Language Use*

When adapting to life in a new country, one of the first cultural institutions to be challenged is the native language spoken by the immigrants. This was no exception for the Norwegians in central Texas. These immigrants knew that the keys to their future success involved learning English and educating themselves, two concepts which tie in closely with each other. At this time, Norwegian was slowly fading from use within the community, and English was becoming the dominant language.

### *Norwegian*

When the immigrants arrived in Texas in 1854, they only spoke Norwegian. Obviously, they continued to speak it within their families and in the community, but they wanted their offspring to learn English. My impression from the interviews is that while these early immigrants did desire to learn English, Norwegian itself was not discouraged, per se. There was just an appropriate time for each language to be used.

Over time, those opportunities to speak Norwegian became fewer and farther between, and English gradually became the norm.

*use among the elderly.* During this period, the only people who regularly spoke Norwegian in the home were the elderly, those individuals from the first wave of immigrants. They left Norway only speaking Norwegian, and they never learned much English, if at all. In some cases, their children only learned Norwegian. Many of my interviewees recalled older relatives living in their home who engaged in Norwegian conversation. A fourth generation man in his mid-90s confirmed, “[My parents] spoke [Norwegian] in the home. We talked back to them, they talked between themselves, and the adults, others, you know, they’d talk between themselves. So, it was quite common in the community” (22, 2004, p. 4). Even though technically this man was a fourth generation immigrant, and his parents were not “elderly” at the time, he remembered his parents speaking Norwegian fluently in the home. Of course, he was in his mid-90s, so this would put his parents’ generation at the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth. I should also add that this was the only gentleman whom I interviewed who had learned Norwegian as a child, and who could still speak, read, and write it fluently himself.

Many people with whom I spoke spent a lot of time with a grandparent or other extended family member who had a limited command of the English language. A third generation man in his early 70s recalled living with his grandmother, who did not speak very much English:

But, they talked in Norwegian, and my grandmother, my dad’s mother, lived in our home until she passed away, and at that time I was, [I] guess, [a] sophomore

or junior in high school. And uh, she spoke Norwegian – that was her first language, because that’s where she grew up. Anyway, she was more comfortable speaking Norwegian than she was in English. (37, 2004, p. 2)

Other interviewees shared similar stories about living with older relatives who could not speak English. A second generation woman in her mid-80s remembered her grandmother speaking Norwegian in the home and teaching the language to her:

[My family] didn’t speak Norwegian all the time, no. But they could speak some, you know, enough to carry on a conversation with Grandma. Because we had to, or we couldn’t talk with her, because she couldn’t speak English or even understand it. And when I first started talking when I was a little girl, I spoke Norwegian! Because Grandma taught it to me. That was my first language. I can’t read it. I have never studied it. I can speak it a little bit. I couldn’t carry on a conversation, but there are a lot of words and things I can say, you know. (10, 2004, p. 3)

A third generation man in his early 80s also lived with his grandmother. In his interview, he explained the difficulty of communicating with her:

And so, my mother wouldn’t let us speak Norwegian at the breakfast table or around the table when I grew up. And *Bestemor*, my grandmother, lived with us for 23 years. I was 12 years old when she died. She never learned to speak English. But we lever learned to speak Norwegian. We learned to count to 100, and we learned how to say, “I love you,” and stuff like that. [L: So how did you communicate with your grandma? Sign language?] Body language and sign

language. [Laughs.] And she didn't let us on when she did know! (33, 2002, p. 4)

As seen in the above examples, many people lived with extended family who knew very little or no English. One interviewee did not live with her older relatives, but they did baby-sit her frequently. This third generation woman in her early 60s had similar memories about hearing and learning some Norwegian from her older relatives. "When the great grandparents were around, they did not understand English at all. They would baby-sit me, and I would pick up Norwegian terms. They would – they had to teach me Norwegian because they [didn't] know English" (9, 2004, p. 22). These people were some of the few who said they learned Norwegian, or some Norwegian, in the home during this phase of ethnic identity development.

Not all early immigrants were stuck with the Norwegian. Some could speak English, but chose to converse in their native tongue. A third generation man in his mid-70s remembered that his Norwegian-speaking grandparents would revert to English whenever they wanted to include him in the conversation:

I now remember, you know, from childhood, my [paternal] grandparents. And they spoke Norwegian in their home. And they lived [on] the same block that I did in Cranfills Gap, and I visited them daily. And I remember a lot of their friends coming to visit with them who had been born in Norway, and they'd sit out on the porch on Sunday afternoon, and they'd speak Norwegian to each other.

And I visited their home frequently. Quite often I'd go up there in the evening and have supper with them and sit on my grandfather's lap, and he'd feed me mush, and he and my grandmother would speak Norwegian, and when they

wanted me to understand what they were saying, they'd speak English. (19, 2002, p. 18; 19, 2004, p. 4)

In this case, the grandparents could speak both languages, but they chose to speak in English to this interviewee when he was small. Consequently, he did not learn to speak Norwegian.

Another person, a fourth generation woman in her late 70s remembered her great grandmother and mother speaking Norwegian in the home, and how even then, they were having problems with the language:

[Great Grandmother] was a little reluctant to give up her Norwegian. She lived to be over 90, and she delighted in speaking Norwegian until she died. But that was the only ancestor I had who tried to hold on to the Norwegian. It was pretty obvious that she could understand English – she just didn't feel comfortable giving up her native language. Because see, she was, I guess, I don't know what age, but young, middle aged, when she came over to America.

I used to think when I was a kid that Norwegian must really be a fun language, because on occasion Mother and [Great] Grandmother would talk some Norwegian. And they'd laugh, and I'd think, "Oh, that must be funny. That must be great." Well, in retrospect, I realize what they were probably laughing at was they hadn't used much Norwegian, and they had forgotten some words, and they probably threw in some Norwegian-sounding English words! And laughed at the language patterns. (7, 2004, pp. 4-5, 8)

This woman also never learned Norwegian. Since her relatives were struggling with it, the language was never passed down to her, except in the form of certain words or phrases.

By this time, Norwegian was being spoken only by a few people in the community. Most of these people were older, or their parents or grandparents had emigrated and thus taught them the language. Some of those individuals speaking it, however, were already having problems with it, so once those people passed away, the common use of the Norwegian language in the home also died as well.

*use for concealing inappropriate topics.* In some instances, Norwegian was also used in the home to hide inappropriate topics from the children. This is a clear example of just how quickly English was adopted by the younger individuals within certain families. The parents could converse in both languages, although probably better in Norwegian, while their children could only really understand English. (It is interesting to note that this phenomenon was not unique to the Norwegians. I had several of my German interviewees reveal to me that they experienced the same thing with their older, German relatives.)

Many different people mentioned family members using Norwegian to hide certain topics. A fourth generation woman in her late 70s shared her theory about the Norwegian spoken in her home. “But I think when they were talking Norwegian, it was mostly to keep something from me, like somebody being pregnant [out of wedlock], you know. You didn’t talk – you didn’t talk to children about [that] then” (7, 2004, p. 8). A third generation woman in her early 70s echoed a similar story. “Grandpa could speak Norwegian, and he did to his wife, and when he didn’t want the kids to know what he’s



talking about” (31, 2004, p. 11). Another fourth generation woman in her mid-80s confirmed this. “My mamma and daddy spoke it when they didn’t want us to hear, to understand what they were talking about! But otherwise they hardly ever said a Norwegian word” (18, 2004, p. 7). A third generation man in his early 70s said the same thing. “[Grandma] and my parents would talk in Norwegian, but mostly about things they didn’t want us children to hear. You know – secrets” (37, 2004, p. 8). A fourth generation woman in her early 50s added:

My grandparents both could [speak Norwegian]. I never heard my grandfather speak very much of it. I did hear my grandmother speak it occasionally when they didn’t want kids to know what they were saying. So I heard some, like, little words. I could hear a little bit of it, but it wasn’t spoken around me. Unless they didn’t want you to know what they were saying. (36, 2004, pp. 36-37)

In all the above examples, interviewees remembered older family members using Norwegian to hide certain topics from them, topics that at the time were considered inappropriate for children or none of their business.

Another interviewee, a fifth generation woman in her late 80s, told about her family hiding information from her and the other kids, but in this case, it was to prevent the children from getting too excited:

My grandfather, now surely he knew a lot of Norwegian, but he never spoke it around the house, unless Sunday afternoon Daddy would come in and ask Mother in Norwegian if she would like [to] visit so-and-so in the afternoon, so we kids wouldn’t hear it, so if she said “no,” you know, he could just drop it, but we would get all excited if we would get to go, so that was his way of [keeping it

quiet]. So if Mother didn't care about going, that was it. But we usually went to somebody's. (32, 2004, p. 11)

In this example, the parents would speak Norwegian when they were discussing going to visit someone, so that if they decided not to go, the children would not be disappointed. A third generation man in his early 80s also told about his older family members using Norwegian to hide their conversations on the community telephone in Norse:

Well, back in the rural community days, we had telephones. And we had non-Norwegians living in the community also, and they all had phones, too. Well, everybody – my mother would talk to her mother, and you'd hear these clicks on the telephone. And there were people eavesdropping, you know? And then it would be – and as soon as Mom would start hearing these – most of these old biddies would start talking, and then Mom and her mother would go to Norwegian. And then you'd hear the clicks go back the other way. (1, 2004, p. 25)

Like the above example, Norwegian was used in this case to prevent others from hearing a particular conversation. In this instance, it was two Norwegian women hiding their conversation from the “Americans” within the community on the community telephone.

As seen in the above examples, Norwegian was sometimes used by the older generations to hide certain inappropriate or private conversations from the kids. Many of my interviewees related to me that they would hear their relatives talking in Norwegian, but that they had no idea what they were saying. By this time, the younger generations were already experiencing the loss of their mother tongue.

*use as small talk, or for certain words.* As seen in the above examples, by the first couple of decades of the twentieth century, Norwegian was dying in the community of Norse. Only the older members of the community, or those more closely associated with the original immigrants, could speak and understand it. The few younger members of the community who could understand it, did so in a limited way at best.

What did remain, however, was the use of certain words or phrases. Most people remembered at least one or two words in Norwegian, and almost everyone to whom I spoke was aware of certain polite phrases, such as the ones used in greeting or saying goodbye to someone, and certainly of “*jeg elsker deg*” (“I love you”). In all cases, they had learned and used the words and phrases as children, but many admitted to still using them even today. Because the use of such words and phrases began when my interviewees were young, I include this topic in this section of my dissertation.

Many people whom I interviewed remembered older family members using various words to express frustration or disgust. These words were not curse words, *per se*, but were used when someone was frustrated, angry, or exasperated. (The Norwegian immigrants did not use strong language, and their descendants today still frown upon swear words.) The primary example of this is *uff da* [spelled *huff da* in Norway], a word whose general definition could cover a myriad of possible situations. It is generally translated as “darn it!,” “ugh!,” or “oh, dear!” Some interviewees even likened the word to the cartoon character Charlie Brown’s (Schulz, 2005) famous saying, “good grief!” It was a commonly-used phrase familiar to almost everyone to whom I spoke, even the non-Norwegians. The phrase had been used by their ancestors, and in many cases, it was still being used today by the descendants.

One interviewee also mentioned another word, *fysj da*, which basically carried the same meaning as *uff da*, but with a greater and more severe intent behind it. She also seemed to think that there was a third word, one that represented the most extreme sentiment of the exclamations, but she could not remember what it was, nor could I uncover it in my research. She explained the difference in the three words to me by using a metaphor, which I paraphrase here: “*Uff da*” is what one says when she sees a cow pie, “*fysj da*” is what she would say once she smelled the cow pie, and “[unknown]” is what she would say if she stepped in it. Although it is possible that this woman may not have been remembering correctly, it is also entirely within the realm of possibility that there was a third, more powerful word at one time, but that it may have been lost to time and/or disuse. I suspect that since this woman used such a descriptive metaphor to describe the words, and since this metaphor was told to her by one of her aunts, that the latter scenario is more likely the case.

Another woman remembered the phrase “*fy da!*” (“for shame!”) being used in her household by older family members. When she said the phrase to me in our interview, she made an angry face and pointed her index finger at me in a jabbing motion. She then wagged her finger at me and shook her head from left to right, and I immediately conjured up an image of a mother scolding her young child for bad behavior. Indeed, the phrase is undeniably strong, and it is used for pointing out unacceptable behavior and for making someone feel bad and ashamed for it. It also shows that the person saying the phrase will not tolerate the behavior and is, in fact, repulsed by it.

One man remembered his mother saying a particular word when she was frustrated or angry, but he could not remember if it was a commonly-used word in the

community or not. He said that at times he even wondered if it was a “real” word, or rather one that had been made up, or at the very least one that had morphed from some other, earlier form. All he remembered was that his mother would say something that sounded like “geerk.” It turns out that this was not a word after all, but rather a phrase common in Norwegian. In this case, his mother was using an abbreviated form of the phrase “*(Jeg) gir ikke*.” It translates as “(I) don’t give (a care),” and it is used when one cannot be bothered with something. Its abbreviated form suggests that it was commonly-used at one time in the community, and it was probably seen as slang.

The woman who discussed the levels of *uff da* also remembered her mother and aunts using the phrase *tusslete* (pitiful). By her use of it during our interview, I got the impression that it was used not as a term of frustration, but rather as a sympathetic term to show pity for someone, as in, “Oh, isn’t she *tusslete*?,” or “She’s so *tusslete*.” The word does translate as miserable, and can be used to describe someone who is feeling or looking small. In this woman’s example, however, it was used to describe someone who could not do anything right, or who was always messing up. This particular family also used the term in the context of “Aren’t we so sad?!,” or “We are so pathetic!,” because when the woman said it, she was laughing and using a gentler tone of voice.

The word *tusslete*, interestingly enough, correlates with an English word that is commonly used in central Texas, by people from many ethnic backgrounds: “puny.” This word means “slight or inferior in power, size, or importance,” or “weak” (Mish, 1985, p. 956). I had always heard the word growing up in Waco, in the context of, “I feel puny today,” but never in the three other states in which I’ve lived. I am not sure if it is unique to central Texas, or Texas itself, or even the southern United States. It is

possible that it is common across the country, but that it has generational connotations. Without employing the use of an etymologist, however, one cannot know the history and use of such a phrase, and I would hesitate to link its use to *tusslete* being used in the Norwegian community of Bosque County, but I do find it interesting that describing oneself by using the word for "puny" (or its equivalent) seems to transcend cultural and language barriers.

Some interviewees mentioned other words they had learned over the years. For example, some people said they knew the Norwegian equivalent of an English word, such as *ku*, cow. A fourth generation Norwegian woman in her early 50s said:

I know the Norwegian word for certain things, like – but I don't think I ever call it that. Like butter is *smør*, and sugar is *sukker*. I know the words for a lot of foods, but I don't think I use them all the time. (36, 2004, p. 73)

A third generation woman in her late 70s commented, "I learned the Norwegian prayer, and I can count to ten in Norwegian, and not much Norwegian I know" (15, 2004, p. 2), a common sentiment echoed by several of my interviewees. A fourth generation woman in her late 70s added, "Just a few words is all I know. [Laughs.] I know '*hilsen*' ['greetings'] and a few expressions, you know, but nothing to carry on a conversation" (26, 2002, p. 8). With regards to greetings and polite phrases, a third generation man in his early 80s remembered Norwegian being used in casual social settings. "Well, they would always greet each other at any meeting, town, or wherever it was, always in Norwegian. That was always. Even today, I do that. And that's just a hand-me-down" (1, 2004, p. 31). In all of these instances, these people grew up hearing certain phrases, and on occasion, they still use them today.

A fifth generation man in his late 60s told me about the Norwegian he heard growing up:

I remember [Grandma] doing the prayer in Norwegian, and she would say “*mange takk*” – that’s “many thanks” – and *velkommen* means [welcome], and, of course, we all said that. I said that even then. And yeah, I heard her say some very few catch phrases in Norwegian. We all did. But as far as sitting down at the table and talking Norwegian with anybody, I didn’t hear many of my ancestors do that very often. I heard them make a comment, or they’d say something or other – it might have been as innocuous as, “How’s the weather?,” but I didn’t understand what they were saying. And I really didn’t care. I was too little. (20, 2004, p. 6)

This gentleman learned basic courtesies in Norwegian, but his knowledge of Norwegian stopped there, primarily because he did not pay attention to the language as a child. Another interviewee, a third generation man in his mid-70s, however, picked up a few more words from his childhood:

We used a lot of Norwegian words in the home when I was young, in my home. We didn’t really converse in Norwegian, but my dad used a lot of Norwegian terms that, you know, I’d remember, and I’ve always remembered, like the word for beard is *skjegg*, and the word for knife is *kniv* – of course things like “*takk for maten*” [“thanks for the food”] and “*velbekomme*” [“you’re welcome”], and those phrases were used quite a bit.

I kind of, you know, I don’t do it every day – I do take spells with my grandchildren using some Norwegian names and words, and I’ll try to teach them

that, about knife and fork, *kniv* and *gaffel*, to eat is *spise*, *kald* is cold. “*Takk for sist*,” “thanks for the last time,” “*mange takk*,” “many thanks,” and “*tusen takk*,” “[a] thousand thanks.” But it’s not an everyday occurrence. I don’t do it every day. (19, 2004, pp. 5, 21-22)

This gentleman remembered certain words his father used, and now he tries to pass them on to his grandchildren.

One person had a particularly colorful story about his introduction to the Norwegian language by his great grandfather. This third generation man in his early 50s related this story about getting into trouble with his older relative:

Yeah, my great grandfather taught me my first Norwegian words, and I think I know what it means, but I haven’t really checked lately, but it was “*skjorta di folde*,” and he’d say, “[Grandson], *skjorta di folde!*” And that was my [great] grandpa, he was 97 years old when he died. And he used to slap me in the back of the head every time he’d say that, so it settled in at an early age. It means “tuck in your shirt-tail!” That’s what I think it would – that’s what’s embedded in my mind that it meant, anyhow. There are some other words that I learned, but you know the one’s – the one that stuck with me the most because I’d always get a swat on the back of my head that meant – I think it meant “tuck in my shirt-tail.” (3, 2004, p. 5)

His great grandfather’s lesson in tucking in his shirt-tail obviously made an impression on this man, because he still remembered that story with great clarity. Whenever he told me the story in our interview, he imitated an old man reprimanding his young relative, swatting the air like he was swatting the back of someone’s head. He may not have



remembered all the other Norwegian words or phrases that he had learned, but he said he would never forget the command to tuck in his shirt!

Another interviewee, a fourth generation woman in her early 60s, also talked about the Norwegian that she had learned from her grandmother and aunts:

Well, Grandma would [speak Norwegian] a little bit here, there, and yon, you know. But as far as actually doing a lot of [it], she and her sisters would sometimes – but as far as actually speaking a lot of Norwegian around us, they didn't. [My aunt] would say, Mother and [my] aunt just would do little sayings, like “*vil gå gungre*,” “down in the back.” And uh, what else – of course, everybody does the *uff da* thing. And uh, Mother and [my] aunt would always say, “Oh, I think my, I think that pair of hose I have [is] in the *skuff* [drawer].” You know, they would use, a lot of times they would use Norwegian words in place [of English ones]. Yeah, you know, “My *pute*'s [pillow] over there,” you know, just little things like that. So, I heard more words than actually speaking Norwegian. But it was fun, and I enjoyed it, because, again, it put that little Norway in my life, you know, and I learned things from that. (5, 2004, p. 10)

This woman picked up words and phrases, and like her older relatives, would insert them into English sentences. For her, it was a way of expressing her Norwegian heritage without having to speak the Norwegian language.

Most Norwegian phrases that were retained in the Norse community and that are still used to this day involve conversational markers. These markers usually take the form of greetings, well-wishing, and farewells. A third generation man in his early 70s talked about the phrases that he knew:

“*Mange takk*,” and uh, you know, little expressions like that, or “*ha det bra*,” “how are you” – or, “have it good,” I guess [also, “goodbye”]. And uh, “*velkommen*,” “welcome.” And then “*velbekomme*” is “you are welcome.” And uh, well, just there are expressions, “*ikke noe å takke for*,” “that is nothing to give thanks for,” or “don’t mention it.” “*Ikke noe å takke for*” – it’s got a good little ring – “*ikke noe å takke for*” – and then “*mange tusen takk*,” “many thousand thanks.” And then you say, “*Nei, nei, nei, fem hundre er nok!*” – “No, no, no, five hundred is enough!” (37, 2004, pp. 24-25)

This gentleman took great pleasure in being able to greet someone in Norwegian. He admitted that the rest of his Norwegian was limited, but that he did enjoy the pleasures associated with the language.

A fourth generation woman in her late 70s explained how common certain Norwegian phrases were in her daily life:

I think it’s fun to speak a little Norwegian now and then. I don’t know much, but when I meet someone from Norway, I’m glad to be able to say “*god dag*” [“good day”], and if we meet again, “*takk for sist*.” And when we part from each other, “*takk for samværet*” [“thank you for the time I have spent with you”], you know. It’s just fun.

Yeah, I still use *uff da*. And interestingly enough, two of my friends have picked up *uff da*. *Uff da*’s a good catch-all word for anything that doesn’t go quite right. And when I greet some senior citizens at the Sunset Home nearby, I might say “*takk for sist*,” which means “thanks for the last meeting we had.” And they get excited about that, you know. A little carry-over from the past. And

“*mange takk*,” I use that sometimes. And when my uncle used to eat with me, we would say “*i Jesu navn*” [“in Jesus’ name”], or the table prayer. And if [my] good friend in [the Metroplex] eats with me, we’ll probably say “*i Jesu navn*.”

“*Jeg snakker lite grann [norsk]*,” which means “I speak very little [Norwegian].” But, I mean, if there was a Norwegian visitor from Norway who was at the museum, and I greeted him, I’d probably say, “*God dag*” and “*[Hvordan] står det til?*” [“How are you?”], and he’d say, “*Jeg har det bare bra, og du?*” [“I am very well, how are you?”]. So then he may think I spoke Norwegian, and he may carry on a little further, and I’d say, “Oh! Wait a minute!”

[Friends] call me sometimes and say, “What is the [Norwegian] word for so-and-so?” Well, I usually have to look in the dictionary for that. Or, “Here’s and expression, can you translate it for me?” I usually have to ask the dictionary. But if they have a greetings card and [the sender has] written [in Norwegian] on one side, they may say, “Will you read this to me?” and I say, “Well, I can’t handle that much. I’ll get someone to read it to you.” But I know some of those words like *hilsen* and *godt nyttår* [Happy New Year], and, of course, *glad jul* [Merry Christmas]. (7, 2002, p. 6; 7, 2004, pp. 21-22)

For this woman, conversing a little bit in Norwegian helped her identify with her Norwegian heritage. It also allowed her to exchange greetings with the older citizens in the Sunset Home, a care facility for the elderly located in Clifton, or with any Norwegian visitors who may come through the area. She further indicated to me that she enjoyed serving as an ambassador, of sorts, for the Norwegian culture in the area.

One interviewee, a fifth generation woman in her early 70s, seemed to think that this interest in speaking Norwegian words and phrases has been a relatively new phenomenon, one that was encouraged by Clifton being declared the Norwegian Capital of Texas:

For instance, I didn't hear anybody using any Norwegian terms ever here until Clifton became the Norwegian Capital of Texas, and then, of course, they got their [*velkommen*] back on the [road] sign, and now people are getting back on the signs. And then you begin to hear, with a Norwegian society, you begin to hear little phrases pop up and all kinds of things. It builds a little bit, you know. And so I think it – I think fostering even a little language is another way of fostering the ethnic quality of the area. (4, 2002, p. 12)

It is entirely possible that the designation of Clifton as the Norwegian Capital of Texas has encouraged the use of certain Norwegian words and phrases within the community. I think, however, that those words and phrases had always been known, and possibly on occasion used, but the frequency of their use correlated with the Capital designation and increased because of it. People were reminded, once again, of their heritage, and they wanted to share it with others. With more people aware of the ethnic history of the area, perhaps the community was more amenable to those words and phrases becoming used again.

### *English*

The Norwegian immigrants who came to Texas in the middle to late 1800s did not speak English. It is even probably not too far fetched for one to assume that most of them *only* spoke Norwegian, since there are no real records or oral histories to indicate

otherwise. Since they came to America to create a better life for their children, learning English became a high priority for subsequent generations.

For the immigrants, learning English was the key to becoming American, so it was very important to them that their children learn to speak, read, and write the language of their new country. This value is evident in their desire to create English-instruction schools, conduct their church services to English, and to blend in with the local “Americans.” Some families insisted on an “English-only” policy for their children, because many feared that even the slightest brogue or accent would put their children at a disadvantage. A third generation woman in her early 60s talked about the immigrants’ desire for their children to learn English:

The schools were important. Even from 1868 – I have some minutes of the first board meeting to establish a school in the Norse area. And one thing they said in there was they wanted an English school, so they wanted the kids to speak English. (9, 2004, p. 58)

From almost the very beginning, then, the Norwegians in central Texas pursued English instruction for their children. For the families that continued to speak Norwegian in the home, however, this presented a problem for their children once they became old enough to attend school. A fourth generation woman in her early 60s talked about the problems her mother and aunt experienced:

I think [my mother and aunt] were speaking Norwegian in the home [as children]. And then they – when they started to school, and the kids were having problems in school because they couldn’t speak English, then they stopped. So when the

other kids [in the family] were growing up, they spoke more English in the home. (5, 2004, p. 6)

A fifth generation woman in her early 70s also discussed the emphasis placed upon studying in English, especially for her father and his generation:

They all spoke Norwegian when they were young. But they had made a conscious effort to learn English and speak English at home at the first generation or two, because they wanted the kids to do well in school. My dad, for instance, said that in the little school that he went to, they taught Norwegian, and they quit after he was in [the] first grade, so he had one year of [instruction in] Norwegian. But families that had, you know, maybe Grandmother lived with them. They heard it a lot, and when I was young, there were lots of people [who] spoke with a definite [Norwegian] accent. (4, 2004, p. 10)

Children raised with Norwegian as their first language in the home experienced problems once they attended the English instruction schools, even as late as these women's parents' generation. It is of note that once the second woman's mother and aunt started experiencing difficulties, the rest of the children in the family were raised with more English. The third woman also talked about how her father and his classmates had to switch to English instruction, possibly, in part, to prevent them from also speaking with an accent or brogue, which seemed antithetical to becoming American by the Norwegians in the community willing to make that change.

The importance of speaking English and becoming an American was discussed by several people whom I interviewed. A fourth generation woman in her late 70s told

about how her great grandfather immigrated to Texas with the intent to become an American as soon as possible:

Some of [my ancestors] could [speak Norwegian]. They didn't usually because most of my ancestors wanted to be good Americans. My great grandfather came over when he was 16, and the first book he bought was a dictionary. He wanted to learn to speak good English. (7, 2004, p. 4)

A third generation man in his early 50s discussed how his grandparents handled the language situation in their home:

My grandpa and my grandmother spoke Norwegian, but they most of the time spoke English. And they sort of instilled in their children to speak English. "But we're American now, and you speak American." And, of course, now I understand that, of course, my grandfather died before I was born, so I never got to meet him, but they said that he spoke real fluent Norwegian. Of course, he came from Norway, so. From time to time, you'd hear the – when you said the prayer and stuff, they said the prayer in Norwegian and different things like that, but every once in a while I'd hear somebody [speaking Norwegian], but I just didn't know what they were saying. (3, 2004, pp. 5-6)

In this instance, the grandparents would occasionally speak Norwegian in their home, but they encouraged their children to learn English. A fourth generation woman in her early 50s also had grandparents who would not teach their children Norwegian for the very same reason:

And their kids – like my mother and her brother and sisters – [my grandparents] didn't teach them Norwegian, because they had been told if you talked Norwegian

in the home, then your kids will have a brogue. Well, they did anyway, but not as bad. Because they wanted to be Americans. They didn't want to be Norwegians anymore. They wanted to speak English, and they wanted their kids to speak English and do well in school. (36, 2004, pp. 36-37)

A fourth generation woman in her late 70s related a similar story from her family:

Unfortunately, very few people study the Norwegian language, and it has not been kept alive in the home [out in Norse]. We were eager to lose it. My mother and dad spoke it between them some, but not much. And they were not urged at home to speak it. When they came to America, when the older folks came, they wanted to be Americans, and they wanted their children to blend in into the society here. And they didn't want to be different. There was a great problem in being different here in Clifton, and my dad has often talked about it. If he went to town and spoke Norwegian, you may be called names. And he said that the had been taught to fight because there were people here in Clifton who were ready to give racial slurs. And he said that more than once, he had to challenge people for insulting him. (26, 2002, p. 4)

In three of the examples above, the interviewees mentioned the decision made by their grandparents to teach their children English. One interviewee experienced this change more directly. A third generation man in his early 70s explained how his parents made the decision to teach him and his siblings English as their first language:

But uh, when my parents started school, they really hadn't learned English. And they learned to speak Norwegian [as] their first language. But when they went to school, well, they told one another, or other Norwegians there, "We're Americans



here,” so. And then as my parents grew older, you know, had us – why they didn’t encourage [us] to speak Norwegian. They, you know, emphasized speaking English. (37, 2004, pp. 1-2)

In this example, and the others, English was the language of choice. Parents saw it as the way for their children to succeed in school, blend in, and make something of themselves. Some Norwegian may still have been practiced in the home, but the children were definitely encouraged to adopt the new language.

For the Norwegian immigrants, the desire to speak English and to attend school went hand in hand. They felt that an educated person who could converse in English would succeed in the new world, and so they encouraged the pursuit of both among their children.

### ***Higher Education***

In the early days of the Norwegian settlement, most kids were lucky to attend school through the eighth grade. This was due, largely, to the demands of farm work. Most families could not spare a child, particularly a son, past the age of 13 so that he could attend school (Wallace, 1980).

Over time, as farming technology improved, more and more children began to finish high school and even attend college. Many individuals attended the local Clifton College. Farming was still important, and many children did continue to farm, but during this time, it became increasingly common for young people to seek employment outside the community. The best way to secure a job somewhere else was to get an education, and the Norwegians valued and encouraged such a pursuit. A fourth generation woman in her early 80s explained. “They had rural schools out in the country, and then they

would go on to get a higher degree. And all of them were firm believers in education”

(35, 2004, p. 11)

This desire for education was instilled in some pioneers from early on. Another fourth generation woman, this one in her late 70s, reflected on how her grandfather encouraged his children to pursue education further than most did at that time:

My grandfather was a progressive man, and he encouraged his children to go to college, which was pretty unusual for those days. But he had two sons that became medical doctors, and he – I think they all went to college. And that was better than it was when I grew up – not everybody was going to college. So, I think he was a great influence on their lives. (26, 2004, p. 12)

This woman’s grandfather had the foresight to understand not only the value of education, but also the importance of advanced degrees. A second generation woman in her mid-80s told how she and her husband raised their kids to value education:

I raised [my kids] in the [Texas] panhandle, all four of them, because we lived 16 miles out in the country. And we taught our kids to work. They worked on the farm just like my husband and I. I worked, too – I drove the tractors and the pickup and the trucks, and the girls did, too. So did the boys. And we all worked all the time until they were old enough to go off to college. And we wanted them to get an education, and they wanted one, too. And they all finished college, and they all have good jobs. They have grown children. And all those, I have, let’s see – I have one, two, three, four – I have five grandchildren in college right now. (10, 2004, p. 12)

Although this woman reared her children in the Texas panhandle, she had been raised in Bosque County. Like the other Norwegians of central Texas, she understood the value of education and saw it as a way off the family farm. Although she and her husband had made a living for themselves as farmers, they wanted more for their children. For them, education was the key.

### *Exogamous Marriages*

During this period in the development of the ethnic identity of the Norwegian immigrants, some people began to marry outside their ethnic group. Even well into the twentieth century, this was considered problematical by some people, Norwegian and otherwise, in the county. Most intermarriages were between the Norwegians and the Germans.

Ironically, the pursuit of higher education, which was very much valued by the Norwegians, may have helped to dilute the ethnic identity of the community somewhat. One German man in his early 60s, an important figure in the community, explained how the Norwegian and German communities began to interact:

What they tell me here is that Clifton College was here, started by the Norwegians. [It] was having a hard time making it financially, and reluctantly, but all together, [the Norwegians] had to invite the Germans to come to their college. So, wouldn't [you] know it, as those German boys and girls started to go to school over here at Clifton College with the Norwegian boys and girls – you can imagine what happened: some of them got married and had children. And so you began the process of “now we're related to all the Germans as well as related

to all the Norwegians.” And that was the start of that, is what I’m told. (29, 2004, p. 7)

So by allowing Germans into the College, the Norwegians not only financially saved the institution, but they also inadvertently began to mix the two different ethnic groups. For the first time, many young people, both Norwegian and German, began interacting with peers from a different ethnic group.

Some Norwegian/German interactions were portrayed as more secretive by some of my interviewees. Another non-Norwegian leader within the community had this to say about such meetings between the two ethnic groups:

Well, the people – it’s interesting the way that the Norwegians actually dated other people. [Some people I know] would tell me stories about how their parents would not let them date a German – that was a no-no, big – you just don’t do that. And so what [the kids] would do, a Norwegian friend would pick up the person, the girl, [and] take them across the [Bosque] River, and they [would meet] with the German [boy], and so that – but that generation had a tough time though. It was considered a horrible mixed marriage. And some of [the kids] were kicked out of families and everything. And finally, though, you know, then it was accepted. And now it is very accepted. (28, 2004, p. 12)

Because these unions, at least initially, were severely frowned upon by the community, these kids felt that had to sneak around and meet in private. A third generation woman in her mid-70s further elaborated on this story:

But I can – talking about the Germans, you know, the fraternization. I’ve heard that the children met in the middle of the river! The Germans were more on the

east side of the river, and the Norwegians on the west, generally speaking. But by the time I came along, in high school, I never heard this. Now, they say, I've heard since, that there was still some ill feelings going on. But, of course, they each spoke their own language. (2, 2004, p. 8)

By the time this woman had reached a dating age, probably sometime in the mid-1940s or later, these taboos against dating outside the ethnic groups were practically gone. Of course, attitudes varied greatly depending on each family's belief system, but after this point, Norwegian/German intermarriages became more and more common and accepted. A fifth generation man in his mid 70s summed up this shift in attitude. "I don't think – I don't think there's that division [now]. You know, the Norwegians and Germans intermarried, and now we're all Americans and – first, and – but hanging on to and still celebrating and very proud of our Norwegian ancestry" (27, 2004, p. 8).

The second generation Norwegian immigrants, although aware of their Norwegian heritage and customs, were primarily interested in becoming Americans. Traditions and customs that were once common-place among their parents and grandparents now faded into memory, or were shadows of what they once were. People were beginning to branch out and try new things. Norwegian was eventually dropped in the homes, the churches, and the schools, and English became the language of choice. More and more young people finished high school, and some even attended college. Marriages between Norwegians and Germans, and others, became more common. People began to move away because of these marriages, school, the army, or a job, and many of the family farms were divided and sold. In a word, the community was changing. Younger people felt more American, so they lived and acted as Americans. They may

have still been aware of their roots, but they did not celebrate the same traditions in the same manner as their ancestors had. The community of Norse, on the surface, seemed to be losing its ethnic Norwegian stamp. It had moved from a “thick” identity to a “thin” one (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998).

### **Third Generation Immigrant Identity:**

#### **Transatlantic Patriots**

By the middle of the last century, the descendants of the original Norwegian pioneers to Norse, Texas, had made the transition to become Americans. The community was now fairly integrated with other ethnic groups, and English was the common language. No longer did one’s ethnicity determine where s/he could live, whom s/he could marry, and where s/he could worship, attend school, or work. And although most people in the county still knew their ethnic background, people were proud to call themselves Americans.

Despite this fact, there has been a revival in ethnic identity within the community. Like the first immigrants to arrive in central Texas, people in Bosque County began to learn about and celebrate the “old” ways. Ethnic organizations have been founded, and many ethnic celebrations have been promoted in the area. People have adopted a symbolic ethnicity once again (Petersen, 1997; Song, 2003; Steinberg, 2001; Zéphir, 2001).

#### ***Kingly Visit***

Some people would argue that this rebirth in interest in ethnic identity began when the sitting king of Norway, King Olav V, visited Norse in 1982. He came to celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Cleng Peerson’s birth and to celebrate the positive

cultural ties between Texas and Norway (BMM, n.d.b, 2000; “Bosque Memorial Museum to Feature Clifton,” 2002; CCC, n.d.d; “Clifton Named,” 1997; Hailey, n.d.; Holmes, n.d.; “King Olav’s Speech,” 1982; Moseley, 1982; “Norwegian Heritage,” 2000; OSLC, n.d.d, 1982; OSLCW, 1990, 2000; Pierson, M., 1997; PMCI 1982b, 1982d, 1982f, 1982n; Reeder, 1982a, 1982b; Robinson, 1984, 1999; Smith, W. L., 1982; Visiting Layman, n.d.). It was a huge occasion for the people of Norse, and people are still talking about it today.

A third generation man in his early 80s talked about the effect the king’s visit had on the community. “[The ethnicity] hasn’t waned, because it came alive when King Olav came here in, what was it, 1982? And that revived our Norwegian spirit, and it just, well, it highlighted Norse as the Norwegian capital [of Texas]” (33, 2002, p. 46). For this gentleman, the king’s visit only verified what people already knew, but yet lay dormant.

During our interviews, several people shared their memories of that special day.

A fifth generation man in his mid-70s said:

Well, I remember the day. It was – of course, the church was full. It was kind of reserved for the membership, I guess, probably. But they had outside chairs set up for other attendees; I was among those. And I remember the king coming in on a helicopter. Actually, there were two helicopters. I guess security required that they come and look the area over. But I remember them coming in and circling around and finally landing right there near the entrance to the Norse church, and the king accompanied by several others, of course. But that was a big day. It was – it was quite an honor to – for the existing present king of Norway to

visit the church and community, as he visited the museum, which carries a lot of the history of the Norwegians [of the area]. (27, 2004, pp. 36-37)

Even though this gentleman was not intimately involved with the festivities of the day, he participated as a spectator and was proud to be a part of the community that day.

Different people had different jobs for that day, so a third generation woman in her early 60s told me about her father acting as an usher for the king, and how one is supposed to interact with the king:

With the king, you don't touch him. If he wants to shake hands, he puts his hand out. But Dad was impressed. He thought he was a very nice man. And I think Dad was just impressed to see the king. That was the first king he had ever seen, much less coming to Norse in a helicopter. (9, 2004, p. 44)

Except for the "no touching" rule, the king seemed like a regular person to this woman's father. He, and many other people, were impressed at how kind he was, and how genuinely interested he seemed to be in the little Norwegian community in the middle of Texas.

Other people commented on the "every-man" quality of the king. A fourth generation woman in her late 70s said:

It was exciting. And it was exciting to see him of the royal family being one of us. He had visited the [church] service and came out and stood on the porch at Norse Church. And I think he said a few words to the people before he went down to lay the wreath at Cleng Peerson's grave. He reached in his pocket and pulled out his little camera and took a picture of the crowd! You know, people



who'd visit were taking his picture, then he took a picture of the crowd! (7, 2004, p. 18)

A third generation man in his mid-70s echoed her statement:

And a lot of people – there was a crowd of people standing around, and there's a lot of them taking pictures of him. And so then he pulled a camera out of his pocket and started taking pictures of the crowd. That went over real well. (19, 2004, p. 15)

The current king of Norway visiting Norse was one of the largest events to occur in the county, but people walked away from that experience with a sense that the king was a regular guy. They were impressed that he would pay Norse a visit, and many people expressed pride that the community was shown in such a positive light that day.

A few people, however, were surprised by the king's appearance and demeanor.

A third generation woman in her early 70s told a story about her mother and cousin going out to view the king as his motorcade drove by:

Mother and [her cousin] used to live over here. And so they was going to walk down there and watch him and all this stuff. And I don't know what Mother had in her head, but she wanted to see the king. And well, here he come. "I don't see no king!" See, he had on a pinstriped suit, you know. She was looking for somebody with a crown on their head [and a long cape], I guess! I don't know what she was looking for, but she didn't see no king! [Her cousin] said, "Right there! There he is!" [Mother replied,] "That's not no king!" (31, 2004, pp. 17-18)

Apparently, this woman's mother had some pretty formal ideas about what a king should look like! She, perhaps, was a little disappointed that he was not dressed in his ceremonial royal garb!

Most people who talked about the king's visit, however, were both proud to show off their community and humbled to have a king visit them. A third generation woman in her early 60s, the one who discussed her father above, summed up the day, "I thought it was pretty humbling, because, I mean, here's this little community in the middle of Texas, and a big – I mean, the king of Norway comes to visit it. It's pretty humbling, you know?" (9, 2004, p. 43). Needless to say, the king's visit lit a fire under the latent ethnicity of the area.

### ***Renewed Ethnic Interest***

As stated earlier in this section, the Norwegians of Bosque County, as a whole, never fully lost their ethnic identity. Some cultural aspects still lingered, however dilute, but people thought of themselves as Americans who were simply lucky enough to know where their ancestors came from. Within the last 25 years or so, however, this trend has begun to turn around. People are taking more interest in their backgrounds and are taking the time to pass the information on to their children. They are interested in learning about their culture's past and in preserving it for the future.

Reclaiming that past involves reviving the rituals, customs, and activities that were once common for the Norwegians in Bosque County. This type of symbolic ethnicity pays homage to the culture of the old country and allows people to participate in ethnic events without having to bring them into their everyday lives. In this sense, the descendants of the original Norwegian pioneers can reconstruct their identity (Song,

2003; Steinberg, 2001). By aligning themselves with particular social structures associated with ethnicity, and then by communicating ideas about who they are to others, social actors develop their identity, which, in turn, is continually clarified, deliberated, and restructured (Abrams et al., 2002; Collier, 1997; Hecht et al., 2003; Lie, 2003; Martin, 1997; Spivey, 1997; Wood, 1997).

Social behaviors, such as celebrations and rituals, can be viewed as an enactment of ethnic identity (Ellis, 1999; Hecht et al., 2003). The Norwegians in Bosque County celebrate many different events, such as the *lutefisk* and *smørgåsbord* dinners, the Norwegian Country Christmas Tour, and several different events associated with the Norwegian Society of Texas, Bosque County Chapter, such as *syttende mai*, *sankthansaften*, Leiv Eiriksson Day, and *juletrefest*.

People in the community are also active in the museum, the Chamber of Commerce, and fraternal organizations such as Sons of Norway and Scandinavian Friends. Some people belong to the Norwegian American Historical Association, or to the *Vesterheim* (Western Home) Norwegian American Museum. Others give tours of the area, help with *Viking Fest*, which is held in Waco, and visit with friends and family at Clifton Lutheran Sunset Home. Most people are quite involved in the activities supported by their church as well.

Some people take an active interest in remodeling old homesteads that have fallen into ruin, while others decorate their homes with a Norwegian flair. Others delve into reading, genealogy, family reunions, traveling to Norway, sewing, and quilt-making. Some people host visiting Norwegians in their homes. Many individuals cook

Norwegian dishes and bake the cookies at Christmas. Different people enjoy different activities.

These activities are a large part of the ethnic identity of the people of Norse. These activities also communicatively construct this ethnicity and validate the identity of these people. For these reasons, these celebrations and rituals will be discussed in greater length in Chapter Six.

### *Coming Home*

Many of the people whom I interviewed had moved away from the Norse area at one time in their lives, but they had recently returned. Several of these people were still working, but most were retired. Several individuals commented on how hard it was to make a living as a farmer today, so even those people who were “retired” still did some kind of work, whether in town or on the farm, to help ease the cost of living on that much land.

Many interviewees also commented on the number of outsiders choosing to retire in Norse. These people come from other areas, such as the larger Texan cities: Austin, Dallas/Ft. Worth, Waco, and Houston. Some concern was voiced about whether or not these people would keep up the land and its historical buildings. Also of concern are the number of wealthier individuals who are buying up large tracks of land for their vacation or weekend homes, or for hunting and fishing.

In addition, a few people commented on the “booming” population in Norse. These individuals were concerned that the large farms, originally 500 to 800 acres or so, were being parceled down to 30 or 40 acres. While that amount of acreage may seem

like a lot, the people who grew up in Norse and who were used to the larger farms kept commenting on how they are just not accustomed to seeing houses so “close” together.

Many people in their interviews with me talked affectionately about the land, its terrain, and landmarks. For many individuals, the scenery of southwestern Bosque County was “Heaven on earth,” as one woman told me. For others, it represented “home.” They had names for every hill (“mountain”), valley, and creek, and they associated different people or events with each landmark. Other people reminisced about their favorite swimming hole or fishing grounds, and one gentleman recalled his adventures hunting as a young boy on his aunt and uncle’s property.

The old homesteads built by the original pioneers are still being called by the name of the person who built them (i.e., the old Pierson place, the Ringness place), even though these farms were not named at the time they were settled. Each location has somehow become more than a building on a piece of land: they have also come to embody the spirit of the immigrants who carved out a living for themselves in their hot, new land. In Norway individuals took their names from their farms, but here in America, a farm or ranch, usually called “place,” took its name from the people who settled there. The locals still use these homesteads as markers to reference where some of the newer homes are being built today.

Some of my older interviewees could even tell me who lived in what old farmhouse when, and when they moved, and when that house was remodeled. Some even knew the original boundaries of some of these farms, and could roughly tell when

and where the land had been divided up. A few people even mentioned some of the one room country schools that they attended.

Everyone commented on the two immigrant churches: Our Savior's Lutheran Church, and the Old Rock Church. These people reflected on how strong and uncomplicated and enduring those churches were, and how much they symbolized the immigrants themselves. And every Norwegian with whom I spoke had family buried at either or both churches. For my interviewees, these churches were the heart and soul of the Norse community in Texas, and everyone expressed an emotional and personal connection with those churches.

A fifth generation woman in her early 70s explained how her love of the land drew her back to the Norse community:

And uh, I guess as you get older you, I think you have a kind of homing thing inside you, I really do. I can remember, I guess I was probably in my 50s, because I always thought I would never come back and live here, you know? "My goodness, of course I wouldn't move back down there!" I began to realize that we would cross [the highway] and cross the Brazos River, and you could all of a sudden see the blue hills around you. It just made me feel happy. You know, to me all my life I've always – you could look up and see those blue hills around you, and to me that is such a comforting thing.

It's – I used to hate going to west Texas. I couldn't stand it because it looked like you could see forever, and there was nothing, absolutely nothing. It was like you were just lost out there. I mean, I didn't want to stop. I thought it – I guess I felt like if I could be trapped up there, I would just dead faint in no time,

because you could see forever, and there was nothing to break, you know, the barrier. It was just endless. I think it's the terrain. I would not have been a very good pioneer and go west, that far west!

It's [also] the quaint little, you know, landmarks like the Rock Church, the Norse church, and these old rock buildings. I love these old rock buildings. (4, 2004, pp. 25-26; 4, 2002, p. 5; 4, 2004, p. 26; 4, 2002, pp. 5-6)

Although this woman and her family had been gone for decades, she said to me that it was like she never left. Seeing the old familiar landscapes and seeing long lost friends brought it all back to her. In another part of our interview, she commented on the closeness of the community which embraced her upon her return:

Well, I guess that I always felt that this was my home. I don't know – there's just a connection. And it's not just me. There are lots of people. Since we moved back, we are constantly running into people that we meet that we went to school with that are moving back, or that have bought a place here, and they come on weekends, and they come to St. Olaf's [Lutheran Church] or Norse [Our Savior's Lutheran Church] or whatever, you know, when they're here and so forth. And it's just like you never left. It's just the strangest thing. We started going to church at St. Olaf's, and it was like we had never been gone. Their lives have just been going on. They've just been maintaining this little society here, just ready for you to come back, it seems like! [Laughs.] (4, 2002, p. 5)

For this woman, then, the community still reminded her of the one she grew up in and left all those years ago. Although some changes had occurred, they were not so numerous that she did not immediately fit in.

A fourth generation woman in her early 50s whom I interviewed had recently purchased an old farm house out in the Norse community. This woman had spent her childhood years in Bosque County, but had moved away. Although not yet retired, she and her husband decided to recapture a part of her childhood by moving back to the community:

I mean, I don't think I wake up everyday and think about [my ethnicity]. But I think it influences my decisions in life. It makes a difference on how I spend my time. My money has always been spent towards things like that. Because, obviously, I had to save to make trips over to Norway and stuff.

Even our decision to move – to sell what's really a lovely home here [in Waco] for an old farmhouse in Bosque County, I think it's because there's a part of me that really wants to go back to that. So it, it's even influenced the fact that I'm going to look at an hour commute to work everyday, because there's going to put me back in a spot that I want to be. Well, I'm trying to look at it positively. You know, I'm trying to think – you know, it will give me a good time to think about things. I can listen to tapes on the CD player. I can make phone calls. I can do a lot of stuff in that hour. You know, I'm trying to look at it in a positive light. And I don't have to work a whole lot – if I had 20 more years to work, it would be tough. But I'm not. I'm getting closer to retirement, so I can probably deal with it.

But I don't think about being a Norwegian American everyday, but it colors a lot of big decisions in my life. (36, 2004, pp. 27-30)



When I spoke with this woman, she had just purchased her farmhouse. It was not one that had originally been in her family, but she really liked it and wanted to create a life for her husband and herself out in Norse. She also mentioned that she got her daughter's approval on the house before she bought it, because she said that when she and her husband are gone, they want the daughter to inherit it. This was an old tradition practiced in Norway, and for a while in the Norse community. Today, however, few families still own their ancestral farms. I did speak with a few people who were making the effort to keep the land in the family, but they were the exception to the rule.

Even though family farms are no longer being passed down, at least not like they used to be, people are still returning to the area. A fifth generation man in his late 60s commented on the recent influx of new people to the area:

As [people from Bosque County] moved off to Fort Worth and Dallas and Houston, and as they got older and retired, a lot of them came back to the old places or places close by. And now their children are coming back, and their children's children. So the strange thing about the ethnicity of this community, the depth and level of ethnicity, I think, is increasing, and the numbers of people [are] increasing. So this is a dynamic, growing, ethnic community today. And it's not a dying or a slowly forgotten ancestral-type thing. It's a growing, dynamic community. And it's got strong roots, strong traditions, and strong values. (20, 2004, p. 13)

As the previous woman's example illustrated, not everyone moving back to Norse is older and retired. Younger families are moving in because they see a quality of life there

that they cannot find anywhere else. With the injection of younger people, this gentleman sees a bright, ethnically-colored future for the community.

At one time, however, people were leaving the community. A fourth generation woman in her late 70s talked about the history of the area, and how people left, but in the end she felt positive about the community's future:

Since World War II everything changed in geographical terms as far as people living within the area. At one time people did not marry without the boundary, they married within, they more or less had a boundary and that, of course, changed. And I see people that left the area because they had to for working conditions – there just weren't enough opportunities here for people to stay and with my husband having a business here, he was able to stay, and we have made our home here all of our lives, but now we see other people coming back to Clifton, and they're wanting to be a part here once more. There are a lot of new people that are coming to this area, and some of the new people feel that we are on the cusp of really a major change here. (26, 2004, pp. 18-19)

Because this woman has lived in the community her whole life, she has seen people leave and then return as they got older. She also commented to me on how stagnant a small community can get, but that she does not feel that this community is falling victim to that fate.

More and more people are returning to Norse, Cranfills Gap, and Clifton. Some are retiring there, while others are moving with their families to live a simpler life. All the people I spoke to feel positive about families moving back or into the community, and

they hope that the younger generation can pick up the mantle of ethnicity when it becomes their turn to do so.

### *Inspiring Others*

Although Norwegians are credited with founding the Norse community, the southwestern part of Bosque County has always been inhabited with people from other ethnic groups as well. The most prominent of these groups is the Germans, who originally settled on the east side of the Bosque River.

The recent upsurge in interest in ethnic identity among the Norwegians has spilled over into other groups in the county, particularly the Germans. In recent years, they have formed their own society, and they now have their own Oktoberfest, complete with polka music and a bratwurst and sauerkraut community dinner. The Bosque Memorial Museum, although still primarily focused on the Norwegian history of the area, has also begun to include displays on the Germans and the other ethnic groups in the area as well. In addition, the Chamber of Commerce makes great efforts to insure that each group is represented in each other's festivities. For example, every year during the Christmas parade in Clifton, the German community is invited to have their own float, even though the parade is connected to the Norwegian Country Christmas Tour.

A non-Norwegian woman in her early 50s who plays an important role in the planning of the ethnic festivities of this area commented on the Germans' recent upsurge in interest in their ethnicity:

To give the Germans their day we started Oktoberfest last year [2003]. And so this is our second year to do that, and the Germans come out in full force, and they cook sausage and kraut and all that here in the downtown. And it was a good

success last year. We had a street fair all day and a little bit of music, and then that night the Chamber [of Commerce] did an authentic German dinner. We brought some of the Germans in, and they helped us cook sausage and kraut and all that. And we hired a polka band, and we had a blast. We had 300 tickets, and we sold out. Everybody had a really good time down at the Armory, so this year we're doing that again, but we've added more German entertainment during the day. We have three tour buses coming that we promoted; these buses have already been here and done the Norwegian thing. (34, 2004, pp. 4-5)

This woman was quite excited that the Germans were beginning to develop their presence within the community. She revealed to me that she hoped they would continue to assert themselves in such a way. A fourth generation Norwegian woman in her late 70s was also supportive of their efforts. She said, "the Germans have a German society now. And they have a church out at [Womack] that focuses on their heritage. But it just depends on them. The ball is in their court right now" (26, 2002, p. 6)

### *Genealogy*

Several people told me in the course of our interviews that the Norwegians' knowledge and passion about their history had inspired others to look into theirs. Traditionally, most Norwegian Americans are fairly interested in their genealogy, and many have family tree charts, family reunions books, and family history books researched and written by someone from that family ("AARP Meeting," 2006; "Genealogy Speaker Due," 2005; "Genealogy Topic," 2006).

A fourth generation woman in her early 60s explained how a non-Norwegian in her family was inspired to get involved with genealogy:

I have an aunt in [the Metroplex], and her husband was not Norwegian, even though he was from the Clifton area. Well, he became as much or more of a Norwegian than anybody. He just got so caught up in all of it, you know, it was just [his] kind of thing. He stud[ied] and did all the genealogy. (5, 2004, p. 15)

In this example, the man researched his wife's family's history and the Norwegian aspects of Bosque County, even though he himself was not a Norwegian. Another person to whom I spoke, an important figure in the community who is not Norwegian, related a similar story about a German woman getting involved with the Norwegian culture:

I [know] a German woman [at] church who's a real, you know – you have these pillars of the congregation – and she's one of those pillars. And she's German, married a Norwegian, and knows the history of the Norwegians better than any of the Norwegians. She really got into it. She really wanted to know more about it, and who they were, and I think it's like what we were talking about – that communication. They don't get out there and just say, "Here's what happened, here it is, this and this –" and so [this woman] came in and started doing all that research herself. (28, 2004, p. 3)

In this case as well, the woman was not Norwegian, but she was so immersed in that culture and so inspired by the Norwegians' enthusiasm, that she wanted to learn more about them. In her case, I am sure that having a Norwegian husband helped spur along her interest, but she seemed to embrace the Norwegian culture rather than the German one, which was her ethnic background.

A third generation Norwegian woman in her early 60s commented on how she inspired her husband in the same way:

I think he's proud that I am proud to be a Norwegian. His background – he didn't know very much about it. And when we married, I had all this information as far back as the 1600s, and he didn't have anything past his parents. And, in the meantime, with my interest in my heritage and what was passed down to me from my family being proud of their heritage, and the generations, and the names, and everything, and the little stories, my husband has gotten interested in genealogy. And he has almost completed an impossible task by use of the Internet and learning to find out who relatives are, searching on the Internet. He's done a pretty good job. He's gone back about four generations right now. But they were from – his family was from, like, Wales and Germany. But the records that, you know, were lost during the war in Germany can't be replaced. (9, 2004, pp. 18-19)

This woman had always known her family tree, and perhaps had taken it for granted, but that was something her husband had never had. Researching four generations by using little or no information, and having to work around missing records, were no small feats for someone who had never shown interest in his family tree before.

### *Historical Restoration*

The Norwegians of Norse have also inspired some others in the restoration and upkeep of old family farmhouses and the historical buildings or homesteads built by the original pioneers. While this is certainly not true in all cases – there are plenty of old buildings going to ruin in the back pastures of Norse – there are enough people pursuing this endeavor to ensure that not all historical buildings will be lost to time or disrepair.

One concern voiced by a few people with whom I spoke, and mentioned above in this section, is the passing down of the family farm. In Norway, and many other farming cultures, farms remained in the same family for many generations. Several interviewees told me that when they toured Norway, they found and visited the ancestral family farm, which, in many cases, had been passed down through the family for hundreds of years. While this practice is not as common as it once was, either here or in Norway, some interviewees expressed a desire to keep their land and home within the family.

I spoke to the widow of a fourth generation Norwegian man who had died the previous year. His great grandfather was one of the original immigrants to Bosque County, and this ancestor had built the original homestead, where this man and his wife lived. So, this man had been the fourth generation of this family to live in this home. His wife shared with me her husband's feelings about being connected to the original pioneers to the area:

He just really enjoyed knowing that his [great] grandparents had lived here, and he was real proud of the place. And he wanted to leave everything just a little bit better than when he found it. You know, like the upkeep on it. You are supposed to do that in life. You're supposed to try and leave everything a little, at least as good, and if you can, just in a little bit better shape than what you found it in when you got it. (25, 2002, p. 1)

His widow also revealed to me that they had made arrangements for the property to go to their children after she passed away. It was very important for them to keep the property in the same family.

Other people with whom I spoke talked about the new people moving into Bosque County and buying up large tracks of land. Most interviewees seemed optimistic about this development, because there had been several new land owners who had shown an interest in the Norwegian history of the area, and who were willing to help preserve the area's history. A third generation man in his mid-70s seemed positive about this development in the community:

Well, I think that the non-Norwegians that have bought the farms that have been traditionally in Norwegian families respect the heritage and take some pride in that heritage. Knowing that a piece of property has a tradition and a history is important to the current owners, even though they may not [have] owned it very long. Some owners may find more interest in that than others, but generally I think [they care]. (19, 2002, p. 22)

Another interviewee talked about helping a family research the history of their new home, which her grandparents had owned at one point. This fourth generation woman in her late 70s told about how interested they were in the house's history:

[This man] bought the house that my father was born in down here off Highway 219. He bought that house, and he asked me to do some research on the background. I had Dad help me. We did all the research that we could. From a personal point of view on that house over there, I would say that rather impressed me for him to find out what has been the personality of the house.

[So this family] bought my grandpa's house out in the Harmony community. And they moved it up to their property in Morgan. You know, the Metroplex people like acres [around] the house they own. And so they came and



spent some time with me getting information and pictures and data, because they wanted to restore the house as it was when Grandpa and Grandma lived there. (7, 2002, pp. 25-26)

Not everyone goes to the extent that this family did to restore an old house, but there are examples of that occurring in Norse right now with some of the older buildings. A few people did mention, on the other hand, that some new homeowners were changing the homes too radically, and that these changes were more for convenience or for recreation rather than for practicality or restoration. The primary concern, however, in either case, was whether or not the land owner kept up the property. No one wanted to see neglected land or run-down fence lines.

The ethnic identity of the Norwegian community in Norse is so strong and prevalent that it has inspired other groups and individuals to learn more about themselves. Even new people to the area seem to respect the history and want to help preserve it. The people with whom I spoke were very pleased about this and hoped that it would continue well into the future.

### ***Pride and Humility***

As seen in the preceding pages, the descendants of the Norwegian immigrants to Bosque County take great pride in their ethnic heritage. For these descendants, this heritage provides a unique identity, one which sets them apart from others. They admire the immigrants for their bravery, hard work, perseverance, and values, and thus the people of Norse strive to live their lives in the same manner and see themselves in the same light.

During our interviews, many people reflected on the importance of their ethnic identity. A fourth generation woman in her late 70s talked about her heritage and its corresponding values and their role in her life:

Oh, I don't dwell on [my ethnic identity]. I do think that it's an added blessing. I have a little sympathy for people who say, "Well, I'm Heinz 57 [a mix]." And I think, "Well, they're good Americans, too." But I think it's rather special when we know where our roots are. I'm not just a Heinz 57. I'm a Norwegian American. And there are not a great many in Texas anymore who are full-blooded Norwegians.

First of all, I am an American and grateful that I was planted in America. But I'm thankful for my Norwegian roots, because they gave to me a rich faith in God, a work ethic, integrity, honesty, morality, and fun – good, clean, wholesome fun. My people who came from Norway were hard working people who were also the main pillars of the church. They also believed in education. They were family people. They were just good, solid citizens, and I'm glad to have that kind of heritage. Moral, upright, Christian, hard working people. (7, 2004, pp. 3, 2; 7, 2002, pp. 4-5)

Other people also talked about the values they had observed in the community and in their families. A fourth generation woman in her early 50s talked about the similarities between Norwegian culture and the ethnic culture in Norse:

I think there's some traits or characteristics of Norwegians that I either like to think I see in my family, I guess, and maybe it's that – first of all, I think [the immigrants] were, like, brave people. Maybe that's part of the *Viking* [pagan

Norseman from the 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries] saga, you know, or something that they would take on things. But I think they were brave to even emigrate here. So I think they were, like, brave people.

I also think that they're very – they're not boisterous or loud. No, they're not. They're real – almost shy. They would never brag or boast. You don't see that very often. It's not part of that culture, I don't think. Even if they wanted to sell you something, they would say, "I don't think you would very interested in this, would you?" I mean, that's how they sell stuff. They're just not that way.

They also have a kind of – there's a real morality, I think. You know, church was real central to life. It seemed to me like it was. And so I like that part of it, too. I think there's a code of conduct of something, a morality. I think there's a – to me they all had nice manners. There wasn't a lot of meanness or anything. And, of course, to me being Norwegian and being Lutheran is real close together, too. So some of it's maybe a little spiritual, too. But I don't know how to draw the line in between them because they're kind of blurred. (36, 2004, pp. 22-24, 30)

This woman has been to Norway on a couple of occasions and has hosted Norwegian guests in her home in Texas. She noticed many similarities between the people she met in Norway and those that she knew from her own family or from Norse. In her opinion, many of the kinder and gentler characteristics that the Norwegian immigrants had brought over with them had remained in the Texas community to this day.

Another third generation woman in her mid-70s with whom I talked also recognized these traits, but had never connected them with her ethnic heritage. She explained how she figured out the relationship:

Well, I never have particularly thought about [the Norwegian influences in my life] until I – when the [winter] Olympics were in [*Lille*]hammer [Norway], I read the *USA Today* newspaper, and they were talking about some of the characteristics of the Norwegian people. And I thought, “Oh! That sounds like my family!” And I realized how much I had been influenced by the Norwegian culture. And I’ve been sort of noticing it since then. And I just thought all families were alike, but I’m finding that really they’re not, and that a lot of it is the Norwegian influence. (2, 2004, p. 3)

In this instance, this woman had just assumed that the way she was raised was typical for all families, but she found out later in life that her Norwegian heritage had greatly influenced the way in which she had been raised. She also commented on the kinder, gentler side of the Norwegians, and how they are very affectionate towards their children.

Many people talked with pride about their ethnic identity. A fourth generation woman in her late 70s talked about her admiration for the motherland and her respect for the early settlers to the area:

I think the [Norwegian] heritage is something I can feel proud of. There were so many Norwegians that emigrated to America, and when we have been with the Norwegians that live there now, in Norway, they are very complimentary about the immigration. They say that America inherited their best people. So, they always make us feel good, you know, when we’re around them. Because we feel

that we came from a strong heritage, and these [immigrants] had a lot of courage plus stamina to come over to America, and they were, you know, they were decision makers. (26, 2004, p. 1)

A fifth generation man in his mid-70s echoed a similar sentiment in his interview:

I think about the hardships and how in the world those people left Norway back in 1852 and not knowing what they were getting into. I just have a deep respect for my Norwegian ancestry and the things that they had to overcome in those early days of Bosque County.

I think it's important to keep our heritage, to remember our ancestry. And it just makes me feel good. I'm glad that I am a Norwegian American. Besides being an American first, I guess, I'm proud to be of Norwegian descent. I don't – I don't want to impose on people's privacy to the extent that I would be considered a boastful or a braggart about my Norwegian ancestry, so I'm probably not as open as some are. But I think by what I do and say [others] can recognize it. It is a source of pride in my life. (27, 2004, pp. 4-5, 7, 19)

This gentleman also touched upon a common theme that kept occurring during my interviews: humility. I found most Norwegian Texans to be extremely proud of their heritage, and many people were quite active in the Norwegian community in Norse, or even in Waco. On the other hand, however, this pride was tempered with a certain amount of unpretentiousness. People were eager to learn about their cultural heritage and share it with those who were interested, but no one wanted to come across as a “braggart” or as pushy. This humility was also present whenever the interviewees talked about the sacrifices and hard work of the immigrants and other family members. Many people

expressed a sense of awe at what some individuals went through, and what they had to endure.

Several people, when talking about their ethnicity, disclosed their feelings of patriotism as a part of their pride. A fifth generation man in his late 60s revealed his thoughts not only on pride and humility, but also on his patriotic feelings:

We never were taught that we were better than anybody else because we were Norwegian, or anything like that, but we were taught to be proud of our heritage. And you know, recently, it's just become clear to me that it's – the reason for this is the absolute amount of sacrifice and work that those [immigrants] did makes me proud to be a Norwegian. And it is important to me. It gives one a sense of belonging. A sense of roots. A sense of – I can tie onto something. Mentally, it's – I feel like if I didn't know, I would feel like a ship adrift. I would just have no bearings.

Let me just say being a Texan is very special. Being American is very special. Being Norwegian is very special. I think I've got the best of all worlds. I'm very proud to be an American. I've been all over the world two or three times, and I wouldn't live anywhere else. I wouldn't live anywhere else in America except Texas. And if I have to live in Texas, I might as well be Norwegian, because we're kind of a unique, unusual, small group.

[The immigrants] were all Norwegians first, and then Texans and Americans second, in the beginning. Then they became Texans and Americans and then Norwegians third. But proud Norwegians. (20, 2002, pp. 2, 1; 20, 2004, p. 3; 20, 2002, p. 24)

It is clear that this man sees himself as a Texan and an American, but one with strong Norwegian roots. This sentiment was repeated by several of my interviewees, who all expressed pride in their heritage and loyalty to not only Texas, but to the two countries straddling the Atlantic Ocean. In her interview with me, a third generation woman in her early 70s encapsulated the sentiments of most people in the community with regards to her ethnic identity:

Well, I'm a Norwegian Texan, is what I am. I belong to the Norwegian Society, and we make all those cookies and things that's hard to make. And we celebrate. We have a Society. And we haven't forgotten where we came from. We just, we never will. But as far as everything else, we're all Texans. We are. Same as you. (31, 2004, p. 2)

As witnessed above, the people of Norse see themselves as Americans or Texans first, and then as Norwegians. For them, it is the ideal mix, the best of both worlds.

An important person from the Norse community, a non-Norwegian, has worked with these people extensively and has come to understand their ethnicity as the defining mark of their identity:

But they have – I don't know if I can give you an example, even – it's so much like an underlying power that you don't even – I can't explain it. I really can't.

But [these Norwegians] are a force to be reckoned with. (28, 2004, p. 8)

This person sees the Norwegians' pride and the humility everyday, and recognizes these traits as the source of the immigrants' descendants' strength and tenacity. This individual also understands that these people's connection to their history, their churches, their families, and their community is what makes them who they are.

The Norwegian immigrants came to Texas to become Americans. Now, their American descendants are reclaiming their Norwegian heritage. Although this heritage was never completely lost, it experienced a considerable “thinning” over time. Today, people are putting the pieces of the ethnic puzzle back together again, and they are more and more defining who they are by this ethnicity. They see this heritage as a link to the past, and as a bridge to the future. They study their ancestors to learn more about themselves, and they preserve and communicate what they have learned. For the Norwegians of Norse, this ethnic identity is a source of pride and of humility, an expression of the public vs. private in the context of the greater American landscape.

### **Summary**

In this chapter I have explored how the descendants of the original Norwegian immigrants to Bosque County, Texas experience their ethnicity, and what meanings they draw from those experiences. In the First Generation Immigrant Identity section, I discussed how the first immigrants lived their ethnicity, noting their desire to become American but living with many of their old world customs. In the Second Generation Immigrant Identity section, I addressed the changes the Norwegian community was experiencing as it made the transition to an American one, focusing on language use, education, and marriage outside the group. And in the Third Generation Immigrant Identity section, I found that the people living in Norse now are reclaiming their ethnic heritage with an eye to pass it down to future generations, and that the ways in which they celebrate their ethnicity are the very means by which they construct and communicate it. In Chapter Six I discuss these communication patterns and relate them to the ethnic identity of the people of Norse, Texas.



**CHAPTER SIX****“BEHIND THE SCENES ETHNICITY:”****COMMUNICATING NORWEGIAN HERITAGE IN NORSE, TEXAS****Introduction**

Identity is formed when individuals align themselves with particular social structures associated with ethnicity and then communicate ideas about who they are to others. In this way, identity is continually being constructed and negotiated (Abrams et al., 2002; Collier, 1997; Hecht et al., 2003; Lie, 2003; Martin, 1997; Spivey, 1997; Wood, 1997). This type of constructed identity is symbolic and is centered around a set of cultural forms and symbols, which, in turn, help distinguish one ethnic group from another (Abrams et al., 2002; Ellis, 1999; Lie, 2003). In fact, this identity communicates uniqueness and solidarity to the outside world (Lie, 2003; Martin, 1997). Social behaviors, such as celebrations, rituals, and customs, can also be viewed as an enactment of ethnic identity (Ellis, 1999; Hecht et al., 2003).

Three goals of this project were to describe how the ethnicity of the people of Norse, Texas is communicatively constructed and maintained (RQ2), to explain how the relationship between ethnic identity and communication contribute to the creation of shared meanings within the community (RQ3), and to investigate how the people of Norse use language and communication to validate their identity (RQ5). In Chapter Three I reviewed the literature to better understand how humans behave as agentic social actors in the creation of their own reality or worldview. My research findings corresponded to that research. The people of Norse, Texas construct and interpret their

meanings and realities through interactions with others within particular contexts. In this way, ethnicity and relationships with others can be understood through communicative processes. In this chapter, I discuss the communication patterns which construct and communicate the ethnicity of the people of Norse, Texas. In addition, I work with these agentive social actors to reveal the meanings of their communication as they understand them.

### **Family Communication**

During my interviews with the people of Bosque County, I asked them several questions about what kinds of topics were discussed within their families. Since this project is about how these individuals define and experience ethnic identity through communicative practices, I focused on the ways families passed on their ethnic heritage. I wanted to know what these interviewees' families had told them about Norway, the immigration experience, the early pioneers to the area, and their families' genealogies and histories. I also asked them about what their extended family and ancestors taught them about their ethnic heritage. Asking my interviewees about what was directly said in their families seemed logical to me, and I expected to get a flood of information on all the above topics.

I was wrong. I was continually surprised as I kept hearing people tell me that they really did not talk about these things in their homes when they were growing up. What little had been said was said casually, in passing. These families just did not talk about the past, it seems. With the strong ethnicity in the area, and with people being so knowledgeable about their backgrounds, I expected a much different response.

A third generation woman in her mid-70s had her own theory about why so little was said about the past. She said, “I think they wanted to be Americans, Texans. And you didn’t hear a lot about the old ways and being from Norway. They put that behind them” (2, 2004, p. 6). A fourth generation woman in her mid-80s seemed to think the lack of information was due to being too busy. She commented, “You know, we never was around [my grandparents] hardly at all. Too much farm work. And you know, it really just wasn’t – we didn’t visit like we’d like to do that” (18, 2004, p. 8). Based on these two women’s comments, and many similar others not listed here, the families in Bosque County were too concerned with becoming American and working on their farms to delve too deeply into their families’ past histories.

A few other interviewees postulated that their family members did not talk about the past because they were already too far removed from the original immigrants to care. A third generation man in his early 80s mentioned this distance between the generations in his interview:

I didn’t hear an awful lot about [the original settlers], except that it was Mother’s great grandparents – no, Mother’s grandparents that were migrants. And I did not hear a whole lot about that, because they would – they were – Mother’s side was second generation, and I didn’t hear a whole lot on that side. (1, 2004, p. 29)

A fourth generation woman in her late 70s also commented on the differences between the generations:

Well, we didn’t talk much about the early days because they were second generation. Actually, they were third generation. So we just didn’t dwell much on the old times. People were interested in being strong Americans. They didn’t

talk a whole lot about the old country. They were concerned about doing well in this country. They were appreciative of their roots, but we just – you know, they were concerned about integrating into the culture of America. I think this is pretty well typical of most ethnic groups – I can think of one or two exceptions. It usually takes a generation or two or three for people to get excited about tracing their ancestry into the old country. (7, 2004, pp. 6-7, 5)

For these two individuals, the generation gap, so to speak, was the reason why family histories and stories were not passed down. The first couple of generations of immigrants to the area were Norwegian, of course, but their goal was to become Americans. They were not ashamed of their heritage, but they wanted to change the course of their future. In addition, they were far too occupied with establishing a community here to bother with the “old times.” Since they took their ethnicity for granted, it was never communicated or shared with future generations. Later generations, however, who had experienced a renewed interest in their heritage, found this information lacking. They had to learn about their families’ histories and the history of the immigrants later in life.

Many people with whom I spoke mentioned this phenomenon. They all said that since they did not hear any stories from their extended family members, then they themselves had to seek out the information as adults. A fourth generation man in his late 80s commented on his experience:

Really, I don’t remember them saying a whole lot about, you know, the early days over here. Mostly what I know now is what I’ve gathered from different books and stuff that I’ve read. Of course, every once in a while they mentioned some

incident that might have happened, like the olden days and being captured by the Indians. (12, 2004, p. 31)

This gentleman explained that he was responsible for learning about the history of Bosque County and his family, although he did mention one story which had been told to him. It is a true story about a young Norwegian boy from Bosque County who was captured by the Comanches and held hostage for three months. It is a very well known story in the community; the story is available in book form and is sold through the local museum (Myers, 1999; Nystel, 1888/1994; PMCI, 1982l). It is entirely possible that this nugget of folk lore was passed down by his family, but it is also possible that he read the story himself later in his life (or both).

A fourth generation woman in her early 50s talked about her experiences as a child overhearing the adults and also as a adult herself learning about her family:

I heard about some things, but it seemed like, it seemed like I found out more later, when I was like an adult and delved into it myself. It seems like they didn't talk that much about it. They were – hmm, what did they talk about exactly? More like little customs and things and some things about family. And we would – I could overhear conversations because adults would talk about family [members] a lot. But like, children just overhear everything.

So most of the things I learned I kind of overheard all these things. I don't think they ever just sat down and said, "Well, now let me tell you about," you know, "Great Grandpa John," or something. It wasn't ever like that. It seemed like I always heard them talking about it, but it was always like I was overhearing

the conversation. And then later as an adult, I sort of dug into it myself trying

to figure out who was who and how they were all related. (36, 2004, pp. 37-38)

Although this woman did hear her family talking about other family members, she never had the opportunity to hear stories about the immigrants' experience or her family's history. The things she did learn she did so by overhearing adult conversations, so even that information was sketchy at best.

Another gentleman shared with me his frustration about not tapping his older relatives as sources of information. This fifth generation man in his mid-70s reminisced about the part of Norway from which his family emigrated, the old family homestead, and about the founding of the Norse community:

When I was young, I don't remember my other great aunts and uncles talking a lot about *Løten* [Norway] – you know, I did – I remember seeing in the history [book] that that was the area that [my ancestors] came from, and so I then eventually found out exactly where it was. But [my family] didn't talk much about that.

Well, you know, actually, when I was really young, I didn't – we used to visit my uncle, who was my great uncle, who lived on the [ancestral] farm where the original [immigrants'] house is. He was the last [family member] to live on that farm. And I remember seeing the old rock building out there. By that time, it was used as a hay barn. But they didn't talk a lot about the ancestry. And so I didn't really learn a great deal about my Norwegian ancestry until, you know, in adult life. I didn't learn a lot from them. Most of it came from written history and things that I've heard and been able to discover on my own.

No, [my great aunts and uncles] didn't talk about [the original pioneers]. They – of course, I wasn't very old when most of them died, so I didn't have the benefit – I wish now I had visited more with [them]. I wish I had inquired and been a little more inquisitive and interested at that point in my life to have gotten more of the story from them. But by the time I became an adult and became more and more interested in my ancestry, they were all gone, so I didn't get a lot of personal input from my great aunts and uncles. (27, 2004, pp. 41, 14-15)

In his words, this man echoed what many of my interviewees said: that they regretted not seeking this information out earlier. The people to whom they could have gone for the information had all passed away, so as a result, my interviewees resorted to getting their information from books, and in some cases, from other members of the community. Most people with whom I spoke, however, also mentioned that when one is young, s/he does not usually express an interest in these topics, so the situation is understandable from that perspective.

Some people with whom I spoke even expressed frustration that they had not learned more about the community while in school. They could not believe that the schools would not focus more on the rich ethnic heritage of the area. When asked about Cleng Peerson, the father of Norwegian immigration to America, who is buried at Our Savior's Lutheran Church, a third generation man in his early 70s said:

Actually, I didn't know much about Cleng until I [went] to the museum, because, you know, growing up here that was not, that was not important to us. I mean,

growing up here, there was this person named Cleng, but you know, we didn't care about that. (16, 2004, p. 21)

Another gentleman, a prominent non-Norwegian in the community, who is in his early 50s, echoed the previous man's statement:

Part of [my rekindled interest in Cleng Peerson] was the visit by the king of Norway. Of course, I was aware of Cleng even before then. I wish they taught more about Norwegian history in school. Well, when I was little I wish they would have [taught that] when I was in school here. As a student, I didn't know anything about him. I couldn't tell you his name. And you know, that's a shame. And they don't teach it now. You could probably ask half the students in town who Cleng Peerson is, and they wouldn't be able to tell you.

Well, [the schools are] doing more [ethnic activities] now. They're taking more fieldtrips downtown, and they're going to the museums. So, they're learning more that way. And of course, the museum has a camp every year, every summer. And they teach the kids about some of the historical elements of people that settled here. They go through the process of making cornhusk dolls and [threshing] wheat, or – I don't know what they do. They do all kinds of little things that pertain – they churn butter, I think. [L: Is that more pioneer-focused, or kind of the Norwegian angle?] Well, a little bit of both. It's pioneer, but it's also Norwegian. The same thing. (24, 2004, pp. 16-17)

Although this gentleman did not learn a lot of the area's history while he was in school, he did acknowledge that today the schools and the museum seemed to be getting better about educating the students about local history ("Bosque Museum Pioneer Day," 2005a,



2005b; “Local Youths Learn,” 2005; “‘Pioneer Days’ Proves,” 2005). This man added that he would like to see the schools continue what they are doing and also add more activities to their curriculum. He further suggested that the other ethnic groups of the area could also be included, especially the Germans.

A couple of women also commented on the local schools, but their main concern was in language instruction. Worried that Norwegian was no longer spoken in the community, they felt that the schools should pick up the mantle and begin teaching the language to the children. A fifth generation woman in her late 80s had this to say about the issue:

Well, what aggravates me is that they teach Spanish here. Why couldn't we have had – we [Norwegians] didn't demand [Norwegian language instruction] like they do. I would love to learn [Norwegian] now, but as a child I didn't care a thing about [that]. (32, 2004, p. 15)

Another woman spoke about her growing up and learning English instead of Norwegian. This third generation woman in her early 70s said:

We [kids] all had to [speak English] – didn't learn Norwegian. Biggest part of us, don't know how to talk [Norwegian]. [L: Do you wish you could?] Yeah. I think [Grandpa] did us a disfavor there, because see, the more languages we know, the better off we are. So, what are we going to learn – Spanish? Well, see, it's not a bad idea to learn German and everything else, you know. But I don't think he should have done that. I think he should have taught us. Now some of the families around here may have taught their children. And [the Norwegian

Society] did have language classes in Dallas, but I didn't learn anything out of that! It takes a long time. (31, 2004, pp. 11-12)

Clearly, this woman wishes she had learned the language as a young girl. She even took Norwegian language classes as an adult to see if she could learn some. She felt that the kids today could learn it in school, and then they would not have to struggle to learn it later as adults.

The people with whom I spoke did not remember their families truly discussing or reminiscing about the "good ol' days." By the time my interviewees were coming along, their families were too far removed from the original pioneers and their ways of life. These families were American, so they did not dwell on the past. Although a few stories or anecdotes were probably shared, most were learned later as my interviewees got older and became more interested in their heritage. They sought out the information in local history books, family trees, and from other members of the community.

### **Local Lore**

In researching their heritage, most of my interviewees started with their families. They had family trees made, and they learned about their families' lives both in Norway and also in Texas. If they were lucky, some family ancestor had already compiled some family information in the form of family trees and a write-up of the family's history. Many of my interviewees had such materials in their possession, which suggests to me that the Norwegians of Bosque County, like their counterparts in Norway, were good record-keepers and wanted to document all pertinent family information. With their high literacy rates and emphasis placed on education, it is also no surprise that some people went to the lengths to record such events. Brown, L. H. (n.d., 1983), Edgar (n.d., 1996),

and Family Tree Committee (1996) are a few examples of such records from one side of my own family.

Many people with whom I spoke also took advantage of the many history books written about the early history of Bosque County. I list several examples here, including some of the newer publications: Aars (2003), Beck (1964), BMM (2003), Bosque County History Book Committee [BCHBC] (1985), Bronstad (1933/2004), Brown, D. A. (1974), Clausen (1976), Colwick (2000), Cureton and Cureton (2000), Finstad (1996), Hauge (1982), Hoel (1974), Institute of Texan Cultures (1985), Jenson (1972), Johnson (1962), Nystel (1888/1994), OSLC (1969a, 2004), OSLCW (1960, 1990, 2000), Pierson, O. E. (1947/1979), Pool (1964), Radde (1976), Reiersen (1844/1981), Roemer (1849/1995), Rystad (1967), Tindall (2003), and Trinity Lutheran Church (2002).

This research, combined with the few stories passed down by older relatives, yielded an interesting array of local lore, or stories, about the community and the people living there. Some were specific to a particular family, while others had more to do with the early days of the settlement. In either case, these anecdotes reveal the interests and values of those passing them on, and they help construct the identity of the people living in this ethnic community. A few examples are highlighted in this section of my dissertation.

### ***Immigration Stories***

According to my interviewees, not many families talked openly about the immigration experience. A few people with whom I spoke, however, did have some compelling stories to tell about their families' struggles to make it to the new world. A

fourth generation woman in her early 50s told me this story about her great grandparents' journey to America:

When my great grandmother came over, they had two small children. And Grandfather came first. Great Grandfather came first. He'd get things arranged. And then he goes and sends for her, and she comes with her two children. But on the ship, [the two children] get sick and die. They die. But they're close to the shore. They can see land. They're not that far away. So she goes to the captain, and she goes like this [pretends to rock a baby back and forth in folded arms] and shakes her head "no" to the water, because they would put bodies overboard.

And [the captain] said – he feels sorry for her, and he sees they're close. So he just has the children wrapped up. So when she gets off the dock, [her husband's] there to meet her, and she has to tell him the children are dead, and here they are. And they buried them in Galveston [Texas]. So then – I always heard this story, and I always thought it was real sad.

And they did have one more child, and that was my grandmother. But that was all. That was all there ever was. But I always thought that was a sad story. And then one day I found an old picture in some old pictures, and it was a man in a uniform. And it was [the] uniform of the – a northern [Union] uniform. But see, this is right after the Civil War, like [18]65 to [18]68.

The Union troops occupied Texas, you know, to restore order, or whatever. So it was a Union soldier. And he wrote on the back in pencil – in all these years, the pencil mark had never gone away. And it says, "Do what you can for these poor people. They had two children die yesterday. They have a letter

and a map, which will explain their route.” And he signed it. And his last name was Norton. And he put, “Bryan, Texas.”

So there was an outpost in Bryan. So I guess from Galveston – then they were supposed to take this card with this picture – it was like a calling card with his picture on the front. And then they would show it to the next people or the next stop, and then they would read it in English and try to help them. You know, he gave them the card to get help at the next place that they went, because they were trying to make their way to Bosque County.

And I found [this card] in my great grandparents’ attic, this picture that was really like a calling card, but it had his photograph on it. And I had it framed between two pieces of glass so I could read the back. Because I thought – you know, my mother had always told me that story, but, you know, it sort of got to have a sort of a fairy tale effect after a while. I was thinking, “I don’t know if that really happened like exactly how she told it.” But then when I found the card, then I knew that it really – yeah, I guess it did.

He’s clearly a – he’s clearly in a Union uniform. I could research enough to figure that out. And he signs his name and puts “Bryan, Texas” underneath it. But where he met up with them – was it at the docks in Galveston or where? – I don’t know. But somehow or another he learned their story. He writes this thing and gives it to them, and then they can take it to the next place and – maybe an Army outpost or something – and present it. And then people read it. Because it says, “Do what you can for these poor people. They had two children die

yesterday. They have a letter and a map, which will explain their route” is what it says on the back. It’s really neat.

But that’s the kind of hardships you’re talking about, to suffer that voyage over. And then they never knew when the ship was going to arrive. You know, like [my great grandfather] would have to go to Galveston and wait around for a few days, because the ship might come Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and maybe even next week, you know? And then when it did arrive, he finds out he has no family anymore – no children, just her. And then eventually they did have one more child, my grandmother, but that was all. (36, 2004, pp. 16-20)

Of all the stories that were related to me in all the interviews that I conducted, this one had the most impact. As she was telling me the story, this woman seemed very touched. She spoke with respect and admiration about her great grandparents, and I had the sense that she ached for their loss, even 130 years after the fact. I have to admit that I felt a bit choked up myself, and I had to fight back the urge to cry or get emotional. I am not sure if the woman telling me the story was feeling exactly the same way, but I could tell she was moved by the story as well. We both agreed that any immigrant who braved the Atlantic Ocean in a small boat to make a better life for her/himself was a very brave individual indeed. We both spoke about the trials and tribulations that many immigrants faced, and how they had to be strong, tough, and tenacious to make it through the journey and to start their new lives here.

Another woman reflected on her family’s immigration experience. While this quote does not represent a specific story that was passed down to her, it does reflect what

many other interviewees said when they were talking to me. Most of the people with whom I spoke mentioned the hard work and sacrifice made by these early immigrants, and how rough the whole experience must have been on them. This third generation woman in her early 60s explained how her family's immigration affected her on her latest trip to Norway:

I went back to Norway a couple of years ago and stayed with my family. And the farm was still in the family's name, and they were still living on it. And this is like – the family left in the 1880s on [one] side, and there were five children of the six who came to [Texas]. And as I [was] walking down the same roads, it looked the same as it did in the 1880s. And I was forced to think of how hard it was to see your five children walking behind your wagon with all their possessions for the new world in a trunk with their name on it, and the father driving the wagon and thinking about [how] he would never see his kids again. But he was going to [*Oslo*] to put his children on a boat to come to America so they could have a better life. And I was just thinking how horrible that must have been. But he never saw them again.

In fact, one child wrote back and said – [the father and his wife] had a baby about two years old. That's why they didn't come at the time. It was too hard of a trip to take a baby, so they were going to emigrate later. But the children wrote back and said, "Dad, don't come to America. It's just too hard for you and Mom and the baby. Too hard and too hot, too much work." (9, 2004, pp. 20-21)

Like the woman above, this lady spoke with admiration about her ancestors and the sacrifices they made to travel to the new world. Being a mother herself, she was moved when she walked down the very road her ancestors took to leave the country. She also spoke about the hardships families endured, both in Norway and in America, and she seemed humbled by what they had to go through just to make ends meet.

This sentiment was a commonly-expressed one when I spoke with other interviewees about the early immigrants to Bosque County. All of the people with whom I spoke admired these qualities in the early immigrants, and my interviewees attributed these qualities to the harsh living conditions in Norway. For them, stories like these reinforced the notion that the Norwegian immigrants were persevering and hardy people, and that these traits had somehow survived in their descendants. An important person in the community, a non-Norwegian man in his early 50s, saw these qualities in his Norwegian friends in Bosque County:

I'm going to say, I'm going to put it in one word, they are very stoic people. And that the only way I can put that – they are very stoic. I think they are very loving, caring people, but their stoicism is amazing to me. You know, for instance, when I talk about stoicism in the terms of they look at hard work as being an attribute – it's just something you've got to do – and they feel bad if they don't work hard, like they are "less than." (30, 2004, p. 6)

This gentleman, although not Norwegian, sees these traits as an integral part of the Norwegians in central Texas. He understands that these traits are carry-overs from the immigrants, and that his friends define themselves by linking themselves to the past. The



hardships endured by the immigrants give today's Bosque County Norwegians the strength and tenacity they need.

*Reasons for Choosing Texas*

Another recurring theme from my interviews revolved around the reason why the Norwegians chose to settle in central Texas. I heard over and over again, from several different people, that the Norwegian immigrants chose Bosque County as the place for their settlement because the area reminded them of Norway (Myers, 1999). The rolling hills, wooded areas, and running water all convinced the Norwegians that they could have a successful settlement in Bosque County. Many of my interviewees who had traveled to Norway saw the resemblance, while others did not. A fourth generation woman in her late seventies spoke about this issue in our interview:

[The Norwegians] came thinking they would live on the land, but they, see, had run into fever over in east Texas, and it was hot and muggy, and they didn't like that. And when they heard there was a better place over in Bosque County, and they came over here, and they saw these hills and valleys and this running water, because the streams had more water then. And they didn't have all these cedar trees then. They thought, "Hey! This is for us. It looks like little Norway."

Because, see, one of my friends who's traveled around the world was here, and she said, "Why did they settle here?," and I said, "They liked it because it reminded them of home." And she said, "Oh, this is nothing like Norway." And I thought, "Oh! Who are you to tell me? All my life I've heard that they liked it because of the hills and valleys and streams." And she said, "Well, maybe on the western side [of Norway]." I was thinking of the area, and I said, "Yeah, they're

from the western coast.” And they really, you know, [thought that] Texas was flat. Here we have these hills and valleys and these streams of running water for the cattle. They were really thrilled. (7, 2002, p. 14)

Another fourth generation woman, this one in her early 50s, told a similar story:

Well, [the landscape’s] probably changing a lot from the way it was. But they had real rolling hills, which I had heard that that reminded them of home. But then we took some Norwegians out there, and we said, “Do you think this looks like Norway?,” and they just shook their head “no.” They didn’t think it did. But, you know, it makes me wonder, “Well, why did I hear that all my life?”

But then we went to *Løten*, [and] I thought it did look like that. And my two cousins said they thought it looks like that, too. Because it kind of has some rolling hills. And it did sort of look like that to us. Not all of Norway is mountains. (36, 2004, p. 61)

In both instances, these women asked friends who were either Norwegian or who had traveled to Norway what they thought of the landscape in Bosque County. In both cases, no one thought there was much similarity. It is interesting to note that the first woman was referring to western Norway, while the second was talking about the eastern part of the country, but that they both felt that there was some similarity with Bosque County. They even seemed to be annoyed that their assumptions about the similarities had been challenged.

The immigrants who came to Bosque County were from different areas of Norway, so I am not surprised that these women are using the same story to discuss two different areas of the country. My paternal grandfather’s side of the family is from

southern Norway, while my paternal grandmother's side is from eastern side of the country, for example. As the second woman said, not all of Norway is mountains, so there are many areas that could bear a resemblance to Bosque County.

A fifth generation woman in her early 70s, aware of the "controversy" surrounding this issue, made a joke about the Norwegians choosing to settle in Bosque County:

I'm glad they came here, you know, because they went to Brownsboro [Texas] first. I know people used to always ask my grandfather why the Norwegians settled here. And he'd always say, "Well, you know, it just looked a little like Norway." Well, it doesn't look very much like Norway, but I guess it looks more like it than east Texas, but. And I've always thought that was funny, you know – [on National Public Radio's] *Prairie Home Companion*, [Garrison Keillor] has that classic skit where he talks about [how] the Germans came to that town because they lost their way and were too proud to admit it and insisted that that was where they were going all along. And the [Bosque County] Norwegians forgot why they left Norway and said, "Oh, this looks like Norway, let's stop here!" [Laughs.] (4, 2002, p. 3)

This woman later admitted to me that Bosque County does look like certain parts of Norway, and she said she could understand why the Norwegians chose to settle there. One has to stretch her/his mind to see some of the similarities, though, which mainly occur in the rolling green pastures and groves of trees. The mountainous and coastal areas of Norway are vastly different than central Texas, of course, but the Norwegian immigrants recognized good arable land when they saw it.

Many of the people whom I interviewed told me this story, that the Norwegians who settled in Bosque County did so because the terrain reminded them so much of their homeland. While some people can see some resemblance between the two countries, others cannot. Even when one takes into consideration all the changes that have occurred in the terrain since the 1850s, such as the overgrowth of cedar trees, s/he may have a difficult time imagining the connection. Despite this fact, however, the people of Norse frequently tell this story, and in some cases, they seem to take offense when someone challenges the accuracy of it. The folks in Bosque County take pride in their *Norge i Texas* (Norway in Texas), and they see it as an integral part of their ethnic identity. By viewing their community in such a way, they have, by default, defined themselves as Norwegian, no matter how dilute their bloodlines are, how far removed they are from the original immigrants, or how much the land resembles Norway. For them, Bosque County *is* their Norway.

### *Native American Stories*

Once the Norwegian immigrants arrived in central Texas, they had to carve a life out for themselves. They faced many difficulties and problems, not the least of which were disgruntled groups of Comanches trying to drive them out (Pierson, O. E., 1947/1979). Many of the people with whom I spoke mentioned altercations between the Norwegian immigrants and the Native Americans in the course of our interviews. Even though the Norwegians living in east Texas were suffering from poor water conditions, they hesitated to move to the Bosque County Norwegian settlement because of the threat of such encounters. A third generation man in his mid-70s explained this situation, and

talked about the most famous immigrant/Native American encounter in the area, mentioned above in this section:

The Bosque County settlement which was started in 1854 didn't grow rapidly at the beginning. And that's because Bosque County was on the frontier. And there was a big risk of Indian depredation. And there were periodic Indian raids into Bosque County that affected the Norwegian settlement. And so the east Texas Norwegians, while they would like to have enjoyed the healthful benefits of Bosque County, didn't want to face the risk of the Indians. And I think that restrained movement into Bosque County.

Then along came the Civil War, and the frontier expansion, which had been moving west at a steady pace, sort of came to a halt because the energies of the nation, of the state, were directed more toward the war effort than they were in settlement.

And the Indians became bolder, and, in fact, the frontier began to recede during the Civil War. The Indians became – because the Indians became bolder. Then that sort of culminated in 1867 when the Comanche Indians captured Ole Nystel, a 14 year old Norwegian boy in Bosque County and carried him off to Kansas where they kept him for three months and then released him. So he came back. But he was ransomed, actually, by Colonel Leavenworth, the Indian agent up there. And that's how he obtained his freedom. But that was the last Indian raid in Bosque County. (19, 2004, p. 8)

Several other people spoke of these Indian raids, relating how the settlers would grab what little money they had and run up the banks of the creeks until they hit the next

homestead to get some help. One woman spoke of a particular chase. This fourth generation woman in her late 60s told this story about Salve Knudson, a Norwegian immigrant who came to central Texas in a later wave of settlers:

They were afraid of the Indians. Have you heard [the] one about him putting red pepper in his water bottle? He was thinking that would kill the germs in the water, so he put [in] red pepper, and they encountered some Indians, because the Indians saw them drinking this bottle with red stuff in it, and they thought it was liquor. And so they were chasing him to get him, to get his liquor. Yeah, but I guess they outrun the Indians. That's the only encounter with Indians story I've heard. (14, 2004, pp. 2-3)

These raids, chases, and Ole Nystel's kidnapping (Myers, 1999; Nystel, 1888/1994; PMCI, 19821) terrified the immigrants. While the east Texas Norwegians did not seem to have as many problems with the native peoples there, the immigrants in Bosque County struggled to hold their own against the Comanches on a fairly regular basis. A non-Norwegian woman in her late 80s, the wife of a fourth generation man also in his late 80s, told about how the central Texas Norwegians defended themselves by building small "forts" on their properties. Although this quote is not a particular story about some local incident, it does illustrate the lengths to which the pioneers went to protect themselves against these raids:

They all had – I think all of these places have these little rock [buildings] – you know, where they just have – where it would shoot up, one door, and then it's all walls. And I guess they hid in there, probably, you know, to get away from the Indians, you know, and they couldn't get them. [The immigrants] could shoot

them, though, if they got too close. [The Norwegians] just had that little place in different places around [the building] where they could shoot out [at the Indians].

Mom and them's house – place down there had that. And the one where we lived had one of those, too. I've seen them so many places, you know? I guess that's where they went to when they had to – when they knew the Indians were coming through. They had some pretty close calls, I think, some of them did. (13, 2004, pp. 36-37)

In the above examples, we see how relations with the native peoples of central Texas affected the Norwegian immigrants. At the time of the first wave of immigration, 1854, Bosque County was on the edge of the American frontier. East Texas, already more settled than the central part of the state, reported far fewer incidents. These stories have great impact with the people of Norse today because in these anecdotes, they see the hardships of pioneer life, the growing pains of a young nation, and perseverance in the face of adversity in action. Once again, these stories reinforce the internal fortitude of the Norwegian immigrants and portray the settlers as *Vikings* conquering not only the American frontier, but the Texas frontier, the “wild west.” In a sense, these Norwegians were mavericks for their bravery, and they are now admired for that quality.

### *Civil War Stories*

In addition to Native Americans, the Civil War was also a common topic through many of my interviews. Several people with whom I spoke mentioned how the Norwegians were against slavery, and how they were also against the South seceding from the Union. Many Norwegians did fight for the South, however, but it was usually

because they thought they had to, or because they were more interested in the notion of states' rights. The Norwegians in Bosque County were fundamentally against the institution of slavery, for they believed in the equality of all men (Pierson, O. E., 1947/1979). A fourth generation woman in her late 70s told of the story of Frank Bean, an African American farmhand hired by one of the Norwegian families in the area:

Well, let's see. I told you the story about Frank Bean, didn't I? The one about him learning Norwegian? Well, you know, the Norwegians were very much opposed to slavery. But, you know that some of them fought in the Civil War because they thought [that they had to]. But Frank Bean got a job working [for] a Norwegian. [Frank] and his wife were impressed with the strange language, so they learned Norwegian, and Frank was quite fluent in Norwegian.

They were black. And so [his boss] would send [Frank] to go in his wagon down to the train station to pick up some people who were coming in from Norway. They used a hired hand, and he'd learned Norwegian, so he picked them up. And he was gracious, and he spoke with them, and so they got loaded in the wagon. They got started back to the Norse area, and the Norwegian father of the family said, "Tell me, why is it you're so dark?" [Frank replied,] "Oh, it's this Texas sun. When you've been here as long as I have, you'll be every bit as dark as I am!"

Oh, the Norwegians love to tell that story! They thought that was so funny. (7, 2002, pp. 38-39)

In this story, the new arrivals are surprised to see a black man who can speak Norwegian. The woman who related this story to me seemed to think that the Norwegians were not



even aware that he was black, since they had never seen a black person before in Norway. To me, this story highlights not only the wonderful sense of humor of the Norwegians, but also their notions of equality and dignity. They accepted Frank and his family in their community, and they did not make race an issue.

I heard other stories about the Civil War. A few people told me about Jens Jenson, the son of one of the first pioneers to the area (also named Jens Jenson), and how the war affected him. A fifth generation woman in her early 70s related the story this way:

Well, I don't know about – I don't have any stories about the immigration. I have some interesting stories about Jens Jenson. And one of them was that he did fight in the [Civil] War, and when he came back, he was very disillusioned with the whole thing, and, of course, didn't believe in slavery anyway. He buried his rifle on his father's property, and a few years ago, [a man] was building a new fence and dug up a rifle from that period, that era. And he gave it to the museum in Meridian [Texas]. I haven't gone there to see it, but anyway, that was kind of neat. (4, 2002, p. 14)

This story reflects how the Norwegians felt about the war, and it reveals the conflicts they must have felt during the time that they did serve. Wanting to be good Texans, and desiring to do their duty, many served. For them, this was a war about states' rights, if about anything at all. However, the war stood in direct opposition to many of their values, and they were more than happy to see the war end. I feel that this story has such an impact on the people of Norse today because it shows personal conviction in the face of larger societal obstacles. In other words, the Norwegians lived in a confederate state

which did rely upon slave labor, but they did not feel the same way about the war as many other Texans did. To me, this story is a prime example of how the Norwegians in Bosque County distinguished themselves from the other Texans by their quiet resistance to the war.

Another popular story which occurred at the time of the Civil War involves a young couple in love. In fact, this was the most commonly-mentioned story in all my interviews. A fourth generation man in his late 80s told the clearest version of this local legend:

When Chris Jenson had to go to the war during the Civil War, he would write letters to, I forget what her name was, this Pierson girl, and her daddy would intercept the letters and hide them so she didn't get them. And she wondered why she never heard from him. When he got home from the war, he was wondering why she never answered his letters. She said, "Well, I never got any letters from you." Come to find out her daddy had intercepted the letters and kept them. So they decided that they were going to elope and get married.

Well, I don't know really what the problem was. [Her daddy] Ole Pierson was sort of wealthy, I think. I don't know, maybe he had quite a bit of money when he came over here. See, he was in the mercantile business. After, I don't know, after he'd been here for a few years, I guess he went into a partnership with someone – I don't even remember who it was. So, I guess he was considered well off compared to the others. Maybe he didn't think Chris Jenson was good enough for [his daughter Petrine]. But Chris Jenson [and his wife], they had a big family.

I think it was about eight girls. And, of course, they only had one boy. (12, 2002, pp. 28-29)

The only detail this gentlemen left out of the story was that the girl's mother Anne Pierson helped the young couple elope. No one with whom I spoke seemed to know the real reason Ole Pierson did not want Petrine to marry Chris, but most speculated that it was a monetary issue. Jens Jenson, Chris' father, and Ole Pierson were friends and neighbors in Norway before they emigrated together to Texas, and in Norse, their homesteads bordered each others'. Because of that closeness, one would think that it would be natural for their children to marry each other. At any rate, this is a well-known and often-recited story in the community. The controversial issue of the Civil War, the hardships of pioneer life, and the romantic overtones all make this a compelling anecdote. In addition, this is a story about two of the original pioneer families marrying into each other, thus further solidifying the bonds of family and community. All that being said, the people of Norse enjoy a good love story!

### *Good Samaritan Stories*

Many of the stories related to me told about how the people in the Norse community would help each other. Since they were such a small group all alone out on the Texas prairie, they relied upon each other for their survival. A fourth generation woman in her late 70s told me this story about how a relative of hers almost lost the family fortune:

One time his father sent [my great grandfather] to Bosque County [from east Texas] on a horse with \$500 in gold coins. I guess they were having weather like we're having now – quite rainy – and the river was up high, and he thought, “How

in the world am I going to get across?,” because they didn’t have concrete bridges back then. Well, I guess he didn’t realize the horse was not a swimmer. And so, someway, somehow, he fell off the horse in the water and dropped that bag of gold coins. But he was able to catch onto a tree up above and hold onto that. And along came someone and helped him out. They were able to rescue the horse – it might have gone to the [river] bank by then. I don’t recall. I wasn’t there! And so [the good Samaritan] held the horse, and he got [Great] Grandpa out of the tree. And [this man] was a swimmer, fortunately, and he dived down in the water and got the bag of gold coins. Because [Great] Grandpa was up in a tree. He didn’t know what was going to happen to all that money and to him. But he was rescued, and the gold coins were rescued. I don’t imagine [the man] even took any gold coins. That was the pattern then – they helped each other. (7, 2004, pp. 5-6)

A fifth generation man in his late 60s also told about how the early settlers looked out for each other. In his example, he told how they would help each other travel a day’s journey until the travelers arrived at their destination:

Yeah, there were lots of stories about – well, “In the old days...” – that’s the way it always starts off. The original pioneers coming in, how they trekked across Texas with wagons. Several of them came up from Galveston in a wagon. They’d take horses, and the guy’d go with them. He wouldn’t sell them the horses, but he’d let them use them to drag their wagon so far. Then they’d get another guy to loan them his horses and go another 20 miles. And then another guy, and they patched it together until they got there. (20, 2004, p. 8)

Another man, a third generation fellow in his early 80s, talked about how a kind-hearted neighbor saved Christmas for his grandparents:

When they came here, they all depended upon one another. My *bestemor* and *bestefar* – it came Christmas Eve, and they didn't have anything to eat. There was a knock on their door, and there was [their neighbor] on a horse [with] a bag. He had killed a hog, had a side of pork meat for them, and gave it to them. Just like a blessing out of the darkness of night. (33, 2002, p. 16)

In all three above examples, we see how the early settlers looked after each other. They knew that their own survival depended upon the survival of others as well. While some of the good Samaritans in these stories were not in Bosque County, and may not have even been Norwegian, the stories still serve as examples of what values the Norwegian immigrants found important. In the first story, we are witness to the virtues of honesty and trust; in the second story, to the values of sharing and altruism; and in the third story, the principle of giving in times of need. In all three examples, we see the importance placed on helping one's neighbor, often with no discernable reward for oneself. For the contemporary descendants of these immigrants, these stories illustrate the Golden Rule in action: treat others as you yourself would like to be treated (Mt 7:12) (Harper Study Bible, 1980).

### ***What Do These Stories Reveal?***

In the above anecdotes, we see the stories that people remember about their history. These stories have meaning for the people of Norse because they communicate certain values about who they are as a people. Almost everyone with whom I spoke, even if they did not have a particular immigration story, talked about the bravery,

sacrifice, and hard work of the Norwegians who came to Texas in the mid-1850s, and they admired them for their courage.

Everyone seemed amazed that their predecessors could carve out a life for themselves in this new world, and many people admitted to me that they did not think they themselves could have done that. They spoke about the hardships of farming with simple tools, and of having to make or build everything that was needed. The women also talked about how much more complicated daily chores must have been, especially without the benefits of modern technology, and how much more time consuming cooking, cleaning, and laundering must have been for those pioneer women, especially those with such large families.

People also spoke about the external struggles faced by the Norwegians in their new country: encounters with the Native Americans and the Civil War. In both instances, the immigrants were forced to deal with situations they had little control over. The Indian raids terrified the Norwegians, and was a topic of great concern for them. In fact, these raids and their corresponding problems hindered further immigration into the area for a while. The Civil War was another issue altogether. Fundamentally opposed to slavery, the Norwegians served in the Confederate army out of a sense of duty. Many served as “home soldiers,” living on their farms and making needed supplies, such as saddles or nails, for the Confederate army. A few who did join the army eventually ducked out and deserted, a crime punishable by death. Fortunately, the number of Norwegians serving in the Confederate army was quite small, and the regiments from Texas did not see many battles.

Many people also talked about how people in the community would help each other in times of need, such as when someone's barn burned down, when a bull broke through his pen and ran off, or when a fence needed to be built. People were always willing to lend a hand, because they only had each other to rely upon. It was also part of their Christian duty to look after each other and to maintain the bonds within the community. Everyone seemed to understand that for the Norwegian immigrants, their move to Texas was an "all or nothing" venture. For them, failure was not an option; they had to succeed, and they had to succeed as a group.

The people with whom I spoke in my interviews greatly admired these immigrants for all the above reasons. While sacrifice, hard work, strength in adversity, and helpfulness are qualities that can be found in many ethnic immigrants' stories, the people of Norse see them as reinforcing the very aspects of themselves that they define as Norwegian: a strong work ethic, a resilient survival instinct, well-established social ethics, and Christian love. Bosque County Norwegians take pride in their ancestors for these qualities, and they work to cultivate them in themselves.

### **Naming as Communication**

Names are what make us human. They serve as markers of our heritage by showcasing the values of our particular culture, and they communicate information about ourselves and our culture. Names are also crucial to the formation of identity, which is then validated or invalidated through interaction with others. The communication of a name, then, is crucial in solidifying its meaning and corresponding identity.

For many Norwegian Americans, names have been both the cause of much frustration and a source of pride. Different naming practices, unusual spellings with

strange letters, and frequent name changes all make dealing with tracing family roots difficult if not impossible at times. In addition, some names are hard to pronounce, difficult to spell, and are troublesome to use here in America. On the other hand, having a name that is easily recognizable as Norwegian (or even Scandinavian) is a badge of honor for some individuals. For them, their name proclaims their heritage and carries with it the mythos of immigrant identity.

Because of the wealth of personal information revealed in the interviews regarding names, few quotes will appear in this section. Instead, I will discuss what was said and give fabricated examples to illustrate the examples used by the interviewees.

### ***The History of Norwegian Naming Practices***

Many people with whom I spoke in my interviews talked about family names, children's names, name changes, and the importance to identity that they play. Although most people with a Norwegian last name were all proud to have such a name, they also knew that their name had taken many other forms over the years. The fact that their family name was something entirely different as recent as 150 years ago did not diminish their affinity for that name nor its symbolism for them. They understood the reasons for all the changes, and they just chalked them up to the practicality of the Norwegians, a trait that they valued and admired.

To understand the complexity of the evolution of Norwegian names, a brief discussion on Norwegian naming practices is merited here. For centuries, Norwegians practiced patronymics, the act of naming an individual after her or his father. In this case, a person's last name would reveal who the father was, and what the sex of the child was. The father's first name became the surname, with either *-son* (or sometimes *-sen*)



or *-datter* attached as a suffix. For example, a man named Peter whose father's name was Lars would be called Peter Larson. If Lars' father was called Knut, then his name would be Lars Knutson. Conversely, a woman named Kristina whose father was named Ole would be called Kristina Olesdatter. This system worked well for small villages in isolated valleys where only one Lars or Knut or Ole lived, and everyone knew who that individual was (Bjørnstad, 2001c; Horlacher, 2001; Oldevoll, 1996). [It is important to note that the patronymic name was not a true surname as we know it, because it was not passed down from generation to generation. Most people think of it as a surname, and it will be treated here in that manner, but the reader should be aware that true surnames did not exist in Norway until the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, and even then, they were not widespread (Føllesdal, 2000; Horlacher, 2001.)]

In other instances, a person would adopt the name of the farm where s/he lived. Most farms were named after geographical features, which were descriptive, and they ended with prefixes such as *-stad* (homestead), *-land* (farm land, or "my" land), *-berg* (rock), *-rud* (clearing or pasture), *-dahl* (valley) (Haugen, 1953), *-stein* (stone), *-fjell* (mountain), *-haug* (hill), *-alm* (ash tree), *-bjørk* (birch tree), and *-eik* (oak tree) (Bjørnstad, 2001a). So if Kristina Olesdatter married a man and moved onto his farm, which was named Rogstad, then she would then become known as Kristina Olesdatter Rogstad. Again, for small villages in remote valleys, this system worked well (Solem, 2002). It is also important to note that when a woman married, her name did not change. Only if she and her family moved to a new farm would her farm surname be altered (Oldevoll, 1996).

In the above example, the farm name was attached after the patronymic name.

Rather than view this arrangement as a combination of two surnames, genealogists suggest thinking of traditional Norwegian names more as addresses. In other words, an individual's first name revealed her or his personal identity; the patronymic name told who her or his father was; and the place, or farm, name disclosed where the individual lived. In this way, a person's name linked her or him to a particular man, the father, and a specific piece of land, or farm (Borgos, 2002c; Føllesdal, 2000; Horlacher, 2001).

By the 1600s and 1700s, patronymic naming practices fell out of favor with people living in the larger Norwegian cities. During this time, families adopted a true surname, one which would be used by all members of the family and which would be passed down to all the children. When deciding on their family name, Norwegians could pick from the patronymic name with which they were born, the father's patronymic name, or another name, such as a place name. If a place, or farm, name was chosen, the family could pick the name of the last farm on which they lived, or the name of the farm from which they came originally. By 1860, the patronymic naming system had been all but phased out in Norway (Bjørnstad, 2001c; Borgos, 2002c; Haugen, 1976; Horlacher, 2001).

Given names also followed certain patterns in Norway. For example, the first son was named for the father's father, and the first daughter was named for the father's mother, and so on. As more children were born, they were named after the grandparents or aunts and uncles (Bjørnstad, 2001b; Føllesdal, 2000; Haugen, 1953; Horlacher, 2001; Solem, 2002). Names were also recycled within families. If a man's first wife died, then the first daughter with his second wife would have the first woman's name.

The same practice was applied if the husband died, and the wife remarried and had a son. If a father died before his son was baptized, the son would automatically be given his father's name. For a baby girl baptized after her father's death, the family chose a similar-sounding feminized name (Horlacher, 2001; Næseth, 1985). It was also customary to reuse the name of a child who had died, or to use the same name many times with several surviving children (Horlacher, 2001).

### *Name Use in Norse, Texas*

As seen from the examples above, Norwegians traditionally named themselves using a confusing and convoluted system. Although most immigrants who came to Texas were already living with a fixed, family name, they still experienced problems with their names. Spelling of Scandinavian names had always been problematical, both in Europe, where even among the Scandinavian countries spelling varied, and particularly in the United States, where people were not accustomed to the additional letters used in the Norwegian alphabet: *æ*, *ø*, and *å*. Letter combinations, such as *kj* and *fj*, were also not used in America. In addition, Norwegians usually did not use *c* and *ph* when spelling, instead preferring *k* and *f* (Borgos, 2002b; Solem, 2002). Additionally, there were often times more than one spelling for one name. The name Ann is the classic example. Norwegian records list several different spellings for the name, including Anne, Anna, and Ane, even for the same woman on different documents (Føllesdal, 2000). In addition, many female names were created out of male names, such as Oline from Ola (Borgos, 2002b; Næseth, 1985).

Early Norwegian immigrants found that most Americans had difficulty with their names because of the confusion surrounding patronymics, different spellings, and name

variants. Norwegian names were often times too long and too hard to spell, much less to pronounce. This is evident most clearly in the situations faced by many immigrants once they reached the American ports, whether they were at Ellis Island, in Galveston, or New Orleans. Immigration officials would write or spell what they could understand, thus changing or Americanizing the spelling. In other instances, they could not be bothered with the complicated names and just gave the families new ones. Some Norwegian families, experiencing frustration during the registration process, offered up simpler names themselves.

### *Surnames*

The vast majority of Norwegians who came to Texas in the middle of the nineteenth century all had fixed, family names which they had adopted in Norway. These names represented the family as a whole and were passed down to the children. When a woman married, she took her husband's last name, and the couple passed on this name to all of their children.

All of the people I interviewed seemed to think that their family name was already established when their ancestors arrived in Texas. No one with whom I spoke talked about patronymic names or about farm names still being used at the time of immigration. Although these fixed family names may have originally been patronymic or farm names, they were now being used as the permanent family surname.

Some people with whom I spoke talked about the problems their ancestors experienced with the spelling of their name. There seemed to be general confusion, both then and now, about the use of either *-son* or *-sen* at the end of a name. At times, different records showed different spellings. Some interviewees felt that one spelling

was more Swedish, and one more Norwegian or Danish, and even the consensus on which one was which flip-flopped depending on with whom I was speaking.

Another example involved the extra letters of the Norwegian alphabet. Most immigrants with one of these letters in their name would Americanize them in order to make their names easier to pronounce. A good example of this can be seen in the letter *å*, which was changed to *aa* and then even to a single *a* to accommodate American spellings.

One interviewee told me about a family member who picked a new name for his family at the immigration check-in, even though his family already had a fixed name when they arrived. The lines for registering new immigrants were organized by the letters of the alphabet, but the line for his family's last name was too long for this man's preference and patience. As a result, he stood in a much shorter line and changed the family name to match that letter. In the end, the man wound up using the name of an old farm where the family once lived, rather than the patronymic name they had chosen to be their family name in Norway.

Not all of the people with whom I spoke had Norwegian last names. Some individuals who were not 100% Norwegian, for example, may have inherited their name from the one grandparent who was not Norwegian, the paternal grandfather. So even though a particular person may have been three-quarters Norwegian, her/his surname reflected a different ancestry. In addition, a woman would "lose" her Norwegian surname, of course, if she married a non-Norwegian and took his name. Despite not having a Norwegian last name, however, the vast majority of these people said that they still identified strongly with their Norwegian heritage. Some said that it might be nice to

have a more Norwegian-sounding last name, but it was not that important to them.

They knew they were Norwegian and felt that they could express that through other means.

Many people with whom I spoke did have Norwegian surnames, and they took great pride in having an ethnic, albeit Americanized, name. It was a symbol of their heritage, and it helped them communicate who they were to others. Several of these people were direct descendants of the original 17 pioneers to the area, and these individuals were extremely proud of that fact, because not only were they descended from those early settlers, but also because the family name had continued for so long. One man said to me that he felt special because of his Norwegian roots, and that he was honored to carry on the name of one of the first families to the area. He also indicated to me that he felt a very deep sense of obligation to the memory of those people, and a sense of duty to behave in certain ways and to make sure the values of his ancestors were passed on. He felt intricately linked to the community and to the original pioneers because of his last name.

Because of the fluidity and short-term nature of the Norwegian surnames, most Norwegians, both here and in Norway, were not particularly attached to one surname or another. It was not until these names became established within a family did the people take great pride in them (Haugen, 1953).

*maiden names.* All of the women with whom I spoke took their husband's name after marriage. This was the case for women marrying Norwegians and for women marrying non-Norwegians. In all instances, these women identified themselves by using their first name with their husband's last name. I did notice, however, that upon meeting

these women for the first time, they would further identify themselves by adding their Norwegian maiden name between their given and married names. In fact, when someone would refer these women to me, an outsider to the community, s/he would also insert the woman's maiden name.

A third generation woman in her mid-70s explained how she employed the use of her maiden name in certain situations:

I had never really even thought about it. But down here, when I go places, well to funerals – you go to a lot of funerals down here – I usually sign [my name using my maiden name], because people know me [from the maiden name]. And they don't – [my last name] – you don't ever hear down here, and they don't know who [that] is. So that's the way I sign it. And if you want to bring out the Norwegian, if you're going to a Norwegian function, then I would use it. (2, 2004, p. 24)

Because this woman had lived away from the Norse community for a while, she chooses to identify herself with both her maiden name and married name. For her, it is a way to remind people of who she was growing up, and to tell them who she was now that she was married. It also communicates her Norwegian heritage and her history with the community, since her husband is not Norwegian and does not have a Norwegian surname.

Another woman with a non-Norwegian surname told me about the benefits of retaining one's maiden name, even if unofficially. She said that she and her family had gone to Norway for a visit, and in the *Oslo* airport, they had been stopped by customs to have their passports checked. The clerk spent a little time looking at each person's

paperwork and passport, as is the norm. However, when this woman presented her passport and I.D., complete with her Norwegian maiden name, he just waved her through without any fuss. She said that he saw her name, which is still quite common in Norway, and knew she was Norwegian. For him, that was all he needed to see.

It is also worth mentioning that for official functions in the community or in the churches, the women tend to identify themselves with their maiden names acting as middle names. It is more common in older documents to see women refer to themselves as “Mrs. John Smith,” for example. Today, these women are using their own first names, rather than their husbands’, their maiden names, and their married names to identify themselves in the community and to express their ethnic heritage.

For interactions within the community with people they know, these women drop the use of their maiden names. Several women told me that in their day-to-day business, they do not bother with the maiden name, because everyone with whom they interact knows who they are and what family they are from. They only use the maiden names when they meet someone new, when they are trying to help someone remember who they are, or when they are involved in some important activity within the community. Many women also advised me to consider not changing my name after marriage, or to adopt the practice of inserting my maiden name before my married one.

### *Given Names*

Most of the people with whom I spoke did not make a special effort to give their children Norwegian names. Most interviewees stated that they named their children “American” names, or names common in American society. Some children received Biblical names, while others received the name of someone their parents knew. Most of



the time, the parents chose a name they liked, regardless of the reason, and gave that name to their child.

In some cases, the parents named the child after someone in the family. Most of my interviewees were from Norwegian families, but the people they named their children for did not have traditional Norwegian names. Had these parents chosen a family member from two or three generations back, one would see more traditional Norwegian names, such as Ole, Knut, or Sigrid. For the most part, however, the chosen names were American. In some cases, the parents made an effort for the names to all start with the same letter, or to start with the same letter as another family member's name. Names from both sides of the family were included.

Middle names were treated differently by some families. Again, many of my interviewees said that they gave their children American middle names, or names that the parents liked for whatever reason. In many instances, however, I had interviewees reveal that while they had chosen an American first name for their children, they had picked out a more Norwegian name for the middle one. In most cases, this was not a traditional Norwegian name, per se, but rather a name that has a Norwegian variant. Some hypothetical examples include changing "Terje" to "Terry," and changing "Kari" to "Carrie." Many interviewees said that this name choice was a conscious one, one meant to show that they thought of themselves first as Americans, and secondly as Norwegians. In these cases, the first and middle names chosen for their children validated the identity of the parents and the children and communicated their values to others.

While most of my interviewees did not focus on Norwegian names for their children, several said to me that they see this trend becoming more common as their

children become parents. Many individuals said that their children had chosen to name their offspring Norwegian names to reflect their ethnic heritage and to try to recapture some of the family's history. This was true even for the interviewees' children who no longer lived in Bosque County. In some instances, it seems that the younger generations are trying to retain some of the ethnicity by creating an identity that ties into the past. Name use among these generations, then, is one of the means through which ethnicity is constructed and maintained.

### *Terms of Endearment*

Other people with whom I talked mentioned using Norwegian terms of endearment when addressing family members. This was most common in households where an older family member lived with the nuclear family in an extended family setup, or when a particular older family member was especially close to the family.

The most commonly used terms were *Bestemor* (Grandmother), *Bestefar* (Grandfather), and *Tante* (Aunt). Most of the time these words were used by themselves, although sometimes a name would be attached after them. One woman told me how her children called her mother "*Beste*," which is short, of course, for *Bestemor*. For them, it was their little link to their heritage, their "code" for the heritage their grandmother had passed down to them. Using the Norwegian word for grandmother allowed these children to experience and share a small part of their ethnic heritage and to glean meaning from that experience and sharing.

### ***"Ethnic" Pets***

Interestingly enough, the use of Norwegian names did not stop with children. Several of my interviewees indicated that they named their pets or even their livestock

with Norwegian names. Dogs were the most commonly mentioned animal to receive a Norwegian moniker. When I asked a fourth generation woman in her early 50s if her dog had a Norwegian name, she replied, “No, but I know people who’ve done stuff like that, like name their dog *Thor* [spelled *Tor* in Norwegian; ancient Norse thunder-god] or something like that” (36, 2004, p. 73). Other people did admit to naming their dogs, either past or present, Norwegian names such as *Bjørn* (Bear) or *Tyr* (ancient Norse god of war). It seems appropriate that even in Norwegian, dogs are given the strong and powerful names, or the names of gods!

One fifth generation man in his late 60s told me about his cat, and how it received its Norwegian name:

Yeah, we had a cat named *Uff da* for years and years and years. Well, the story is that when he was little, he made some real messes on the floor, and the first thing we said was, “*Uff da!*,” which is Norwegian for whatever you want it to be for.

“Oh, darn it!,” “Aw, shucks!” And I said, “*Uff da,*” and I said, “That’s his name!”

(20, 2004, pp. 23-24)

Instead of being named for something powerful, like a larger animal or an ancient Norse god, this cat was named using one of the words used to express frustration as discussed in Chapter Five. In his owner’s opinion, the cat had come by his name honestly!

Another interviewee told me about some sheep she had as a young girl. This fourth generation woman in her late 70s related the story of how she named her four pet sheep:

[I had Norwegian names] for my sheep. I had Olvilda Tomena and Matilda

Katrina and Terana Telitha. I had several sheep. Daddy was the shepherd, but he

let me have several sheep, and I had four sheep. And so I named the first three Norwegian names: Olvilda Tomena, Matilda Katrina, and Terana Telitha. And I thought, “Ah, I guess I’d better go American.” So, the other sheep was called Katherine Ann! [I was] trying to be American! Oh, Daddy had names for his sheep, but they weren’t names like that. They had maybe Crooked Toe and Wiggley and Clipped Ear and things like that that fit the personality of the sheep. Or the appearance of the sheep. (7, 2004, pp. 20-21)

This woman’s quote is a good example of some of the Norwegian naming patterns occurring in the Norse community at the time she was a young girl. While three of her sheep had distinctive Norwegian ethnic names, her fourth sheep was given an “American” name to keep up with the times. It seems that this example of naming livestock corresponds with the patterns of naming children in the Norse community at that time: what was once all Norwegian began to fade into the larger American landscape. At least with regards to given names, people were beginning to favor American names over the more traditional Norwegian ones. In this sense, name use among pets and livestock reflected and validated the shift in names being used in families for children.

### ***What’s in a Name?***

Despite all the changes in Norwegian names over the years, and the primary use of American names in the community, the people of Norse do not seem to experience a diminished sense of ethnic identity. Most of them understand the history of their names, and they see the practicality behind the changes. As a result, having a Norwegian name

is not a necessary component to their ethnic identity. A third generation woman in her mid-70s explained how she saw the situation:

The Norwegians were not as bound to names as, say, the English. [The Norwegians] sort of knew who they were, and they didn't really care what people called them! They didn't need the name to make a statement about themselves. Because you know, [the names] were misspelled – the immigration officers often couldn't spell very well anyway, and they'd spell it differently. There were too many [people with the same name] that came through, so they'd give them another name. It was – and they would – of course their pattern of naming – often they would take a farm name. And if you moved to another farm your name would change. So they were sort of used to changing these names, I think. And you couldn't really – it was you as a person that meant something and not so much your name. Your handle. It was just a handle to call you by. So they were not as tied to a particular name. (2, 2004, pp. 25-26)

The people of Norse today are much like their immigrant counterparts in that names have served a practical function. While most names in the beginning were initially Norwegian, the community now is more Americanized. This fact, however, does not negatively affect the way people view themselves ethnically. While having a Norwegian name is a nice bonus, so to speak, it does not define the person as a whole. People in the Norwegian community of Norse, Texas tend to look at the individual and her or his relationship to others rather than at the name. A fifth generation man in his late 60s summed up the situation:

To the Norwegians who came over here, I don't think the name was an important thing. The heritage was the important thing. And you were the same person regardless of what name they attached to you. Names were chosen for simplicity, to Americanize, and to make it easier, and besides, they had to do it because they had to get a common family name. (20, 2002, pp. 24-25)

Practicality is the overarching theme regarding Norwegian names in Norse. People did what they had to do to become Americans, to blend in. Now, some people in the community are reversing the trend, but they are hardly the majority. Those that do choose to change back to the "old" ways are doing so not out of practicality, but out of nostalgia.

It is interesting to note that in Norway, traditionally, when a woman married, her name did not change. Only when she moved to another farm did her farm surname change. Similarly, women in Norse choose to retain their maiden names as personal identifiers. While it is true that all these women took their husbands' names after marriage, they also chose to use their maiden names, the names they had before they married. In this sense the women are revealing their ties to an ethnic past and are drawing links to different families.

If one were to look at family genealogy books or family history books, s/he would see these Norwegian naming practices at work, even within the Norse community. Many interviewees with whom I spoke showed me their family trees, or some family histories written by a distant relatives, and some of these traditions can be witnessed there, particularly with regards to picking first names. Some children were named for certain relatives, while other children were named for kids who had died before them. I even

found some examples in my family tree which illustrated the use of the same name among surviving children within one family (Brown, L. H., n.d., 1983; Edgar, n.d., 1996; Family Tree Committee, 1996).

Today in Norse, one can find many Norwegian surnames. These names were brought over by the immigrants and have been in the community for over 100 years in some cases. At one time, one could also find a plethora of Norwegian given names, both first and middle, but that is no longer the case. Parents have chosen more American names over Norwegian ones, and the Norwegian ones that have been used are merely Anglicized versions of older forms. By all appearances, traditional Norwegian naming practices have all but disappeared in Texas. A few families in some of the younger generations, however, have made efforts to include more Norwegian names in their family trees, so perhaps in the future one will be able to see more Nordic names in the community.

### **Norwegian Pilgrimage**

One way the people of Norse construct and maintain their ethnic identity is through travel to Norway, the land of their ancestors. Over half of the Texan Norwegians whom I interviewed had been to Norway, and some of them had been multiple times. The ones who had not made the trip said they just never got around to it, or that it was too expensive for them. I only had two women tell me that that was not really something they had ever been interested in.

When asked what they did on their trips, people replied overwhelmingly that they looked up living family members, found their ancestral farm(s), and did some genealogical research. They also said that they did the typical tourist things, but that

those were not as important as seeking out family. All of the people who had traveled overseas went there to make a connection with their past, and to hopefully meet some surviving family members. For many, this journey was a pilgrimage of sorts, a personal fulfillment.

One gentleman, a third generation man in his mid-70s, talked about visiting the ancestral farms from both sides of his family, and what that meant to him:

Well, it was an essential thing for me to do, you know. I did that both times I went to Norway. Just took, you know, an automobile, and I'd drive up to [the family] farm. On the first trip to Norway, I did not visit any of my mother's ancestral homes, because I really didn't know where they were. But on the second trip, I had identified them, and so I visited those farms as well. It's fulfilling. (19, 2002, p. 14)

Another man, a third generation gentleman in his early 70s, echoed similar sentiments when he talked about visiting the village church:

So, anyway, that was just a real moving experience to have seen where they came from. And uh, just to be there at the church where my great grandfather was born and baptized in that church, 1803. And uh, the church is still standing. (37, 2004, p. 19)

For both of these men, seeing where their ancestors lived, worked, and worshipped was inspiring. They connected with their past and saw what life was like for their ancestors over 150 years ago. As a result, their Norwegian ethnic identity was reaffirmed and validated.



A fourth generation woman in her early 50s talked at length about her trip to Norway when she met long-lost family members. She said that that trip was a very special one, and that it had changed her life:

[My daughter's] very interested [in Norway]. And when I got ready to [go to] Norway, you know, she wanted us to go together, because she thought it would be real special and fun. And it was. So it wasn't my husband and I that went. It was my daughter and I that went the first time.

We went to – we did the heritage tour from this lady who was Swedish and lived in Elgin, Texas. And that was her specialty. If you would give her information about your family, she would try to find out things for you, maybe find distant relatives. Or, at the very least, she would take you to the area where your family was from or show you the church your family was from. And she would run ads in newspapers in the same cities that she knew that you were from and see if she could rustle up anybody before the tour.

So, on the tour, it was my daughter and I and two cousins, two girl cousins – four of us that went. And [this woman] called us the night before, and she said, “I found one relative, but he's very old, and he doesn't speak any English.” So we said – we just laughed, and we said, “Oh, well! You know, we never really expected to find any relatives. But we would be very happy to see the church and the little community where we were from. We would be perfectly satisfied with that.”

Well, when we got there to the little church, she said, “Now, this one old relative will be there. He's going to be there at a certain time and date.” Well,

when – we pulled up to this beautiful old church that was 800 years old. And when we got there, there were like people in the churchyard, and so we thought, “Oh, it must be a funeral,” because it was like a Wednesday or Thursday. But it wasn’t. A man came to the door [of the tour bus], and he was the historian of the church. And he asked if I was on the bus, and I said, “Yes.” And he said, “Well, we have relatives here to see you,” and it was all family.

And they had – the press came out, and they did a little newspaper story. It’s all in this little [scrap]book. And so I really did get to see a lot of the family. And then I went inside the church, and they had microphones set up. And I had to talk to them and everything. And I didn’t know what I was going to say. And we all cried. I cried. My daughter cried. My cousins cried. You know, because we thought we were going to meet one old man that couldn’t speak English that was some kind of distant relative. And instead, there were like thirty-something of them.

I did carry a lot of things with me, old postcards and pictures and things. And I really don’t know why. I just thought I’d carry all this stuff with me, because what if I should need it or something? As it turns out, we had to lay it all out on the table, and we showed them all these pictures. And then we had one book of everything from Texas, and I had that out. And they looked at all that stuff with a lot of interest.

But they were real shy, and they wouldn’t hardly talk. And the [church] historian told us – because I said, “Can they speak English?” And the pastor was there, too, and the pastor had been educated in, like, Minnesota. I mean, he could

speak perfect English, and he said, “They can understand you, just speak English.” He said, “They’re just shy. They just won’t say much.” But, like, I would talk and talk, and they would look at me and nod their heads. But they wouldn’t ever answer me back, so I couldn’t tell what they thought of us, you know? And they were all ages, little children, you know, young couples, teenagers, older people. They were all ages that came.

[The church historian] had a book, a big book which had all the history of the church in it. And he would get it out and show it to me. And he said, “You know, your family is in here,” and he pointed things out. And then they took us to the family farm. This was the birthplace of my great grandmother.

I have some great pictures and stuff. And I have pictures of – and the newspaper sent out a reporter, and they covered it. And we came out in two different papers about how we had come back and found our family. (36, 2004, pp. 44-47, 47-50, 47)

As evidenced by this woman’s story, she had a phenomenal experience in Norway meeting her family. Before she and her daughter and cousins left for Norway, they did not even know if there were still family over there to find. When the tour guide told them that one man would be meeting them, they were thrilled – it was more than they had hoped for. But to see over 30 people waiting at the church was overwhelming to them. Not only did the family show up, but they seemed interested in hearing about their lives in Texas and about the Norwegian community in Bosque County. The Norwegians shared their church records and genealogy charts with the woman, while she shared a bit of her past with them. She also commented that she regularly corresponds with several

members of her extended Norwegian family, and they have even visited each other since that trip. For this woman, finding out that she had surviving family members in Norway was a thrill, but to see that they were also interested in reaching out to her made her trip all the more special.

A fifth generation man in his late 60s also spoke fondly of his many trips to Norway. Like the other people with whom I spoke, he was also interested in visiting his ancestral farms. Unlike others, however, he wanted to bring home a piece of Norway:

When we went to the [farm from] Mother's side, I went out into the field right behind the old barn that was there when they emigrated and scooped a bunch of soil and put it in a Baggie, and I noticed it was leaking. And I [had] picked up an old square barn nail that they'd used to build the original barn and mixed it in with the dirt. I didn't see it, and I put it in the Baggie, and it poked a hole in the Baggie. So I have a square nail and the dirt from [Mother's ancestral] farm.

A lot of people, when they travel, like to pick up rocks. But when we went to our homesteads, I don't know why we picked up the dirt instead of rocks. But we associate the dirt with the land. And rocks are not good to a farmer. Dirt is good. And that soil is fertile, black loam. It just makes me connect to the land and the times and my ancestors. (20, 2002, pp. 15-16)

For this man, the dirt symbolized a small piece of Norway, the motherland, that he could have for himself. He said that keeping the dirt was his way of connecting the past with the present, and that it reminded him of his roots. He already lived close to the Bosque County community, but now he could keep Norway close by as well. Only one other gentleman, a third generation man in his early 80s, also brought back Norwegian dirt to

Texas. He told me that upon returning to Bosque County, he went to visit his *bestemor* and *bestefar* in the cemetery, and he threw the dirt across their graves. He said he was closing the circle, mixing the soils from the two different lands.

A fourth generation woman in her late 70s had visited Norway on four different occasions. She, too, spoke about seeking out the family farms and meeting family in Norway:

Well, it's just interesting to see where [the immigrants] lived, how they lived.

And many times there were still people there who were of the same lineage. I know it doesn't really compare with going to the Holy City in Israel, but still, on the other hand [laughs], you know, it's somewhat the same thing! You want to walk where Jesus walked. And, you know, that feeling when you go to Norway.

You know, "This is where they walked. This is where they lived." I don't know,

I guess it's just a feeling of warmth. It gives us some security. (26, 2002, p. 10)

For this woman, a trip to Norway was somewhat like making a pilgrimage to Mecca. It stirred up nostalgic feelings in her, and it made her appreciate her ancestors more. It was also something she felt compelled to do, and that her trip would be incomplete if she did not go to the family farms. This sentiment was expressed frequently by my interviewees during the course of our interviews.

The majority of my Norwegian interviewees had made one or more trips to Norway, and every one of them looked up the ancestral family farm and family members. This task was the primary objective of their trip, so any typical sight seeing or shopping excursions would come secondary. Everyone said how beautiful and clean Norway was,

and how friendly the people were. They were thrilled, of course, to see the old farms and possibly meet some distant family members.

When they did meet their family, they were pleasantly surprised at how warmly they had been received. Most people commented on the shy and reserved nature of the Norwegians, but said that their hosts were extremely polite. At times, the translations became problematical, because the older Norwegians did not speak any English, and of course, the Texans did not speak Norwegian, but everyone said they coped with the language barrier by getting a younger neighbor, family member, or friend to help translate. The Norwegian hosts always welcomed the Texans into their homes, which were small and tidy, and they always served coffee with open-faced sandwiches and cookies. I had more than one interviewee say that they were treated like royalty by their Norwegian family.

Other interviewees joked that the Norwegians in certain parts of Norway were sort of getting used to all these Texans arriving on their farms and asking to be shown around. Since most of the immigrants to Texas came from the same villages in Norway, that is where all the Texans were going on their trips. Some interviewees even hypothesized that the local Norwegians were becoming pseudo experts on their family trees because of all the visitors coming and asking for information! Needless to say, most of the Norwegian families knew about their Texas connections.

Traveling to Norway and looking for the family farms and distant family members are extremely important to many Norwegians in Bosque County, Texas. This process links them to the past and allows them to further appreciate what their ancestors gave up and then endured to make lives for themselves in America. These trips also

reinforce and maintain the ethnic identity of these descendants and contribute to the creation of shared meaning within the ethnic community of Norse, Texas.

### **Texas Hospitality**

Many of the Texan Norwegians who visit Norway reciprocate the favor and invite their new family members and friends to visit them in Texas. They are anxious to show off their little piece of Norway in Texas, and to show the Norwegians what happened to the immigrants after they left Norway. The Norwegian visitors seem to enjoy the area and are fascinated that there is a Norwegian settlement in Texas.

The Bosque Memorial Museum, the Clifton Chamber of Commerce, and several different individuals involved in the community all told me that Bosque County receives several Norwegian visitors every month. These tourists visit the museum and go see many of the historical buildings and churches out in the Norse community. By all accounts, they appear to enjoy their visit. It seems that more and more people are hearing about the Norwegian Capital of Texas. (It is interesting to note that the Chamber of Commerce asked a Norwegian woman to record the out-going message on their answering machine, so that callers can hear the message spoken in English but with a Norwegian accent. They call their info number a “troll-free” call!)

Many of the people with whom I spoke host their new family and friends in their own homes. They all said that visiting and eating were the two main interests of their guests, although they also do a little sight-seeing in Norse, Waco, or even Dallas. One woman said she always took her guests out for Tex-Mex food, to introduce them to the flavors of Texas. Most of the time, however, is spent telling stories or looking at maps or

cookbooks. All of my interviewees truly enjoy these visits and look forward to future visits, either here in Texas or over in Norway.

One interesting thing many people mentioned with regards to entertaining Norwegian guests was dealing with their stereotypes about Texas. It seems that the Texans know a lot more about Norway than the Norwegians do about Texas. The people who mentioned this to me were amused by it, but they could understand how popular media could influence someone who had never been to America, much less Texas, and they were more than happy to entertain some of their guests' notions. I heard stories about shopping for cowboy hats, eating barbecue, and attending a rattlesnake rodeo.

I also have it on good authority that the Norwegian visitors to the museum are more fascinated with the Native American exhibits than they are with the Norwegian displays. The "wild west" has its appeal for the Norwegians, and many want to experience that when they come for a visit. A non-Norwegian woman in her early 50s who is involved with coordinating and planning some events in the community talked about this in our interview with regards to the area hosting Norwegian exchange students:

They like seeing the churches and stuff, but if they're actually from Norway, they want to see cowboys. We have a group of students that comes every year from Norway – *Bergen*, Norway. And they stay one to two nights with us, according to how their schedule's going. What they do is – their senior year to us, which actually they go 13 years to school, but what would be our senior year, they come, and they go to a school in Minnesota for a year. And during that year, they have a two week break. And one year they go [to the] western United States, and the other year they go [to the] eastern United States, the tour bus guy does. And they



see – when they [go] west, they go, like, to Disneyland and Hollywood, and they go through all those amusement parks and everything, but they come here at the end of their tour, and they stay one to two nights, and it's usually about 30 to 35 kids. And we house them in private homes – each person takes usually three kids, or some take four.

And then we have a tour planned for them. And the first year they came, I kept shoving all [the] Norwegian stuff at them, thinking they wanted to see why we were the Norwegian capital of Texas. And while Cleng Peerson's gravesite was important to them, nothing else was. I can tell these kids were just bored to death. And we threw a big Texas barbecue for them, and we do that out at Green Mountain Retreat, and we have a band that comes out and plays, and we do barbecue. And I try to teach them how to two-step, which is just a hoot.

And so the first year, I had fun, and I enjoyed it, but they didn't think we looked like Norway or anything like that, like some of [the immigrants] did. You know, when the Norwegians settled here, they thought we were similar to Norway because we were green and hilly and had lots of water. But other than that, you know, there's no glaciers out there in Norse or anything like that!

So anyway, probably the second year that the groups [came], one of the young girls took me aside, and she says [whispering], "I want to see a cowboy." And I said, "You do?" She says, "Yeah, I want to see a horse. Can I ride a horse? Can I pet a horse?" And then it dawned on me – "Duh! They want to see the Texas thing." I mean, they're fascinated with the Norwegian capital of Texas and

that there are this many Norwegians here. But what they really wanted to do was the cowboy thing.

So now, when they come, we tour working ranches. They get to ride horses – [we] have some cowboys come out, and they learn to rope, or they try! [We] buy them cowboy hats and bandannas. And they wear them the whole time. They do tour our high school and have lunch with our high school students. And they do go to Our Savior's and the Rock Church. But other than that – and they go to the museum. And we go to the art conservatory, and you know, do that kind of stuff. But we make it much more cowboy now. And we still do two-stepping, and we go on hay rides, and we do s'mores – they didn't know what s'mores were. Yeah, they love it. And so, the last two years we've really done the cowboy thing, and they really seem to enjoy it more. (34, 2004, pp. 12-13)

While these exchange students were somewhat interested in the Norwegian influence in Bosque County, they were mainly concerned with experiencing Texas as the wild west. Many of the people with whom I spoke hosted some of the kids in their homes. These interviewees said that the exchange program has become quite well received in the last few years, and that they are proud to be a part of it. In addition to sharing Norse with their family and friends, they could also bring a little of the frontier life to the Norwegian kids who pass through every spring.

The Norwegians in Bosque County are proud to show off their ethnic corner of Texas, particularly to other Norwegians. Many individuals have kept in contact with their Norwegian family and friends, and they frequently invite them over for visits. The community as a whole also hosts Norwegian students, who get to experience cowboys

and Texas with a unique Norwegian flavor. In this sense, the descendants of the original pioneers to the area share their Texan Norwegian ethnicity with others by celebrating the elements that make them uniquely both. In the end, their identity is validated by their willingness to live in both worlds.

### **Cultural Forms and Symbols**

As seen in Chapter One, symbolic ethnicity is centered around cultural forms and symbols (Abrams et al., 2002; Lie, 2003) which help distinguish one ethnic group from another (Ellis, 1999; Martin, 1997). Identity is formed when individuals align themselves with particular social structures associated with race or ethnicity and then communicate ideas about who they are to others. In this way, identity is constructed and maintained (Abrams et al., 2002; Collier, 1997; Hecht et al., 2003; Lie, 2003; Martin, 1997; Spivey, 1997; Wood, 1997). In this section of my dissertation, I look at the cultural forms and symbols embraced by the Norwegians of Norse, Texas.

During the course of my interviews, I specifically asked my interviewees what sort of Norwegian things they had in their houses, and in some cases, their places of business. I also politely looked around to see what items I could find. In all cases, my Norwegian interviewees possessed and displayed cultural symbols which distinguished themselves as Norwegian. Some people had more things than others, obviously, but the Norwegian influence was always evident, whether the individual lived in the simplest room at the Sunset Home, a modest weekend country home, or a nice large farmhouse complete with all the modern amenities.

The phrase *uff da* could be seen almost everywhere. Almost everyone with whom I spoke had some small trinket with *uff da* printed on it. I saw hand towels, refrigerator

magnets, wooden heart ornaments, coffee mugs, trivets, coasters, and large button pins with the phrase emblazoned on them. I also saw many similar items with *velkommen* on them. These two words are known by everyone in the community, including the non-Norwegians, so they quite clearly and unambiguously proclaim the Norwegian heritage of their owner.

I also saw many flags, ranging in size from large (mounted on front porches), to medium (hanging on walls), to small (sitting in a stand on a shelf or table.) All of the large flags were American, while the medium ones were predominately Norwegian. The small flags usually came in sets of three: American, Norwegian, and Texan, all sitting in a small base. I also saw a couple of Norwegian flag windsocks. This flag hierarchy seems to reflect the interviewees' notions about being an American first and a Norwegian second.

Many people had other distinctly Norwegian home accents, such as large, carved wooden spoons, straw wreaths, calendars, and prayers (both the Lord's Prayer and the Norwegian *bordbønn*, or table prayer). Others had *rosemaling* (rose or flower painting) displayed in their homes. This is a style of folk art painting, and each pattern represents a different region of Norway. *Rosemaling* was most commonly seen on wooden plaques hanging on the wall. One of these plaques read, "*In Jesu navn går vi til bords*," another one said, "*Gi oss i dag vårt daglige brød*" ("Give us this day our daily bread"), and a third one said simply, "*Mange Takk*." Two other plaques had this cute phrase painted on them: "You can always tell a Norwegian, but you can't tell him much." Some others were simply decorative. *Rosemaling* could also be found on a wooden wedding plate,

where the bride's and groom's names were also painted into the design, or on *tine*, traditional Norwegian oval wooden boxes.

*Hardanger* (whitework embroidery) doilies were also found in some of the homes, along with other forms of needlework. Some homes also had *Konge Tinn* (Royal or King's Pewter) items, such as plates, cheese slicers, candlesticks, and vases. This line of pewter ware is very popular, and in a strip of bas-relief across each piece, it depicts scenes of Olaf the Holy bringing Christianity to the Norsemen. Most of the homes also displayed ceramic plates, many of which had one of the local churches painted on them. A few plates had been purchased in Norway and represented the area from which they came. A couple of people had carved wooden boy and girl figurines, made popular by the Henning studio of Norway.

Many homes also displayed items with a *Viking* theme. I saw several painted scenes of Viking ships, along with Viking statues; I even saw Hågar The Horrible (Browne, 2005) references in one house. In a couple of instances, I saw Leiv Eiriksson mentioned on a coffee mug or a magnet. In addition to *Vikings*, I also saw a lot of trolls and *nisser* (gnomes). One woman had a sheep, a bird, and a troll all made out of wool. A few people had small dolls wearing the Hardanger *bunad*, or the national costume of Norway, while one woman had the Norwegian Barbie, still packaged in her box, prominently displayed on the mantle. One gentleman had a "Norwegian only" parking sign mounted on the wall in his garage where he parked his car.

With regards to clothes, a few individuals showed me their Norwegian sweaters, some of which had been in the family for a while. A few of the women also displayed their *bunader*, or folk costumes. Most of the central Texas *bunader* are homemade, and

hence do not follow the rules which traditionally govern the creation of such garments, but the women took pride in their costumes and said they wore them at every possible opportunity. A couple of women did, however, have authentic *bunader* from Norway, and they were absolutely stunning. Made of wool and embroidered with colorful threads, these *bunader*, much like the *rosemaling*, refer to a specific region in Norway. In addition to these garments, several people showed me quilts that had been made by older family members. While not technically Norwegian, these quilts were highly prized by their owners, who admired them for their handiwork and treasured them as family heirlooms.

A few people with whom I spoke mentioned having Norwegian Christmas decorations and ornaments, such as woven heart baskets, straw hearts and stars, Norwegian flag garland, and others. One woman even had her artificial Norwegian Christmas tree, as she called it, completely decorated and sitting in an extra closet, covered by a sheet. She said she wanted to be ready, and could not mess with redoing the decorations every year!

Of course, everyone had some kind of collection of books about Norway, the immigrants, or other interesting topics pertaining to their heritage. A couple of people said they had the family's Norwegian Bible and the corresponding song book, both prized family possessions. Many women had Norwegian cookbooks, and a few people even had some Norwegian food items in their pantries or refrigerators, such as *Viking Bread*, ligonberry jam, sour cream porridge mix, *geitost*, and even *aquavit*. A few individuals also had some dishes, such as sugar bowls and pie plates, which had been passed down to them.

A few people with whom I spoke also talked about specific furniture items that had been brought over from Norway, or that had been built soon after the immigrants arrived in Texas. Some of the pieces were even homemade. The most commonly mentioned items included mirrors, mantle clocks, chairs, and tables. Two people had antique pump organs which had been in their families, and one man mentioned a music box. Three people owned Norwegian steamer trunks, the ones which their families used during immigration. Needless to say, these were highly valued by their owners.

Two women also showed me some smaller valuable family pieces from Norway. One woman had a carved wooden bowl with *rosemaling* on it dated to 1866. She had it displayed in her living room, and she said that sometimes she put things inside the bowl. Another woman dug in the depths of one of her closets and revealed a large *tine* about the size of a big bucket. It was in very good shape and was dated to 1770, and it had carved markings along the outside. Both pieces were stunning and could easily be showcased at the museum. Both women appeared proud to own such treasures, but did not seem to know quite what to do with them.

By far, the most common thing I encountered in the homes of the people I interviewed was photographs. Some of the photos were old, and some were new, but almost everyone had at least one large photo of Our Savior's Lutheran Church or the Old Rock Church framed and mounted on their wall. Some people also had photographs of their homestead, or land, in Norse. One gentleman had an aerial photo of his family's farm in Bosque County. Of course, everyone had family pictures, and some of these were quite old. Another common item found in almost every home was family documentation in the form of family trees and written family histories. Most everyone

seemed eager to show me these papers, or they at least would talk about them. A few people also had some old letters written by family members long gone. Two gentlemen had the original land titles to their families' properties framed and mounted on the wall, and one gentleman had a Baggie of dirt from his family's ancestral farm in Norway.

As seen in this section, the people of Norse express their Norwegian heritage through a wide variety of cultural forms and symbols. For most individuals, this expression is involved on multiple levels through many different symbolic items. Some items are valuable family heirlooms, while others highlight the lighter, more humorous side of the Norwegian culture. In either case, these cultural forms and symbols play an important role in the lives of the people of Norse, and so these individuals display these artifacts prominently in their homes. These cultural forms and symbols, then, serve to create shared meaning within the community and to validate people's identity as Norwegian Texans.

### **Rituals, Customs, and Activities**

As we have seen in the above section of this dissertation, symbolic ethnicity is intricately tied in to cultural forms and symbols. This symbolic ethnicity is also aligned with rituals, customs, and activities. By participating in such events, the Norwegians of Bosque County continually construct, maintain, and communicate their ethnicity (Abrams et al., 2002; Collier, 1997; Hecht et al., 2003; Lie, 2003; Martin, 1997; Spivey, 1997; Wood, 1997). These activities celebrate Norway and its customs, but they also look to the future by serving to distinguish the Norwegian Texans from other ethnic groups. As a result, participation in such events creates a feeling of uniqueness for the social actors involved (Song, 2003; Steinberg, 2001). In this sense, these rituals,



customs, and activities create and reinforce symbolic cultural identity for the descendants of the original Norwegian pioneers to central Texas.

Most of the people with whom I spoke are quite active in the Norwegian community in Bosque County. Some folks are obviously more active than others, but everyone is involved on some level. For example, many of my interviewees stated that they are members of the Bosque County Chapter of the Norwegian Society of Texas. Some even said that they joined to show moral support, even though they are not able to participate at the level they wanted to, either because of health reasons, travel, or other commitments. Those who were not members still choose to participate in many of the Society's events, however. Most people said they enjoy *syttende mai*, or Norway's Constitution Day, and the winter solstice events, or *juletrefest*. These festivities always draw large crowds, and they seem to be growing in popularity each year. A few other people, mostly those who lived in Bosque County, said they also participate in the other two yearly events hosted by the Society: *sankthansaften*, or summer solstice, and Leiv Eiriksson Day. These festivities are not as large or as well-attended as *syttende mai* or *juletrefest*, but everyone agrees that they add a certain Norwegian presence to the day. Several individuals are also actively involved in the restoration and preservation of some of the historic buildings in Norse, activities which are sponsored through the Society.

Many of my interviewees are also members of other Scandinavian fraternal groups. In addition to the Norwegian Society of Texas, some people also hold memberships in the local Sons of Norway Lodge, Canuteson-Reierson #1-660, in Waco, and the group Scandinavian Friends. They regularly attend the monthly meetings and participate in activities sponsored by those groups whenever possible. A few

interviewees also told me about their involvement with other Norwegian American organizations, such as the Norwegian American Historical Association (NAHA) in Northfield, Minnesota, and the Vesterheim Norwegian American Museum, based in Decorah, Iowa. They receive those organizations' monthly newsletters and try to stay abreast of what is occurring with them. Several people also told me that they help plan, organize, and implement *Viking Fest*, a three day festival celebrating Norwegian and Scandinavian heritage which originated in Georgetown, but is now being held in Waco ("18 Centuries," 2004; Genz, 2003; Viking Fest, 1998; Viking Fest, Inc., 2005; Viking Fest Planning Committee [VFPC], 1996; "Viking Fest Returns," 2005).

Many of the people with whom I spoke also help out with more local groups. The Clifton Chamber of Commerce, the Bosque Memorial Museum, and the Clifton Lutheran Sunset Home all benefit from the expertise and aid from several individuals who either work or volunteer there. These people help these organizations plan and organize events, set up exhibits, and help promote them in the community. These individuals may, for example, set up a Norwegian-themed booth at a particular event, or they may help give guided tours through the historic parts of the community.

On a more personal note, many people shared with me the things they do to celebrate and pass on their Norwegian heritage. Many of the women said that they attempt to cook Norwegian dishes, experimenting with different recipes and spices. Other individuals are more into genealogy or reading about their family or about Norway, while some other people like to write up their family's history and stories and share those with their families. Some people also mentioned that they enjoy decorating their home

with a Norwegian flair. One woman said she is learning how to sew *hardanger*, and another lady is an accomplished *rosemaling* artist.

As seen from the above examples, the descendants of the original Norwegian pioneers to Bosque County are active in celebrating and perpetuating their ethnic heritage. Different people participate in various activities and at varying levels of involvement. Some people participate in a few events, while others are active in many. In the next section of this dissertation, I highlight the primary cultural events through which the people of Norse, Texas celebrate and construct their ethnic identity. First, I start with three unique activities enjoyed by a few of my interviewees.

### *Some Unique Examples*

In the above paragraphs, one can see the myriad of cultural activities enjoyed by the people of Bosque County. These activities, in a general sense, provide a glimpse into how participation can serve to validate and communicate identity. Three additional unique examples stood out in my interviews, so they are included here.

One third generation woman in her early 70s is quite involved in the Norwegian community of Bosque County. She spoke about how her involvement started when she lived in north central Texas, when she and her husband took Norwegian dancing classes:

There's a lot of [Norwegians] in Galveston, I think. And there's quite a few up around the Metroplex, because they have two or three lodges, Societies up there. There's a lot of them up there. I belong[ed] to the one in Arlington – that was *Midnattsolen* [Midnight Sun]. And then the *Viking* was in Dallas, and *Sol Hjem* [Home of the Sun] – I believe they call it – is Fort Worth. And they have Norwegian dancers. And my first husband and I tried to do that. We was going

to be dancers. And I was too clumsy. He did it better than me – he was full-blooded German! He did it better than me! I was clumsy! Well, I can do just a slow dance pretty good. But these folk dances, they're hard. They're hard to do. (31, 2004, p. 5)

This woman told me that she was interested in learning the Norwegian folk dances to learn more about her ethnic background, and also to be able to share it with her husband, but she apparently found the dances too difficult to master. No one else mentioned Norwegian folk dancing, primarily because the Society in Bosque County does not offer those classes.

Another woman told me about a Norwegian summer camp sponsored by Sons of Norway that her children attended when they were growing up in California. This third generation woman in her early 60s explained why she felt it was important for her children to attend:

We belong to the Norwegian Society of Texas. I belong – when we lived in California, I belonged to the Norwegian Society up there. And the children went to *Camp Norge* [Camp Norway] close to San Francisco. And it was a Norwegian camp, and they stayed there for two weeks. They danced in a children's [dance group].

It's *Camp Norge*. It's close to Walnut Creek. It used to be out close to Walnut Creek near San Francisco. They learned all about Norwegian heritage, and they learned the games and to count to 1000. They learned to speak Norwegian and just have a lot of fun with other Norwegian kids. I don't know if

it is [still there] or not, but it used to be – it was pretty expensive, but it was good for the kids. (9, 2004, pp. 26-27)

Like the previous example, this activity did not occur in central Texas, but this woman felt like the camp was important for her children to attend, so she and her husband paid for them to go. She also expressed to me that she would like to see something like that more available to the kids in Texas. She praised the local museum for their educational programs, but added that something like this camp would be an added benefit for the community.

One man with whom I spoke had a different approach to sharing his ethnic heritage with his children. He researched Norwegian trunks, and then he had some made and painted for his family members. This fifth generation man in his late 60s talked about this process during our interview:

Several years ago I decided to make trunks, one for my wife, and one for my children, like the Norwegian trunks that [the immigrants] came over with. And these trunks are pretty sizable – they're a couple of feet long and a foot and a half high with rounded tops. And a curved lid on them. And I had them constructed for me by a cousin who's half Norwegian – owns a furniture shop. And then we went to Dallas to a Norwegian lady that contracted to paint the *rosemaling* on it. And oh, that's Norwegian heritage. That's something I've been pushing with the kids, too, is each one of them's getting a trunk, and as a result of them getting a trunk, we had to research the *rosemaling* – it is unique to each area of Norway. The area you are born in can be determined by looking at the *rosemaling*.

And so the trunks are – one of them is finished, one of them has got everything but the *rosemaling* on it, and the other two have still got just primer. And hopefully those – and we had wrought iron handles and clasps, hasps handmade by a smithy on, and hopefully – and they are really neat. They're painted on the inside as well as the outside. But they're supposed to be symbolic of the trunks that people brought over from Norway. And I thought that was interesting that they put the curved tops on them, and they did that on purpose because they didn't want people stacking stuff on top of them. If you came with a square trunk, they'd put another trunk on top of yours. So they put the rounded tops of them, and they put stuff on them anyway. (20, 2004, p. 16)

I thought this man's story was unique because he took an old idea, Norwegian trunks, and created new cultural objects for his children. It was his hope that the trunks not only remind his children of their cultural heritage, but that the trunks would become family heirlooms as well. He told me that the trunks may be new now, but 50 or 100 years from now, they would be considered antiques. And although this gentleman did not make the trunks himself, something he said he wished he could do, he did personally research and design them. He also worked with the carpenter and the *rosemaling* artist to ensure that the trunks were as accurate as possible. For this gentleman, the activity of creating a new family custom became a way for him to maintain his own ethnic identity and create shared meanings with his children.

### ***Reunions***

Another important ritual which occurs frequently in Bosque County is family reunions. I had many people speak about reunions in their interviews with me. In fact,

most people attend reunions from both sides of their family. They talked about seeing extended family members and catching up the family trees. These reunions usually take place every year, or every other year, and much planning goes into them.

The people with whom I spoke look forward to such get-togethers. A fifth generation man in his late 60s explained how the Norwegians in the area feel about these reunions:

There is another area that you haven't brought up but is very important, and that [is] reunions. And all the people in Clifton, all the Norwegian families, almost every one of them that I know of, are very oriented to having family reunions. And I don't mean 20 or 30 people – I mean 200 or 300 people.

[My family has] them at Cranfills Gap. They have [my grandfather's family] reunion every other year [on Mother's side], and in between they have [my grandmother's family] reunion on Mother's side. And there will be 100 to 200 people at each one. And [I'm] kin to both of them. They come from all over the United States to come to this reunion. And I go to those reunions. And they're so disappointed when people don't come, particularly their children and their grandchildren, but they're so happy to see you! (20, 2002, pp. 40-41)

This man comes from a large family, one that values family reunions, so their meetings are quite well-attended. I am not sure if all reunions reach 300 people, but I have heard that some can get rather large. He goes further to say that it is good to see family members who had moved away many years ago, and that he enjoys reconnecting with people he had not seen for a while.

A fourth generation woman in her early 80s echoed the man's earlier statement when she commented on her family reunions:

When we get together – my family still gets together once a year – I have four brothers and a sister. I have only two brothers living now, but my cousins – we have a reunion every year and get together. I don't know that we talk anything special about Norway, but it's a close family tie. I think Norwegians are closer in family than a lot of the other ethnic groups. (35, 2004, p. 4)

This woman's family also meets once a year. For her, this meeting also includes the cousins and extended family. She indicated to me that she feels close to her extended family, and that is why she feels Norwegian families are close. She appreciates her relationship with her cousins and knows them almost as well as she knows her own siblings. In her opinion, these relationships are what make Norwegian families stronger and closer than others.

A fifth generation woman in her early 70s concurred with the previous statement. She told me about how differently her mother and father viewed family and reunions:

My mother is English, and the Norwegians in our family are much closer about keeping track of all the relatives. They visit with – my mother's family never visited one another very much. They never had reunions. My mother just thinks this is the strangest thing the way Norwegians just constantly, you know, have reunions and everything. But, you know, like, my dad is just typical – they're all like this – you know, you mention someone and it's, "Oh! That's so-and-so's cousin, and he married such-and-such." And you know, they talk around to where they figure out how they're related. You know? It's just, I don't know, a part of



the culture. It's very much a part of the culture. Anybody who grew up here and has a shred of Norwegian blood in them. [Laughs.]

When I was growing up, wherever you went, people would say, "Who are you?" Little cotton head would go up, and I would say, "Oh, I'm [so-and-so]." And there'd be this pause, and I'd say, "[My father's] daughter." And if they still were blank, I said, "[My grandfather's] granddaughter." [Laughs.] You know, and then, "Oh, yes!" At some point there was this recognition. They wanted to know [not only] what your name was, but [also] who are you, what family do you belong to?

And so [people go] into this thing about relationships and everything. And they just do that. I mean, it's like a pastime. All of these people are like that. They are just constantly tracing this little web of descent. [Laughs.] I remember high school. My home economics teacher – we mentioned somebody, and she said, "Well, [child], that's your relatives!" And I said, "Huh?" And she said, "Well, I think you're seventh cousins." And I was, like, "Who cares?!", you know? Well, I think in very few places in the United States would anybody even consider you any kin if you are seventh cousins. But here they do. (4, 2002, pp. 2, 17-18)

In this one quote, this woman encapsulated the essence of family, relationships, and reunions in Norse, Texas. Comparing her father and mother, this woman acknowledges the Norwegians' penchant for family reunions and tracing lineage. I noticed this phenomenon myself, for when I called people to set up interviews, not only did I reference who told me to call, but also who I was with relation to the genealogy in Norse.

I would introduce myself as Laura Pierson, daughter of Don Pierson, granddaughter of Johnnie and Ruth Huse Pierson. (Notice here that I used my grandmother's maiden name to facilitate the connections. Had I been married, I would have also included my maiden name as well.) All but two people knew my grandparents, and the two people who did not know them, knew *of* them. I was also well-versed enough in my own family trees to be able to fill in some blanks for some people regarding a few extended cousins, once removed, and so on. These relationships filled in the web, so to speak, for these people and allowed them to put my piece in the larger Norse puzzle. Without reunions and the subsequent importance placed upon family and relationships, this type of communication would have been impossible (Stanford, 2005). (Note this woman's positive use of the term "cotton head" when referring to herself as a child.)

Instead of relating history or stories, the people of Norse communicate relationships and family. They trace people and family trees, not names, and in understanding the links in the community, they conserve and pass on their ethnic heritage. In this sense, "Norwegian-ness" is communicated through family, church, and community. Ethnic identity, then, becomes a core cultural value which is strengthened through connections with others.

### ***Christmas Celebrations***

For many people, Christmas is a special time of the year. This is especially true for the descendants of the Norwegian immigrants to Bosque County. Everyone with whom I spoke has stories about Christmas celebrations, both past and present, and the special meaning those hold for their families. Some families celebrate Christmas in an American way, while others still maintain some of the Norwegian elements of their

ancestors' celebrations. Although these Norwegian Christmas celebrations are not as common as they were, say, even 60 or 80 years ago, certain Norwegian traditions remain.

Whether they celebrate a more American Christmas or a more Norwegian one today, almost everyone talked about attending church, reading the Christmas story in the Bible, enjoying Christmas trees and gifts, singing hymns and carols, baking Norwegian cookies, eating *lutefisk*, consuming a big meal, and sharing the season with family and friends. No two families' celebrations or traditions were alike, but many were similar.

A third generation man in his early 80s commented on the significance of the holiday for his family, and how preparations and celebrations always seemed to start early:

The holiday season starts in the middle of November. You've got all the baking and the cookie making and the crud like that for the holiday season. And I was the only [kid] Mom had around the house to help do all this stuff, so I got acquainted with all that kind of thing. And then at Thanksgiving time is right around the corner to Advent. And we always did that. We always had the Advent wreath and things like that. And we never sat down to a meal without praying. (1, 2004, p. 31)

This gentleman's comments were fairly representative of many, if not most of my interviewees' statements, with regards to the preparations involved, and the significance of the Advent season in church. The Lutheran church observes the Advent season, the month or so before Christmas. It is during this time that most people in Norse begin to prepare for the Christmas festivities. The goal is to get all preparations finished in time to enjoy Christmas with one's family.

A third generation man in his mid-70s explained how his family was continuing the Norwegian traditions in his home:

Well, it's the custom in Norway to celebrate Christmas on Christmas Eve, not Christmas day as other countries. Some other countries. And so we continue that tradition here. [We] open [the] gifts on Christmas Eve and have our family gathering. Of course, we usually gather on Christmas day also, but the main celebration's on Christmas Eve. (19, 2004, p. 16)

Other people had similar stories. A fourth generation woman in her early 50s, the one who remembered putting out the *julenek* for the birds with her grandfather, talked about how she and her family celebrate Christmas today:

I still have my big dinner on Christmas Eve. We still open presents on Christmas Eve. We might go to [church] services that night. But on Christmas day, we do nothing. We just relax. We still do everything on Christmas Eve.

Well, I don't put out the '*nek*. But then, you know why? Because it's kind of hard to find bundles of oats now. Because now they make them into those big round bales or something, you know? For bundled oats you had to have a reaper. So it's actually kind of hard to find oats that are still on the stalk. But back then, they had old farm machinery, like the reaper, and it actually would cut [the oats] off. And tie [them] with a string into bundles. Bundled oats they called them. And that's what you would [put] them on the '*nek*. So, nowadays, unless you're planning way ahead and you sneak into somebody's field, it would be hard to put up a '*nek*. (36, 2004, pp. 43-44)

This woman's Christmas traditions have changed little since she was a small girl.

With the exception of putting out the *julenek* and feeding the farm animals extra food on Christmas Eve, her celebrations are the same. She is now passing these traditions down to her daughter and grandchild. I almost got the impression from our interview that if she could get bundled oats today, then she would continue with the *julenek* tradition.

Another woman shared her family's Norwegian Christmas traditions with me. This third generation lady in her early 60s explained how many of the old world traditions still live on in her family:

I still – my family still celebrates, after all these generations here, a Norwegian Christmas. Our cookies, our baking, our cakes, our traditions are all still upheld. We sing Christmas carols in Norwegian. We have a little Christmas tree with Norwegian – some Norwegian [straw] ornaments. In our own family at Christmas we have the traditional Christmas meal and *lutefisk*. And then we have – the children at Christmas will do their little Christmas church – Sunday School presentation before the tree, and they will sing [singing], *Jeg er så glad hver julekveld* – and that's a Christmas song on Christmas Eve. And that has not changed through the past four generations. But the children are an important part in our Christmas tradition. No matter who – until they get about 14 or 15, everybody gives them a gift for Christmas. (9, 2004, pp. 5-6, 38)

Of all the people with whom I spoke, this woman seems to have retained the most Norwegian elements in her Christmas celebrations with her family. She and her family still celebrate on Christmas Eve, when everyone attends church, eats the big meal, and opens their presents. They also celebrate with a Norwegian Christmas tree and carols. It

is interesting to note that this woman is descended from four of the prominent immigrant families to Bosque County, and although her husband is not Norwegian, they continue to carry on these traditions. Her family's interactions at Christmas help maintain and construct their symbolic ethnicity.

### *Christmas Eve Candlelight Services*

Everyone with whom I spoke mentioned church services as a part of their Christmas celebration. Whether these families celebrated in an American way or a Norwegian way, church was always very important. One of the most commonly mentioned activities during the Christmas season was candlelight services on Christmas Eve in the Old Rock Church. Some people mentioned having services at other churches, but the Old Rock Church seemed to come up the most during our interviews.

Nostalgia is quite possibly the reason why the Old Rock Church was mentioned the most. Even though Our Savior's Lutheran Church is 17 years older than the Old Rock Church, Our Savior's has had more improvements added over the years, such as electricity, plumbing, and a brick exterior, among other things. As a result, the Old Rock Church looks older, like an immigrant church. It stands now much like it did when it was new. Once the new St. Olaf church building was built in Cranfills Gap, the Old Rock Church was used more and more infrequently. Now, it is used for an occasional church service, funeral, or wedding.

The starkness and simplicity of the Old Rock Church spoke to many people. A third generation man in his early 70s reflected on the power and symbolism of this small country church at Christmastime:

Now to me, that is still, you know – [if] there is a heartfelt thing that really attracts to the Norse settlement it would be the Old Rock Church. On Christmas Eve night. On Christmas Eve night for a number of years we always went out there for Christmas Eve service. And you know, it's just something, you know, the candlelight, no electricity, the old pump organ – I mean it really – you know we have taken my nieces and nephews out there. They only went once, but they still remember that it just makes that kind of impression on everybody. (16, 2004, pp. 20-21)

A fourth generation woman in her late 70s echoed the previous statement, but added, “It's just that when you sit there at the service, you think about your ancestors that worshipped there in years gone by” (7, 2004, p. 15). For these people, and many others, the symbolism and the history of the church, combined with the Christmas Eve services, reaffirm their ethnicity and their admiration of the immigrants who made a life for themselves in Texas. It is like they step backwards in time. Even though the service is conducted in English, the people with whom I spoke associate that particular church service with their ancestors, many of whom are buried in the cemetery outside. For many, the Christmas Eve service at the Old Rock Church is an intimate and emotional bond with the past.

For the reasons listed above, these Christmas Eve services have become quite popular in Norse and the surrounding community. A fifth generation woman in her early 70s reflected on the popularity of this Christmas Eve service:

Well, the Christmas [service] is a lot more special. It's candlelight, of course, and they have [hurricane] lamps in the windows with greenery and red bows, and red

candles and candles all over the place. It's lovely, and it's packed – two services – and they are packed, and people are turned away because they can't get in. They do two services, and they could do more. Oh yeah, oh it's stuffed. People are standing in the aisles. They put in extra chairs – there is no room. It's just, you know, it's just something that is really special, and people like to come, people that are not Lutheran, people [who] probably never go to church any other time maybe, come to those. (4, 2004, p. 17)

For many people in Norse, the Old Rock Church's Christmas Eve candlelight services are what define Christmas. People from outlying areas, and even people from other denominations, also come in to worship. The event is a much anticipated part of the Christmas season in Bosque County. The Old Rock Church symbolizes simplicity, strength, and faith, characteristics the Norwegian people in Norse also see in their ancestors, and for that reason it remains an emotional tie to the past.

#### *Norwegian cookies*

One custom which kept cropping up in my interviews involved Norwegian cookies. While these cookies can be baked at any time of the year, and they sometimes are, Christmastime is usually when they make an appearance. All of my Norwegian interviewees remember watching their mothers prepare them and then eating the treats as children. Everyone has fond memories of the Norwegian pastries.

Many of the women with whom I spoke bake them today, although several complained that the Norwegian cookies are fairly difficult to make. A third generation woman in her early 70s commented, "I just about quit cooking them cookies! They fall apart, and I get mad, and so I've just about quit! They're hard to make!" (31, 2004, p.



16). Even though she still continues to make them, so gets very frustrated in the process. For her, and other women like her, having the cookies was so important, that the pain and frustration were worth it.

Other women shared her sentiment. A fourth generation woman in her early 50s talked about passing along the tradition of cookie baking to her daughter:

She knows how to make a lot of [the] Norwegian cookies, because we did a lot of baking around Christmastime, too. So, she's seen me do that over and over again.

So she could probably make cookies like that if she tried hard enough, but she doesn't have much interest in cooking. (36, 2004, p. 44)

Although this woman has shown her daughter how to make the cookies, and even though the daughter has baked them before, the mother is concerned that the tradition of Norwegian cookies will not be continued through her child. Perhaps the cookies are too difficult for someone with so little cooking experience. At any rate, this tradition had been shared between the mother and her daughter, so perhaps the tradition will ultimately not be lost in that family.

Despite the difficulties brought on by these cookies, however, some women are determined that the tradition lives on. Another woman talked about how she used cookies to pass along her ethnic heritage to her grandchildren. This woman, a fifth generation lady in her early 70s, also talked about how important it is to continue with the tradition:

I do make – well, I guess this is an example. Yes, at Christmastime I always make, you know, different Norwegian cookies. I always had those cookies. The [grand]kids don't – they are not necessarily their favorite cookies or anything, but

I always had them. Just because it was a little part of the Scandinavian background. I like to follow through.

Well see, I think [the cookies are] an important aspect of [the] Norwegian Society, because we do sell [them] at all of these festivals, like Septemberfest, and *lutefisk* [dinner], and the [Norwegian] Country Christmas [Tour], and everything. We've gotten to where we've started having a bake-off, and we bake Norwegian cookies and that kind of thing, because, until we started doing that, we'd get all these chocolate chip cookies and all this other stuff, and people would say, "Well, I don't know how to make Norwegian cookies, but I'll bring this other stuff." Well, if you don't start getting people to cook these things, then pretty soon nobody will be alive who can do it. And none of them are easy to do. They are all somewhat trouble. But, you know, I just think it's important to teach some younger people how to do this. (4, 2002, pp. 9-10)

The Norwegian cookies are a way for this woman to share her ethnic identity with younger family members. She also sees the Norwegian Society of Texas as a conduit for passing along the tradition to younger members. She believes that the ethnic identity of the area could be threatened if the rituals and traditions are not preserved and communicated to others. For her, the Norwegian cookies are part of what maintains the ethnic identity of the community (Ryan, 2006a).

#### *Norwegian Country Christmas Tour*

Throughout my interviews, people also kept mentioning the Norwegian Country Christmas Tour, and how it has become a part of their Christmas celebrations. Many people attend the tour, going to see the different homes and how they are decorated, and

then they visit the museum and the exhibits in town. They enjoy seeing Christmas being celebrated in an “old world, traditional” way. Many people said that they would remember their childhood celebrations, and that they are reminded of their how their ancestors may have celebrated Christmas. For these people, the tour represents a simpler time when the focus of Christmas festivities was more centered around family and togetherness, rather than on gifts and materialism.

A few people with whom I spoke work for the Norwegian Country Christmas Tour. Many individuals told me about their involvement in the planning and implementation of the day, and how much that means to them. Participating in the tour in this way allows these people to enjoy the festivities, and also to share these activities with others.

Several of these people mentioned how fulfilling it was for them to represent the Norwegian community in such a way. A fourth generation woman in her late 70s told me about one particular visitor to the tour:

We’ve had from Norway a number of visitors here, and it’s fun for them to talk with us about Norwegians. We had one to come in when I was working up in the [Gallery of] Christmas Trees, and I was in the [Norwegian] costume, and he came in, and he got all excited, and I found out he was from Norway. And he’d heard about the day of celebration on his Internet. And so he came up especially for it. So, he asked some questions, and we had a good visit. And he said, “Is it OK to take your picture?” And so, I got in one of the Norwegian magazines! (7, 2002, p.

This woman takes great pride in her heritage, and she enjoys sharing it with others, but she was tickled that a Norwegian reporter would want to use her story and her picture in a Norwegian magazine as part of his report. This incident made her feel more proud of her heritage and validated who she was as a Norwegian Texan.

Other people also spoke about their experience giving tours. They said they enjoyed hosting a bus full of tourists and showing them the sights. Another fourth generation woman in her late 70s explained how she participates in the tour festivities:

I take people on tours. And when we have the Christmas tour, I ride a bus, and I narrate the tours and what we're seeing and doing. I talk the whole time and describe what we're seeing as we drive along the countryside. And I give history as part of the tour. (26, 2004, p. 22)

Other people also aided in giving tours. A fourth generation woman in her late 60s shared a similar story about helping with the bus tour:

Well, I guess [my favorite event would] probably [be] that Norwegian Country Christmas [Tour]. I get on a bus with about 50 people, and I get to show them all our area and tell them stories and talk about the history of the Norwegians coming here, and even down to the Ole and Lena jokes, which they love. Whenever I tell an Ole and Lena joke, they say, "More, more!," and they clap and want more Ole and Lena jokes. I guess that's probably more fun. Because I enjoy talking about the Norwegian heritage that we have here and how we enjoy it, and I also go out and do tours for the Clifton Chamber [of Commerce] when they have bus tours that come. And I put on my costume and go to the Rock Church and tell them the

history of the Rock Church, maybe do a little 15 to 20 minute story there for them. And that's – I like doing that. (14, 2004, p. 16)

Sharing the Norwegian heritage of the area is important to both of these women. They talk about the history of the community and about the people who settled there. The second woman also makes the history lesson fun by telling Ole and Lena jokes (Strangland, 1989) on the tour bus. For her, light-hearted ethnic jokes add to her sense of distinctiveness and to her feelings of inclusion within this particular group. These jokes also show the lighter side of the culture, and they reveal that the Norwegian descendants in central Texas have a sense of humor and can laugh at themselves. She enjoys her Norwegian heritage by helping with the tour and “making fun” of the Norwegians.

### ***Lutefisk Dinner***

As seen in Chapter Two, *lutefisk* has historically played a large role in the construction and maintenance of ethnic identity in Norse, Texas. This fact is still true today. While most contemporary families do not prepare their own *lutefisk*, they still manage to incorporate the tradition into their ethnic celebrations at the annual dinner held in Cranfills Gap. Even though this *lutefisk* dinner is held the first Saturday in December and is considered a part of people's Christmas celebrations, I am treating it separately here, mainly due to the frequency with which the topic was mentioned.

It should be noted that no one, even Norwegians, has ambiguous feelings towards *lutefisk*. People either love it and see it as a delicacy, or they despise it and hate to go near it. There does not seem to be any gray area in this matter, although I did run across some individuals who claimed to hate the taste, and yet they ate it anyway. The vast

majority of Norwegians with whom I spoke said they liked it, and the few who did not enjoy it so much said they had developed a taste for it.

I also learned that everyone seems to have a story surrounding the smelly fish. I heard about how the mercantile would stock bales of the dried fish, which looks like long, wooden shingles, on the front porch, and how stray dogs would come and mark on the fish because of the stench. I had more than a few people tell me how bad downtown Clifton would smell, saying it smelled like dead rats or cat urine, and how everyone would pray for the wind to change direction. One gentleman told me how a crafty neighbor rigged a basket for the rinsing of his *lutefisk*. This neighbor could not bother with all the water changes necessary for rinsing the lye out of the fish, so he put his *lutefisk* in this basket, tied the basket to a tree, and threw the whole contraption into the cold, flowing creek. After about a week, he and his family enjoyed what little fish was left behind by the raccoons!

While Norwegian Americans can laugh at their “love” of *lutefisk*, they also take it very seriously. Most of the people with whom I spoke still feel the fish dinner is a crucial part of their ethnic heritage and Christmas celebrations. A fourth generation woman in her late 70s explained why she enjoys the whole *lutefisk* dinner experience:

I love *lutefisk*! They have people from miles around – Dallas and Fort Worth and San Antonio and Houston. When it’s prepared right it is so good. Have a big hunk of flaky fish and then a big helping of boiled potatoes. And then pour cream sauce on that and pour melted butter on that. Sprinkle a little salt and pepper on it. Eat it with homemade bread, and that is oooohhhh – delectable!

Yeah, you get to see people. People from here, there, and yonder.

Some you know, and some you don't know. And I think it's terrific that they have these little children from the public school there who are in costume, and they're doing dancing. And maybe only one or two or three of them will have Norwegian roots. They're black, brown – you know, all ethnic groups. And they've learned these Norwegian dances so they can perform at the *lutefisk* dinner. Because the benefit is the school. They get the money. (7, 2004, pp. 13-14)

This woman's statement is fairly typical of what many people said about the *lutefisk* dinner. They love the taste of the fish (albeit all doctored up with cream sauce and melted butter), and they also enjoy the socializing at the event. It is interesting to note that despite the school being more ethnically integrated now, it still carries on the *lutefisk* dinner tradition. Even non-Norwegian children participate by wearing costumes and dancing for the crowd.

As I stated earlier, I did talk to a few people who claimed to dislike the *lutefisk*. Despite this fact, however, these individuals still manage to eat some of the fish sometime during the holiday season. A third generation man in his early 80s talked about how the fish meal worked its way into his family celebrations, despite his intense dislike of it:

And then up in the Norwegian community we [have] the *lutefisk* supper out at the Gap, and I hate – I don't like that stuff. I grew up with that stuff. And it wouldn't be the holiday season if we didn't have *lutefisk*, at least at times. (1, 2004, p. 46)

Echoing the above statement, a third generation woman in her early 70s began by talking about how much she dislikes *lutefisk*, to then discussing how she dresses it up to enhance the flavor:

I mean, goodness! I'd of hated to have to eat *lutefisk* everyday. I don't even like it. Well, I can tolerate it. I'll take a little bit on my plate when we have a supper up here at the Gap. But I don't take a whole lot! Some of them, they don't eat any turkey – they just pile their plate up with that old fish! I'll tell you what it tastes like. It tastes like the white of a boiled egg with gravy over it. You need to put a little lemon on it, or a little salt or something. It needs something. If you just try to eat it by itself – it's boiled – and if you try to eat a piece of boiled fish without putting a little something on it, it's not very good!

And sometimes they get some bad fish, and it does taste real fishy. But most of the time it's real bland. And you can either pour the butter sauce over it or the creamed gravy, whichever once you want. [L: I've heard of people doing both.] Oh yeah, they will. They'll gob it up there. And you know, the potato, the boiled potato goes with it. And you set them side by side and cover them up with this gravy and butter sauce. Yum!

I'd hate to see me try to make it! I'd have the biggest mess. You know how they soak it in lye water for 10 days, clear water for 10 days. I don't really know. I know my aunt used to make it every Christmas. She lived on the home place up here, where I told you. And boy, it was finger licking good. She made that every Christmas. And people, kinfolks from Dallas came down to eat. (31, 2004, pp. 3-4)



Both of these individuals have learned how to eat *lutefisk* despite not being fans of the dish. As the gentleman stated, Christmas would not be the same without it. Both people have made the dinner an important part of their holiday. They identify too closely with the ethnic tradition to abandon it simply on taste alone.

Another woman with whom I spoke told me about how she experienced *lutefisk* in another part of the country. This third generation lady in her early 60s spoke about how disappointed she was to see other Norwegian Americans eating the fish “incorrectly:”

Well, I like [*lutefisk*]. To me, there’s no taste to it until you make it taste with your salt and pepper and butter. We used to live in Missouri, and we had a bunch of us people who were Norwegian got together at Christmas. And they would make the big *lefse* [flat tortilla-like potato bread], like our huge tortillas here in Texas. And they would put their *lutefisk*, their mashed potatoes, and their butter and salt and pepper and roll it up and eat it like a [burrito]. They’d make a cone out of the bottom so the butter wouldn’t drip over – or either flip, you know, like the end of a burrito. But that’s how they ate theirs, and I was appalled. You know, that’s not the way we eat it in Texas. (9, 2004, pp. 36-37)

This woman had made the effort to gather with Norwegians at Christmas, even though at the time she was not living in the Norse community in Texas. Because the other people’s traditions were so different than what she had experienced, she was “appalled.”

Apparently this woman had a certain set of expectations for how the *lutefisk* dinner should be prepared and eaten. To her, the meal just wasn’t the same if certain elements were changed.

Other people with whom I spoke talked about buying up extra *lutefisk* after the Cranfills Gap dinner so that they could have some at a later date, if they wished. A fifth generation man in his mid-70s explained how he and his family stock up for other events:

I look forward to the *lutefisk* dinner, because – and my son – I have one son – he’s crazy about it. In fact, I’ve got some – still have some in my freezer where he bought some last year to have one of these days. But I really enjoy that at Cranfills Gap.

And I can remember when they – when we used to have *lutefisk* at these family dinners, of course, my dad prepared it. But for some reason, it seemed like they didn’t know how to get that smell out of it. Now, the *lutefisk* dinner at the Gap, I think they’ve done a pretty good job of getting that bad smell out of it. It’s just good food, so.

I don’t fix it – prepare it or anything. We buy it from the Gap after they – they sell it in bulk after the – they usually have plenty of it left over to sell. And like I said, my son, last year, I think bought about five pounds of it, which is still in my freezer. It’s already prepared. We just thaw it and – well, it needs to be cooked. But, you know, you don’t boil it very long. It doesn’t take long to cook it. But yeah, it’s prepared.

I don’t – there may be some people who still go through the entire preparation from – I can remember down on the main street of Clifton, when Clifton Mercantile used to sell *lutefisk*, and, as they say – you know, it looks like an old worn out shingle in its dried up form. But it’s quite a preparation. But I’ve

never done it. My dad is the last one that I know of in my family that actually prepared *lutefisk*. (27, 2004, pp. 25-27, 30-31)

Since *lutefisk* is not readily available in central Texas other than around Christmas, this man and his son stock up for other times of the year. Not knowing how to prepare the fish from scratch, and not willing to do so, they simply purchase the fish already processed for the Cranfills Gap dinner. This way, they can enjoy the fish at other times of the year if they choose to do so.

A third generation woman in her mid-80s also spoke about freezing *lutefisk*, but she did not purchase this fish from the people in the Gap. She makes the *lutefisk* herself; in fact, she is the only person with whom I spoke who still does. In our interview, she talked about continuing the tradition that her mother started:

I fix it myself. My mamma used to fix it, and every Christmas we had *lutefisk*. And I did fix it myself. In fact, I have some in the freezer right now, and I've got all [the] kids' [*lutefisk*], because when I had it ready, none of them had time to come and eat with me! Now, Mother used to fix it. She had it out in the, in the – we called it [a] smokehouse, a garage, and then another kind of storage space next to it. And Mamma would fix it out there, and it was cold enough where you didn't need to put ice on it. I fix mine in the refrigerator. I put ice on it. (8, 2004, p. 16)

Preparing the *lutefisk* meal and sharing it with her family are important aspects of the Christmas season for this woman. She said that she enjoyed carrying on an old family tradition and remembering her Norwegian ancestors in such a way. She also indicated to me that Christmas would not be the same without it.

Clearly, for better or worse, the Norwegians in Bosque County still adhere to the old ways by continuing the *lutefisk* tradition. One woman still cooks the fish herself, a fact she is very proud of, but most people have their yearly fill at the dinner in Cranfills Gap. A few individuals who really love the fish meal buy extra fish and bring it home to eat later. Not everyone is as fond of the meal as these individuals are, however. Every year, a handful of wary folks gamely “choke down” their yearly “requirement” of the fish in the spirit of celebrating the old Norwegian Christmas custom. Regardless of how much the traditional dish is loved or hated, however, it is doubtful that the Norwegians in central Texas would feel as closely tied to their heritage without it. For them, eating *lutefisk* at Christmas is the ultimate expression of their identity as Norwegians.

### ***Smørgåsbord Dinner***

When speaking about their Norwegian heritage, almost all of my interviewees mentioned the annual *smørgåsbord* dinner and its importance to them. As discussed in Chapter Two, this dinner is also central to the construction and maintenance of ethnic identity in Bosque County, Texas. People plan early to send in for their tickets, and if their names are not drawn, they find ways to purchase tickets from others who cannot attend, or who purchased too many.

Because the *smørgåsbord* dinner is held during the second week of November, it is unofficially seen by many in the Norwegian community as the beginning of the holiday season. Again, because of the number of comments on this event, and because of its significance to the people of Norse, the *smørgåsbord* dinner will be addressed here in its own section.

Almost every one of the Norwegians whom I interviewed had been to the *smørgåsbord* at least once in their lives. Most of these people attend every year, or at least attempt to. Like the *lutefisk* dinner, they see this event as an enactment of their Norwegian heritage. It is an opportunity to visit with other members from the community, to showcase their Norwegian heritage to others, and to share the history of the community with outside guests. A fifth generation woman in her early 70s explained how she feels connected to the event:

The *smørgåsbord* is really a neat thing to go to. I mean, you really feel like you are in a Norwegian place, because of the decorations, their costumes, and there is a Norwegian table prayer, and the jokes, and so forth. It is very ethnic. (4, 2004, p. 15)

A fourth generation woman in her early 50s also commented on the Norwegian flavor or feel of the evening:

Clearly, [the *smørgåsbord* is my] most favorite thing. Because I just love how it looks – those little lanterns on the tables that are – they’re sort of – they’re like oil lamps. They put oil lamps on the tables. And, you know, they just have it look so pretty. And the food is good. And it’s always the same every year. It never changes. The recipes are always the same. I think that’s fun.

But we have rarely missed [a] *smørgåsbord*. I think I have missed it twice in all these years [that it has been going on]. I have been phenomenally lucky at getting tickets. [L: What happened those two years you didn’t go?] One year was the year [my daughter] was born. And then I think there was one other year I didn’t go. I can’t remember why. But it seems like if I don’t get tickets, then

someone else does, and they'll sell me a ticket. But I've – I don't think I have missed it but twice. (36, 2004, pp. 65-66)

For both of these women, the Norse *smørgåsbord* is a yearly opportunity to revisit their ethnic roots. Because the event is the same year after year, they know what to expect. The dinner is a consistent reminder and reinforcement of who they are as Norwegians living in Texas.

The *smørgåsbord* attracts people from all over Texas and the United States. A few people from Norway have also been known to show up on occasion. A fourth generation woman in her late 70s also commented on the ethnic flavor of the *smørgåsbord*, and how well received it is with visitors from Norway:

Oh, well, now the *smørgåsbord* at Norse is very popular. That's *the* popular event, I suppose. You have to order your tickets at a certain time, and you may get turned down, and you may get turned down even if you order within that time frame, because they say to put them all in a big tub, and then they draw, and you may be lucky, and you may not. So that's very popular, and they dress in authentic costume, and they have all the popular dishes of the Norwegians. It's very authentic. And that's been going on now for years and years. There was one fellow here from Norway who went to that and he said, "Ha ha! We don't have anything in *Oslo* this Norwegian!" (7, 2002, p. 2)

Another woman intimately involved with the planning of the *smørgåsbord* also commented on Norwegian visitors to the dinner. This fifth generation lady in her mid-60s compared the tradition in the two countries:

[Norwegians] think [the *smørgåsbord*] is just absolutely wonderful. Of course they have more fish over there, you know, where we don't have the *lutefisk* or any – all we have is some pickled herring. But the people that have gone to Norway to visit over there, said you even have fish for breakfast. But otherwise, they think it's pretty, you know – they think it's just really nice. [L: And what is their reason for the opinion? Do they think it's neat that there is a Norwegian community here, or that the *smørgåsbord* is authentic, or what were their comments?] I think it's both, I mean that there really is a community in Texas that, you know, [is] Norwegian basically, and they thought some of the food was, you know, some of the cheeses and stuff like that – it's not all authentic. But the Norwegian cookies, they thought that was real neat. The *gammelost* [aged cheese] and *mysmør* [whey cheese] and all that – yeah, they thought was real nice. My grandmother made it so, you know, she made it from the curds and whey, the old way – *gammelost* is from the curds, and the *mysmør*'s from the whey, and she boiled it down, and she made that. And my grandma made *flat brød* [flat bread], too, and they thought, you know, the Norwegians thought the *flat brød* was very good. (6, 2004, pp. 10-11)

This woman, who is actively involved with the planning of the yearly *smørgåsbord*, takes great pride in being able to pull off the dinner each year. She is also proud of all the people who help make the dinner happen. When talking about the Norwegian visitors to the dinner, she seemed especially happy that the little church in Norse could make such a positive impression on someone from Norway. The fact that they approved validated her notions of being Norwegian herself.

## **Church**

Of all the ways the Norwegians in Bosque County construct and maintain their ethnicity, nothing has more power than the church. Everyone with whom I spoke was a member of a church in their community, and most everyone attended services every Sunday. This fact was true even for the non-Norwegians with whom I spoke. The crucial difference, though, was that all but one of my Norwegian informants were Lutheran. They were born into Lutheran families, and they were baptized, confirmed, and married in the Lutheran church. And most of these people expected to be buried in the Lutheran cemeteries. The one man who was not Lutheran was a Methodist, and he converted to that church when he married his wife.

The people of Norse are religious people. They define themselves as such, and they see their Norwegian identity as intricately intertwined with that religious identity. For many people, the two cannot be separated. The church as an institution is the focal point of the community, and it permeates all activities in the area.

### ***Lutheranism***

Traditionally, most Norwegians belong to the Lutheran church. This fact is no different in Bosque County, where there are four Lutheran churches in the Clifton/Norse/Cranfills Gap area alone. (Three of these churches are Evangelical Lutheran Church of America [ELCA], and one is Missouri Synod.) Although there is also a sizeable German membership in these Lutheran churches, Norwegians maintain a strong presence even to this day.

When questioned about being Lutheran, most people said that they were very satisfied with the Lutheran church and its teachings. They also stated that they could not



see themselves attending any other denominational church for an extended period of time. A second generation woman in her mid-60s claimed:

Well, I don't know. I guess I just feel like a Norwegian belongs to a Lutheran church! I don't know any other reason! So many of them are [members]. And that's it, I guess. A Norwegian, I guess, just belongs in a Lutheran church. I've attended services in other churches a lot, you know, in my life, but it's entirely different. (10, 2004, p. 22)

This woman, who has been Lutheran her whole life, could not imagine being anything else. This sentiment was echoed in a statement by an important non-Norwegian person from the community. When asked if the community would be as Norwegian as it is if the Lutheran church did have not a presence there, this German man in his early 60s replied:

I would say probably not. You know, if you look at the Norwegian activities, you will find those people are mostly members of a Lutheran church here: [Trinity], Our Savior's in the country, or St. Olaf over in Cranfills Gap. And there's various ones around in the little communities, too – smaller churches, but nevertheless predominately Norwegian, and their coming together for Sunday worship certainly is a reminder of who they are, even if it's not in Norwegian or any Norwegian practices there. They gather with their relatives, and there is that tie – it's not visible, really, but yet there is a tie between who they are on Sunday morning as well as who they are ethnically. Like I say, it's not, it's not exclusive or overt or anything like that – it's just there. (29, 2004, p. 6)

This man also recognizes the tie between Norwegians and their Lutheran faith. He commented on how the Norwegian Lutheran churches are family churches, where people

go to meet other family members and relatives, and how those relationships strengthen the ethnic identity of the people involved.

A few people with whom I spoke directly tied in ethnic identity with the actual church itself. A third generation man in his early 70s, when asked if the Lutheran church forms the ethnic identity of its congregants, replied:

It does, and underline that two or three times. They don't know, uh, they don't think of themselves as Cranfills Gap, they think of themselves as St. Olaf or the Norse church [Our Savior's Lutheran Church]. That's – you're not part of the [Norwegian] settlement unless you're somehow or another associated with those two churches. (16, 2004, p. 21)

According to this man, the people of Norse define themselves not by the town in which they live, but by the church they attend. For these people, the church serves more as a personal identifier than a city does. A fifth generation man in his late 60s felt the same way. When asked about the role of these churches in the Norwegian community, he replied:

Well, you just asked me about the churches, and I just thought about the fact what would it be like without the churches, and I think without the churches, the community probably wouldn't be the community that it is. I'm not sure – well, I don't want to go so far as to say it wouldn't have survived, but it was the focal point, the reason for being, the one thing that tied everybody together. All ages, all families had that same common religious faith, and the church was the focal point for that. And this was a true faith. This was not a superficial, hollow faith. I just don't see how it would have been Norse without the church. In fact, if you

say “Norse” to most people, they immediately think of the churches. (20, 2004, pp. 21-22)

For these two men, the Norwegians in the Bosque County community think of themselves not only as Lutherans, but also as Lutherans from a particular congregation. In this sense, the church congregation acts as another family for its congregants. People can trace their lineage and their relationships through the own families *and* their churches. Consequently, both the families and the churches are Norwegian.

A fifth generation woman in her early 70s also commented on the role of the church in the construction and maintenance of ethnic identity. In her statement, she referred to the Old Rock Church, and how it is still being used by the current members of St. Olaf. (The St. Olaf Lutheran Church was built in Cranfills Gap when the congregation outgrew the Old Rock Church.) Even though the Old Rock Church is used only infrequently, she cautioned against dismissing its importance and symbolism in the community:

The congregation [at St. Olaf] is, I mean, that’s part – you know, this is still St. Olaf’s. And so many people come back and are buried [at the Old Rock Church], people that if any of their family ever belonged to St. Olaf’s, many, many of them are buried there. It’s there – it’s a real definite connection. There certainly is not a sense of it just being an abandoned church. There are weddings there all the time, [and] they have funerals there occasionally. Uh, and I don’t think that we would be able to maintain the kind of ethnic presence that we do, that we have, without those two churches. Or without the churches, period. (4, 2004, p. 19)

As evidenced in the above statements, the Norwegian ethnicity of the area is tied in to not only Lutheranism, but also to particular churches as well. While Lutheranism shapes the Norwegian identity of the people of Bosque County, the specific churches further clarify that identity. Each church gives its members a sense of place within the Norwegian ethnic community, which itself is Lutheran.

This ethnic and familial tie between individuals and their church is an enduring one. Another important non-Norwegian person from the community, a man in his early 50s, talked about how this link between ethnicity and the churches does not diminish over time:

I understand that part of who they are as a people is tied up in the church, and the way they can still keep their identity as a people is in the church. And even if they move away, I mean, to be honest about this, you know, there is a lot of funerals done at the Rock Church, are people who have not been connected with [that] church other than they were raised maybe in the community, or their parents were, and they, they are in their 70s, and they have been away for 50 or 60 years, but they come back here to be buried. And that's important. You have to understand that great pride that comes with it, and it's not just a bunch of old people hanging on to the past – it's not that. It's something else – it's their identity and who they are as a people. (30, 2004, p. 16)

Clearly, the descendants of the Norwegian immigrants to central Texas identify strongly with the Lutheran church and with their particular church itself. Being members of a specific congregation, which happens to be Lutheran, sets these individuals apart from other people living in the community and contributes to the community's understanding

of what it means to be of Norwegian descent. For most of the descendants of the Norwegian settlers to the area, being Lutheran and being Norwegian are mutually inclusive.

### *Cemeteries*

In addition to the churches, many people with whom I spoke also mentioned the adjoining cemeteries. Both Our Savior's Lutheran Church and the Old Rock Church have cemeteries on the church grounds next to the buildings. (St. Olaf in Cranfills Gap does not have a cemetery; it still utilizes the one at the Old Rock Church.) These cemeteries are surrounded by fences with gates, and most of the original immigrants and their families are buried there.

When speaking about the cemeteries, my interviewees remembered long lost family members and friends. A few individuals also spoke about the immigrants or Cleng Peerson, and how seeing their graves reminded them of all the hard work the original settlers to the area had to endure. Some others mentioned the family plots with all the children.

A fourth generation woman in her late 70s was very moved by all the children's graves. A mother herself, she reflected on how difficult losing all those children must have been for the pioneers:

The cemeteries are just wonderful. And then they sadden, too. To read the tombstones, sometimes there'll be three or four baby tombstones lined up, and you can read those babies lived maybe three or four months, some lived a day, some lived two years.

I think that has bothered me as much as anything about those poor people that came over. They lost their babies. The cemeteries, if you walk the cemeteries, you will see maybe four little graves in one family. These young [immigrant] mothers didn't have their mothers, didn't have their grandmothers to console them and help them.

My aunt told me that she had a child, and they had him, I think, about 18 months or two years. She knew he would not live. And that's so sad, because you know how attached you would become to a child. We become attached very quickly. But she was so saddened by it – she knew he would not live. The cemetery's just filled with young people. Yeah, the stones, I just love those old stones. [L: The ones with the little lambs on top?] Mm-hmm. (26, 2004, P. 37; 26, 2002, p. 13; 26, 2004, p. 37)

For this woman, the cemeteries embodied the hard work and sacrifice of the people who emigrated to Texas. Of course, there is no greater sacrifice than losing one's child, so the presence of so many children's tombstones in the cemeteries moved this woman. What also made an impression on her was how many of these families had no older family members to fall back upon. These young families were alone in their new home, coping as best as they could.

Other people commented on the positive feelings they had when they visited the cemeteries. Many spoke about the connection to family, or about a certain sense of peace. A third generation man in his early 80s said:

I feel very comfortable [in the cemeteries] because I went to funerals as a child all the time. We didn't miss a funeral for any member of the church or family. So

walking in the cemetery is like being among friends and relatives. It is a good feeling of – [a] historical feeling of strength. They had a lot of strength. (33, 2002, pp. 33-34)

A fifth generation man in his late 60s concurred, commenting on his connection to the two churches through the cemeteries. He said, “I can go to two graveyards, five miles apart, and get 95% of all my ancestors. That’s a good feeling. I can’t explain why – it’s just neat” (20, 2004, p. 17). A third generation man in his early 50s also spoke about his family buried there. He commented, “[I] sort of like to go back and sort of talk to them a little bit and tell them what [I’ve] done with [my] life, so. It’s a place to just remember” (3, 2004, p. 17). For all three men, visiting the cemeteries at the two immigrant churches was like visiting family. They gained a certain amount of satisfaction from knowing that their families were still around for them in a sense. It was their connection to the past and to their heritage.

Other people talked about experiencing different emotions when they visited these cemeteries. Another woman reflected on how her ancestors in the cemeteries inspired her life now. This third generation lady in her early 60s said:

Well, I’m kin to nearly everybody in there. And it’s like visiting the past. I remember the pictures in the photo albums of those people. And there’s stories I know of. Them and I just - it’s a time of reflection for me and strengthening that I can do what I want to do because of them, because of their faith, their perseverance. (9, 2004, p. 41)

For her, the sacrifice and hard work, along with the faith and perseverance, of her ancestors allow her to live her life the way she wants to. She feels like she would not be

who she is today without them, and she is grateful for all that they did for the future generations. She says she is who she is as a person today because of who her ancestors were then, and she feels a strong connection to them because of that.

### *Church in Norway*

A few people with whom I spoke also talked about the Lutheran church in Norway, and how it is different than the church here. Several people became aware of these differences when they visited a church in Norway, while others learned about them during their visits with Norwegian guests here. The primary difference, of course, is that the church in Norway is the state church, which means that it is sponsored and paid for by the government. A third generation woman in her early 60s talked about the state church in Norway:

Church here is a little different than the church in Norway, because people paid the pastor here. In Norway, the state pays the pastor. So our system is a little different. And most of [the Norwegians] are kind of impressed with the fact that so many people go to church [here]. You know, I've gone to church in Norway, and it was a big day, because it was [a] baptism there. There were about 20 people in church, and half of those were people getting – with a baptism. About the only time the churches fill up in Norway is whenever it's Christmas or Easter, from what I gathered from the clergy. (9, 2004, pp. 31-32)

Low church attendance is the norm in Norway, a fact I heard several times during my interviews. For the Norwegian Texans who attend church every Sunday and who stay active in other church activities, this trend is most unusual. A fourth generation woman in her late 70s addressed this low church attendance in Norway in our interview:



They have the state church, and from what I gather, the masses aren't highly excited about the church because it's there, and it's paid for, and the preacher is paid for out of their taxes. And so when the weekend comes, a lot of them go to the hills and the water and have fun. If they need a baptism, they go to the church. If they have a wedding, they go to the church. But I would say from what I hear they are not as enthusiastic about church as many people in America are. Now when [my] folks were over there visiting, and they went to church, they said that they had a good crowd, but mostly older people. (7, 2002, p. 18)

In both of these statements, we can see that the state-run church in Norway almost discourages people from attending. In Norway, people see church more as a duty, or as an obligation, whereas in Texas they see it as a pleasure, or as a necessary component of their lives. Perhaps the Norwegians in Texas see church as more of a survival tool than the Norwegians in Norway do. In Texas, the Lutheran church may be needed more to reinforce the ethnic identity of the descendants of the Norwegian immigrants, since Texas is a diverse state with many different ethnic groups and denominations, whereas in Norway, everyone is Norwegian, and quite possibly Lutheran.

A fourth generation woman in her early 50s also discussed the state-run church in Norway, but she had greater insight as to why Norwegians had such poor attendance in church. Speaking about an encounter with some Norwegian guests in her home in Texas, this woman began to understand why so few Scandinavians attend church:

[We] definitely go to church more. In fact, I think I even offended one man and his son, because I said, "Do you want – if you want, we'll go to church at Norse on Sunday." And they went, "No, no, no, huh-uh." You know, because the

church over there was so connected to the state – it was a state church, that they used the church sometimes to – like propaganda.

Like in Sweden, if you work at the match company, OK? You made matches all day. Then you had – you also bought all your goods at the company store, who charged you whatever they wanted to and put credit on your account or whatever. But it was the same people that owned the company store that paid you your paycheck. And then the house you lived in, you rented that from the match company, too.

And then when you went to church on Sunday, the pastor in the pulpit would say, “And you should be good to your employer and be faithful to him. Everything you have has come from your employer, who is good to you like your Father in Heaven.” So they even used church sometimes like propaganda. And so some people got a bad taste in their mouth from church.

Norway, too, because Norway had the state church. But the Swedish church – when we went to the match museum, and they talked about all that stuff, I could see where sometimes church got a bad name, because – and, quite frankly, it was kind of a political thing. You know, they would say things in the pulpit. Because they wanted these people to kind of stay under the control of the match company. They rented them their houses. They ran the company stores. And they even ran the church. (36, 2004, pp. 102-103)

The Norwegians who emigrated to Texas were faced with a new situation: no church, and no governing body willing to pay for one. Until they could raise the money, acquire the land to build a church themselves, and pay a pastor’s salary, they held church services in

each other's homes. Even though they had to adapt to a new way of worshipping, Texas must have seemed like the land of religious freedom to the immigrants. The Norwegians who came here were grateful for the opportunity to worship as they wished. Religion was an important part of their lives, much as it is today for their descendants.

### **Preparing Future Generations**

As seen in this chapter, the descendants of the Norwegian immigrants to Bosque County construct and maintain their identity through a variety of cultural forms and rituals. These forms and rituals, then, serve to create shared meaning within the Norse community. Part of this sharing involves communicating ethnic identity to future generations.

Many of the people with whom I spoke expressed concern that their children and grandchildren would lose touch with their ethnic heritage. As a result, these people go to great lengths to include their children and grandchildren in their ethnic festivities, customs, and rituals, which are included in this chapter. Some individuals, however, take a more direct approach to passing on the ethnic heritage of the area. A fifth generation man in his late 60s told me how he and another member from his church educated the children from the congregation about their ethnic background:

When I was a Sunday school teacher here in Waco [at First Lutheran Church], one time I took the children on a field trip up [to Norse]. And we went to [Our Savior's Lutheran] Church, and we toured the community, went to the Carl Questad place, and they walked along the house and along the brick walls, and actually we had [a gentleman] deliver a talk rather than a sermon. We sat in the Rock Church in the pews, and all the parents came with their children, too. They

were interested in it, and [this man] got up, and you know he's a historian emeritus on the Norwegians – he's got – he works on it considerably, got records and details that you and I will never recognize, but he got up and gave a talk.

And I never will forget, he was talking about – he said, “I want to tell y'all a story about one time” – and these were all true stories he said. “This is a long time ago, this young man” – I can't do it as well as [he] – but he said, “There's this young man who lived out here in this church, and he did this and he did that, and he got in trouble for doing this, and then he grew up, and he actually found a little lady that he liked a lot, and he married her in here,” and he was working in the church and doing it, and he concluded by saying, “And this was [so-and-so's] great grandfather.” He put it all personal, but [the boy] just lit up, you know, he sat there – and then [the man] told another story. And he went through this whole story from when this person – and he made up stories of this man or this woman, and then he'd say, “This was [that young lady's] great grandfather.” And he had the history of everybody in that class that had Norwegian roots up there, and he made a story of it. And nobody knew.

And don't you think those kids weren't paying attention? They sat there – “Is this me? Is this me? Is this my time?” And he had a story about everybody. And [this gentleman] tells a very good story. He had it of an interest level that the kids really liked. These were junior high level kids. And he did it in a way that they just sat there waiting, wondering who would be next. They got [this one boy] first, and [this girl] second, and so, yeah.

We went up there, and we went through all the – several of the homes.

We went to the big oak tree where they camped out after that little service and had a picnic at the same area where they lived while they were building their rock homes. You could still see a few little rock pits or circles where I think were the fire rims from the old days before the house was even built. We did have to tell them to watch out for snakes and scorpions and fire ants and things like that. But other than that, it was a pretty good little [excursion]. (20, 2004, pp. 18-19)

These two men took these kids on a field trip to Norse to teach them about their Norwegian heritage, even though they were all members of First Lutheran Church in Waco. Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Norse is the mother church to not only St. Olaf's and Trinity, but also to First Lutheran, which was also founded by Norwegian immigrants in 1884. As a result, the children's ancestors had at one time been active members of the Norwegian community in Bosque County. Making the connection between the two communities reinforced their heritage and told them about family relationships.

A fourth generation woman in her early 50s also took a group of kids up to Norse. Instead of sharing stories about each child's family, she took them to the cemeteries so they could do tombstone rubbings of their ancestors' graves:

You know, I took a youth group out there one time from First Lutheran. And they loved it, loved it, loved it. We took a bunch of kids out [to the Old Rock Church], and we gave them all sheets of white paper and Crayolas. And we said, "OK. Look at these tombstones. These are all the saints that went before you." And we said, "If you take these Crayolas, and you put the sheet on there and you go like

this [quickly moving her hand back and forth from left to right], you'll get an etching."

And we gave them all a little folder with paper and a bunch of Crayolas. And they went all over etching, you know, like children's graves or the little angels that are carved on the headstones or whatever, you know? And they did it until it almost got dark. We had to honk the horn and make [the] kids leave. They had that much fun doing it. We just did it with Crayolas, but it worked.

In fact, we had – I think we actually did that twice. One other time we went out there and had a little campfire and roasted weenies and everything. And, of course, it was so dark, and there's no light. We actually had to turn on the car lights in order to do stuff – the headlights on, you know, one of the cars.

But every time we take kids out there, they love it. And we just spend the whole day. Kind of pick a time of the year when it's kind of like fall when it's not – when the days are still warm, but the nights get a little cooler.

The kids always love going out there. They always think it's fun. And they see a lot of the names of the people that are in the church. Because the same last names that are at First Lutheran are the same last names you're going to find out there on the tombstones. And then there are still a lot of people who are buried out there, you know. So they remember.

And I've always thought that these kids at church probably didn't really pay much attention to the older people at First Lutheran. But when we got out there, they were spotting every tombstone of anybody at First Lutheran that was buried out there. And they remembered their names. It's real unusual.

I would just take, like – I kind of mixed all ages, like, you know, nine to teenagers, or whatever. And we would just go out there. And sometimes I would get some other parents to go and stuff.

But I can remember that I was real surprised at how they would recognize even names of people from First Lutheran that were buried out there. Well, this is Mrs. [so-and-so's] grave. We know [her]. And I would think all this time, I thought that they weren't really paying attention to the older people at church, but they really were. They remembered the names. They would find names on the tombstones. They thought it was a lot of fun.

We went to the Norse church [Our Savior's], too. And we've had a picnic lunch underneath that big tree and roamed around that cemetery, too. And both the churches are open all the time. So, you know, you can just go up and open the door and go in. (36, 2004, pp. 84-88)

In this example, we see how ancestors, names, church, and family all come together to help create and pass on ethnic identity for the descendants of the Norwegian immigrants in central Texas. Even though this woman thought that tombstone rubbing would be a fun activity for the kids, she did not think they would be as involved with it as they were. She was surprised at the connections they made to the names on the tombstones, and how they related other names and tombstones to their own families. She was also pleased that they were able to draw that link between their church, First Lutheran, to its mother church in Norse.

These are two excellent examples of how the older generations are taking the ethnic identity of the area and are directly passing it down to the younger set. Everyone

with whom I spoke understood the importance of sharing the ethnicity of the area, for they all wanted it to continue well into the future. A fourth generation man in his late 80s addressed this issue, but in a more general way:

Well, I think these [activities] are quite important. It's what keeps the interest alive. If they didn't have them, why, I think the interest would just eventually die out. But as long as – and as time goes on, it will eventually, I think – they'll get some of the next generation interested in it. Because as one generation dies out, if there's nothing left for the coming generation to hold on to, why, things will just eventually evaporate, so to speak. But these events, I think – it may not interest the majority of them, but there's always some that will pick up [a] thread, so to speak, and keep it going. (12, 2004, p. 48)

A third generation woman in her early 60s also commented on the continuance of ethnic events in the area:

I would say that Norse is a very unique place with a past, present, and a future through – not buildings and not big memorials, but through the past. Because I think people in Norse, being the families that they are, possessing the qualities of hard work, love, and family, that their – the picture I see of them is something – a legacy that will continue as long as there are people from those families still in the area. (9, 2004, pp. 29-30)

Both of these individuals see the younger generations as crucial to the continuance of the ethnic identity of the Norse community. They also see the families as the conduit for passing along the knowledge and traditions necessary for that ethnic identity to remain.



Because of the strong family and community ties in Bosque County, both people feel confident that the Norwegian presence in the area will remain strong for years to come.

The descendants of the Norwegian immigrants to Bosque County understand the importance of communicating and sharing that heritage with their children. They accomplish this feat by aligning themselves with particular cultural forms and symbols, and by participating in specific cultural rituals, customs, and activities. Some communicative acts may appear more obvious than others, but one would be mistaken to underestimate the presence of the Norwegians in the area. An important non-Norwegian person in the Norse community made this observation about these descendants and their commitment to their heritage:

You don't hear them, they're just there. You never hear them, they're just there. They're behind the scenes everywhere. Yes, oh [the ethnicity] is there, and it's involved in every part of the community. There's nothing untouched by the Norwegians in this area. You won't hear it, though. You won't hear it. [They are] very humble. Yeah. And they believe you do it because you're supposed to do it, period. You don't talk about [doing] it. (28, 2004, p. 18)

For the descendants of the Norwegian immigrants to Bosque County, ethnic identity is lived out through symbolic forms and cultural rituals. They communicate their ethnic identity by living it, for it is part of who they are and how they live their lives. It defines them and is also created by them. By sharing it with others, they continually validate their identity as central Texas Norwegians.

## Summary

In this chapter I have explored how the descendants of the original Norwegian immigrants to Bosque County, Texas construct and communicate their ethnicity, how that ethnicity is maintained, how shared meaning is created within the community, and how language and communication are used to validate their identity. I discussed how families passed on ethnic values and respect for the ancestors through local lore, and how some families are beginning to use names as a way of communicating ethnic identity. I also outlined the various activities through which these descendants validate and share their ethnic identity with others, including traveling to Norway, hosting Norwegian visitors in their own homes, holding family reunions, celebrating Christmas, and attending the local *lutefisk* and *smørgåsbord* dinners. In addition, I reviewed the various cultural forms and symbols adopted by the Norwegians in Bosque County to express their heritage, and I uncovered the importance of the Lutheran church in the formation and maintenance of ethnic identity for these people. Finally, I briefly touched upon the importance of continuing these traditions and what the people in Norse are doing to ensure the ethnic identity of the community continues for many years to come. In Chapter Seven, I offer an analysis of the ethnic identity and the communication patterns found in the Norwegian community of Bosque County.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### COMMUNICATING ETHNICITY IN NORSE, TEXAS

#### Introduction

The goal of this dissertation was to address the inter-related nature of identity and communication. In my research, I investigated how ethnicity is constructed and communicated in a small ethnic community in Texas. I looked at how the people of Norse, Texas experience their ethnicity, and what meanings they attach to it. In addition, I examined how that ethnicity is communicatively constructed and maintained, how the relationship between ethnic identity and communication contributes to the creation of shared meaning, and how language and communication are used to validate that identity.

I discovered that the descendants of the original Norwegian pioneers to the area still strongly identify with their Nordic heritage. In small and in large ways, this identity influences their daily lives, both on a private and on a public level. Even though these descendants are several generations removed from the settlers to the area and are quite Americanized, they choose to identify with a Norwegian ethnicity. They do this on an individual level by decorating their homes with Norwegian knick knacks, researching their family trees, or by cooking traditional foods. Publicly, they help plan or participate in larger social events, such as the *lutefisk* and *smørgåsbord* dinners, the Norwegian Country Christmas Tour, other Christmas activities, and Norwegian Society of Texas functions, among others. This public participation allows these agentive – and ethnic – social actors to reaffirm their personal ethnic identity and to share that identification with others, thus creating a collective, or community, identity. While all of these activities

were meaningful on some level, three institutions within the community – three cultural markers which reference a Norwegian heritage – were found to be key in the construction, maintenance, and transference of ethnic identity in the community today. Those three Norwegian cultural markers are Christmas celebrations, *lutefisk*, and the Lutheran church. Without these three ethnic and cultural institutions in place, the Norwegian presence in central Texas would have been difficult to maintain.

I also discovered that in sharing its ethnic flavor with others, the community of Norse, in a sense, markets its ethnic background to not only celebrate the ethnic history of the area, but also to promote the area and to bring in some money. In the process, “outsiders” become more familiar with the area, and these cultural forms and symbols are subjected to agents of potential change, such as commercialism, contact with other ethnic groups, and assimilation. These agents all threaten to dilute the Norwegian ethnic experience of the area, but my research suggests that this dilution has been minimal and slow to occur, at best. Some adaptation has occurred over time, of course, but the unique Norwegian Texan flavor of Bosque County remains salient to this day.

For these new world Norwegians, ethnic identity is continually being expressed through symbolic forms and ethnic rituals. These symbols and celebrations shape who these Norwegians are and help them sustain a distinct ethnic presence in Texas. In addition, these celebrations allow these people to share their ethnicity, which, in turn, is validated by such interactions. In commemorating and celebrating their heritage in such ways, these people strengthen their family ties, solidify the community, and draw links to their ancestors. They find faith through their connections with the past, and they muster

up inner strength in their dreams for the future. They value their ethnic identity and want to pass it along to future generations.

In this chapter I discuss my research findings on the relationship between identity and communication for the people of Norse, Texas, the three primary Norwegian cultural markers which maintain and promote the ethnic presence of the area, and the marketing of civic pride and its consequences to the ethnic flavor of the community.

### **Identity and Communication**

As seen in Chapter One, the notions of identity and communication are inter-related and dependent upon each other (Abrams et al., 2002; Collier, 1997; Hecht et al., 2003; Shepherd, 2001). One part of identity is ethnicity, which is formed when individuals align themselves with particular social structures associated with their ethnic heritage and then communicate ideas about who they are to others. In this process, identity is continually being constructed, rethought, and reconfigured (Abrams et al., 2002; Collier, 1997; Hecht et al., 2003; Lie, 2003; Martin, 1997; Spivey, 1997; Wood, 1997).

This type of constructed identity is symbolic and is centered around a set of cultural forms and symbols (Abrams et al., 2002; Lie, 2003), which, in turn, are used by ethnic groups to distinguish themselves from other groups (Ellis, 1999). Folk crafts, flags, *Vikings*, books, ethnic costumes, trolls, *nisser*, Christmas decorations, and exotic foods are all examples of the cultural forms and symbols being used by the Norwegians of central Texas to celebrate and express their unique Scandinavian background. These particular Norwegian forms and symbols communicate uniqueness and solidarity to the outside world (Lie, 2003; Martin, 1997).

Social behaviors, such as holiday celebrations, cultural rituals, and food customs, can also be viewed as an enactment of ethnic identity (Ellis, 1999; Hecht et al., 2003). The people of Norse, for example, celebrate Christmas with a Christmas Eve candlelight service in one of the old immigrant country churches. Many individuals bake Norwegian cookies at this time, and the local *lutefisk* and *smørgåsbord* dinners also occur during this time of the year. People also enact their ethnic identity by making pilgrimages to Norway and also by hosting Norwegian guests in their homes. In addition, the Lutheran church is still a strong cultural element in the community. All of these celebrations, rituals, and customs help to distinguish the Norwegians as a unique and distinct ethnic group in central Texas (Lie, 2003; Martin, 1997).

In addition to cultural forms and symbols, celebrations, rituals, and customs, a community's language, especially that which references their identity, is a critical component to identity (Hecht et al., 2003). In Norse, the last few individuals who grew up in the home learning and speaking Norwegian are slowly fading away. Very few individuals in the community now speak Norwegian, although there are some people who have a limited grasp of the language. This limited understanding, however, is usually the result of studying the language as an adult, or of traveling abroad. That being said, some Norwegian phrases and sayings do survive in the community, and are, indeed, experiencing a comeback. Many people who claim a Norwegian heritage can say "hello" or "good bye," along with "thank you" in Norwegian. Some can even engage in elementary courtesies, such as, "How are you today?," and, "Thanks for our last meeting." Most Norwegians in the community also know the Norwegian table prayer, and it is said quite often, both in homes and at community functions. The descendants of

the original Norwegian pioneers to the area take pride in what little Norwegian they can speak, and they want to learn more.

That some Norwegian has been retained at all seems somewhat remarkable, given the processes of Americanization and the development of Norwegian in Norway since the period of immigration. When the immigrants left Norway over 150 years ago, the Norwegian language there was more formal, more “old fashioned,” and this was the language they carried with them to Texas. Compounding the problem in Texas was the fact that the immigrants also brought with them their regional dialects and ways of speaking. As a result, the Norwegian spoken in Texas evolved within a totally different context, and over time, was quite dissimilar from its original form, which, in Norway, had since been standardized and less-formalized.

According to Løvoll (1999), this phenomenon was common throughout Norwegian communities across America. The mixing of different languages and dialects brought about its own way of speaking and speech patterns, which were often a mix of English and Norwegian. American speech patterns would be interspersed with Norwegian words, or with adaptive Norwegian-sounding words, and “strange” accents developed.

Examples of these adaptations can be seen in Bosque County today. One can witness English and Norwegian being used simultaneously on a gate for a farm named “Norse Forty,” a play-on-words for a football term. Other farm gates which mix the two languages include “Norse Ridge” and “Valhalla Ranch.” In these examples, *Norse* means “Nordic,” and *Valhalla* is “the hall of dead heroes,” as portrayed in pagan Norse mythology (Crossley-Holland, 1980; Davidson, 2006; Hamilton, 1969).

Other linguistic “errors” are also present within the community, mainly in the spelling of particular Norwegian words. On another gate for a farm named “Fjell Hjem,” which stands for “Mountain Home,” one “l” is dropped off the first word. I was not able to find out why this happened, although I tend to think it was an honest mistake. While I did not personally speak to this farm owner about his sign, I heard through other sources that he is somewhat bewildered about it as well. Wanting to display a Norwegian name for his farm, this farmer is now stuck with a misspelled sign.

Other “misspellings” in the community can be found primarily at the *smørgåsbord*, where certain ethnic foods are now identified primarily with phonetic spellings. For example, *geitost*, which is “goat cheese,” is now spelled “yettost.” For a community that no longer speaks Norwegian nor understands its spelling or use, this spelling elicits the correct pronunciation. Since English does not employ the Norwegian letters *æ*, *ø*, and *å*, these symbols have all but disappeared from the *smørgåsbord* menu. But removing these letters changes the pronunciation of the words, so the words had to be further altered to elicit the proper pronunciation when spoken by native English speakers.

I do not point out these “mistakes” to be critical of the people living in Norse. Instead, I use these examples to show that Norwegian still lives on within the community, albeit at a somewhat diminished level, *despite* the fact that no one speaks it anymore. Norwegian is no longer spoken in central Texas, but its presence can be felt there. The *smørgåsbord* still serves Norwegian dishes, and the dishes are still referred to by the Norwegian names; the names are just spelled more “American” now. (After all, they still refer to *geitost* as “yettost,” rather than just “goat cheese.”) And I think that using English and Norwegian together, whether accidentally or on purpose, just goes to show



the adaptive nature of language, and the power it has to allow people to live in both worlds.

Because of the myriad of ethnic groups living in Texas during the mid to late nineteenth century, the native Norwegian speakers were exposed to a larger variety of languages, dialects, and accents. This exposure, no doubt, also influenced the evolution of Norwegian in the area. In Norse, the language was not only Americanized, it was “Texanized.” Norwegian in Bosque County became its own dialect of sorts, complete with localized slang. What was common there had long ago fallen into disuse in Norway. It seems natural that with subsequent generations, the language faded from use altogether.

The traditional model of assimilation assumed that as cultural differences were reduced, ethnic groups would lose their uniqueness, and assimilation could more easily occur. Specific cultural elements such as language, religion, place of residence, and levels of intermarriage were all considered indicators of a group’s level of identification (Alba, 2000a; Steinberg, 2001). The model’s linear approach to assimilation, however, did not take into account the willingness of a group to be assimilated. For those groups who identify strongly with their identity, there is no motivation to assimilate (Alba, 2000a; Hecht et al., 2003). For this reason, the descendants of the original Norwegian pioneers to the area still maintain a strong Norwegian ethnic identity.

Over the past 150 years, this community experienced changes as each new generation emerged, as outlined in Chapter One. The first generation, or the immigrants from Norway, were still linked to the old world (Petersen, 1997). They spoke the mother tongue, cooked the old recipes, and celebrated holidays like their grandparents did back in Norway. They even attended school and church in Norwegian. Their children, the

second generation, were interested in becoming American. During this generation, people adopted English in their homes, schools, and churches. Some individuals married non-Norwegians, and others moved out of the community. They wanted to make better lives for themselves, so their aim was to become Americans.

The children of the second generation, or the third generation, belonged to America. By this time, the Norwegian traditions had all but died out in Norse. The community experienced an ethnic revival, however, so now some of these traditions are returning. People take pride in their heritage, and they celebrate it through a variety of customs and rituals. This symbolic identity, then, is this generation's attempt at reconstructing its identity (Song, 2003; Steinberg, 2001).

Subsequent generations in the community will determine the future of ethnicity in the community. This fact has already been borne out in the fourth and fifth generations from the Norse community. Not only do they embrace their Norwegian heritage, they are taking active steps to pass it along to their children and grandchildren. These individuals value being American, Texan, *and* Norwegian (Steinberg, 2001; Zéphir, 2001).

Being an American, a Texan, and a Norwegian is not a contradiction for contemporary ethnic Americans. One can be assimilated into the larger American cultural landscape and still retain certain ethnic elements of one's past (Alba, 2000a; Steinberg, 2001). For the descendants of the original Norwegian pioneers to central Texas, ethnicity is an important aspect of their whole identity (Daniels, 2002), and they want to learn as much as they can about that heritage (Song, 2003). They accomplish this goal by celebrating their ethnicity in a variety of ways (Halter, 2000), which will be discussed in the next section of this dissertation.

### **Norwegian Cultural Markers in Norse, Texas**

As seen throughout this dissertation, the descendants of the original Norwegian pioneers to central Texas readily identify with their ethnic heritage. They see themselves as Norwegian, and their lives have a little more meaning because of that identity. They also proudly exhibit this heritage by displaying cultural artifacts around their homes and places of business, announcing their immigrant roots to all. In addition, these individuals participate in cultural celebrations and rituals, all of which reaffirm their identity and communicate it to the outside world.

Of all the cultural celebrations and rituals, three stand out as particularly Norwegian, and they are most responsible for the continuation of the Norwegian culture in Bosque County, Texas. These three Norwegian markers are Christmas celebrations, *lutefisk*, and the Lutheran church.

#### ***Christmas Celebrations***

No holiday is more cherished nor more anticipated in Norway than Christmas. It is a time for family and friends, for celebrations, for reflecting on the past year, and for looking ahead to the next. When the Norwegian immigrants came to Texas, they brought their Christmas traditions with them. Many of these traditions are still observed to this day in Norse, Texas.

In Norway, the Christmas season coincides with the onset of Advent, the beginning of the church year. Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas Eve. The Advent season has not only become a preparation for the Christ child, but also a preparation for Christmas as well. During this time, people make or shop for their gifts, cook, and decorate. An Advent wreath with four white or violet candles is placed in the

home, and a new candle is lit each consecutive Sunday. Scriptures are also read at this time. Some families even keep Advent calendars, with scriptures and small treats for each day of the season. These activities are geared toward the children, who learn the Christmas story through these celebrations (Mellbye, 1996; Stokker, 2000; Su-Dale, 1995).

Baking is an important part of the Christmas season in Norway. Cookies are the most critical part of the holiday menu, with seven or more different types usually present. Most Norwegians today would not even consider it a Christmas celebration without the varied types of cookies from which to choose. In 1992, *Aftenposten* (Evening News), Norway's largest daily newspaper, conducted a survey of which types of cookies were baked most frequently during the Christmas season. Their results included *smultringer* (doughnuts) and *hjortetakk* (crullers, or unraised doughnuts), tied for first place, *sandkaker* (known as *sandbakkels* in America), *sirupssnipper* (gingersnaps), *Berlinerkranser*, *gøro* (rectangular cookies pressed in an iron), *krumkaker*, and *fattigmannsbakkels*. A lot of time and care are put into the baking and serving of these cookies during the holiday (Henriksen, 2005; Mellbye, 1996; Melsom, 2003; Serre, 2004; Stokker, 2000).

Although Germanic in origin, Christmas trees are very popular in Norway. They are usually cut down on Christmas Eve, and they are placed in the house and decorated by the family. Ornaments include homemade straw shapes and heart-shaped baskets. Paper Norwegian flag garland is also draped over the trees. The families also put lights on the trees, and when the decorating is finished, switch them on. Presents are also opened on this night, although if the children cannot wait, they are allowed to open one

gift the night before, on *lillejulaften*, or Little Christmas Eve. At this time, many families have a *juletrefest*, or a Christmas tree party (Henriksen, 2005; Mellbye, 1996; Stokker, 2000; Su-Dale, 1995).

On *julekveld*, or Christmas Eve, church is very important in Norway. In fact, more Norwegians attend church at Christmas than at Easter, the two highest church attendance days of the year in Norway. Most Christmas Eve services are held between 2:00 and 4:00 in the afternoon, although some churches have begun to hold midnight services once again. The popular Christmas carol *Jeg er så glad hver julekveld* (Knudsen & Wexelsen, 1978) is always sung during these services (Mellbye, 1996; Stokker, 2000).

Following the church service, most Norwegian families eat their Christmas meal. While families and traditions do vary, certain regional dishes are common. In eastern Norway, families celebrate Christmas with *ribbe* (roast rib of pork) and *surkål* (sour cabbage), while western Norwegians prefer *pinnekjøtt* (steamed rib of lamb) and *kålrotstappe* (mashed rutabagas). In southern Norway, *kalkun* (turkey) is the favorite dish, while in northern Norway, *lutefisk* and boiled cod are Christmas staples. Many families across Norway also serve *medisterpølser* (pork sausages) and *medisterkaker* (pork patties), along with some dessert made from *molter* (cloud berries). Some people even add *aquavit* to their celebrations (Henriksen, 2005; Mellbye, 1996; Melsom, 2003; Santa's Net, 2005; Serre, 2004; Stokker, 2000; Su-Dale, 1995).

People are not the only ones to enjoy a special feast on Christmas Eve in Norway. Some rural Norwegian families still put out the *julenek* for the birds and give their farm animals extra food as a symbol of Christmas generosity. These ancient *Viking* traditions

still hold meaning for many Norwegians today (Henriksen, 2005; Mellbye, 1996; Stokker, 2000).

During the Christmas season, especially between Christmas and New Year, many young Norwegians go *julebukking*, traveling from house to house, wearing costumes and singing carols in the hopes of getting some treats. This centuries-old tradition has roots stretching back to the *Viking* times, when people believed that supernatural beings in the form of goats roamed the earth. After Norway had been Christianized, the story changed somewhat, telling how a *julebukk* (billy-goat) and a *julegeit* (female goat) would approach each farm as Christmas neared to assure that the family was taking care of Christmas preparations. In a sense, modern day *julebukkers* serve the same purpose. A tradition that once was used to ward off evil spirits and exert social control now is done for fun, and to strengthen the commitment to neighbors, families, and friends. *Julebukking*, then, serves as a reminder of a more innocent past, where people were more friendly and more trusting (Henriksen, 2005; Løvoll, 1998; Mellbye, 1996; Santa's Net, 2005; Stokker, 2000).

As seen in Chapter Five, many of these Norwegian Christmas traditions survived the trip to the United States and thrived in the community of Norse. Some of the older Norwegian traditions, such as putting out the *julenek*, feeding the animals extra food, and *julebukking*, have since died out in recent decades, but they were once common in the community. Perhaps these traditions lost their importance and practicality once people began leaving the farms and living in town, and few people had farm animals to look after.

Most of the other Norwegian Christmas traditions, however, still retain their significance and symbolism in Norse. While each family does celebrate Christmas in its own way, of course, most families' traditions center around a core set of themes. Most people with whom I spoke see the Advent season as the "official" beginning of the Christmas season, with the local *lutefisk* and *smørgåsbord* dinners preceding that. People spoke of Advent wreaths and calendars, and of reading Scriptures and sharing treats with the children. For all these families, Christmas is a child-centered holiday, and it is a time to share faith and teach the young ones about the birth of Christ.

Other critical components of Christmas celebrations in Norse are the Christmas tree and gift-giving. Many of the people with whom I spoke still celebrate on Christmas Eve, although some people said their families wait until Christmas day. Many individuals said they make their own Norwegian-style ornaments, and they try to decorate their home in a similar manner. A few people also said they put their tree in the middle of the room, hold hands in a ring circling the tree, and sing carols while dancing around it – a very Norwegian tradition. Some families even sing the carols in Norwegian!

Of course, no Christmas in Norse would be complete without the candlelight Christmas Eve service in one of the local churches, preferably one of the immigrant churches, Our Savior's or the Old Rock Church. Most people with whom I spoke attend Christmas Eve service at one church or another, although a few said they preferred service on Christmas day. By all accounts, the churches are always full, and the children's program, held by some congregations, is always good.

After the church service, many families have their traditional Christmas meal.

In most cases, this includes turkey, dressing, and mashed potatoes, but many families also continue with the tradition of *lutefisk*. In these instances, the fish is bought ahead of time, usually from the overstock from the Cranfills Gap dinner, and frozen, so few people actually make it from scratch any more. In addition, many families still celebrate with the Norwegian cookies, although not with the seven different varieties that are expected in Norway! A few individuals also make *gløgg*, a traditional hot spiced wine punch.

Whether a family celebrates Christmas in Norway or in Norse, certain elements will never change. Christmas is always about children, and most importantly, the baby Jesus. The holiday is also a time of gathering with family and friends, for worship and reflection, and for appreciating the simpler things in life. It is also for planning for the future, and for passing down traditions to the newer generations. For these reasons, Christmas is a special time for the people of Norse, Texas, just as it was for their ancestors who arrived there 150 years before.

Christmas is about the past and about the future, so it is understandable why so many Norwegian Christmas traditions survive in Norse today. Stokker (2000) discusses the importance of these Christmas traditions, and how they helped the early Norwegian immigrants to America retain a sense of who they were:

Incorporating change while retaining everything that makes it so beloved, Christmas holds within its vast and monumental embrace diverse individuals, families, and cultures, allowing each a means of self-expression. Amid the combined pressures of Americanization, modernization, and mobilization into the middle class, Christmas helped mediate the initial strangeness of the New Land.



Intensifying Norwegian American sentiment about both their ancestral home and their adopted one, Christmas helped Norwegians assimilate into the American culture of Christmas trees, Santa, and store-bought gifts even as it allowed them to retain the beloved [Y]uletide carols and *julebukking*, [*fattigmannsbakkels*], *lutefisk*, and *lefse* from home. These customs and foodways provided a touchstone to Christmas past – first those in the Old Country, then those Norwegian American and American Christmastimes that inevitably and ineffably soon grew equally dear. (p. 299)

For the descendants of the Norwegian settlers to central Texas, these somewhat modified Norwegian Christmas traditions allow them to be Norwegian, American, *and* Texan.

### ***Lutefisk***

As mentioned above, *lutefisk* is a part of Christmas for many Norwegians. It has become an important component of the Christmas Eve meal, and indeed, Christmas would not be the same without the fish dish for many Norwegians. That tradition has carried over into Norwegian American communities as well.

*Lutefisk* begins as cod swimming off the shores of the *Lofoten Islands* in northern Norway. In the spring, thousands of tons of these fish are caught and are hung on drying racks to make stockfish, the basis of *lutefisk*. On these racks, the strips of fish dry into slender boards which resemble wood shingles when stacked (Norwegian Seafood Export Council, 2002). This process of catching and drying the fish is well over 1000 years old, and Norwegians have been trading the dried fish for goods such as wine, wheat, and honey for just as long (Innovation Norway, 2005; Nor-Shipping, 2005; Utenriksdepartementet, 2005).

Traditionally, the dried stockfish is broken up with a wooden hammer, soaked in water, and eaten with mustard or butter. Adding potash lye to the water produces soft and flavorful fish meat, otherwise known as *lutefisk* (Innovation Norway, 2005; Nor-Shipping, 2005; Utenriksdepartementet, 2005). Traditionally, *lutefisk* season begins in the fall and runs through late winter (Norwegian Seafood Export Council, 2002).

Although once common throughout many regions of Norway, *lutefisk* had fallen out of favor with many Norwegians in the last century. With improved food distribution and refrigeration, the once-common staple became replaced with fresher varieties of fish or with other kinds of meat. Norwegians generally considered the dish “lowly peasant fare,” and they were glad to discover other alternatives. Recently, however, *lutefisk* has enjoyed a revival of sorts in Norway, and more and more people are enjoying it once again (Stokker, 2000, p. 247; Norwegian Seafood Export Council, 2002; Torvund, 2004).

In Norwegian communities throughout America, *lutefisk* is a crucial ethnic marker. It makes its appearance at Christmastime, served by many families as part of their holiday meal. Norwegian Lutheran churches also serve *lutefisk* suppers, not only to reinforce and celebrate their ethnic heritage, but also to raise money. It is oftentimes accompanied by *lefse*, another Norwegian culinary staple. In fact, some people roll up their *lutefisk* in the *lefse* and eat it like a burrito. No matter how it is eaten, the table prayer “*i Jesu navn*” is always said beforehand (Stokker, 2000).

Despite its importance as a Norwegian cultural marker, Americans also have quite a sense of humor about this fish dish. Many people joke about the bad smell that accompanies the dehydrated fish, or they may make comments about the arduous

preparation time. Still, many other individuals comment on the taste, but most would prefer to partake in the traditional meal rather than to miss out, even if they dislike it somewhat. According to Stokker (2000), the good-natured humor surrounding *lutefisk* is itself part of the ritual, and is just as important as eating the fish.

The descendants of the Norwegian immigrants to central Texas still consider *lutefisk* to be a major part of their lives. Most people, even those who claim to dislike the fish dish, try to attend the yearly dinner in Cranfills Gap. Some even buy up extra portions to be served at their families' Christmas dinner, although one woman admitted to still making it herself. The fact that no one makes it from scratch anymore did not seem to diminish its significance in any way. If anything, the people were glad to not have to fool with it.

As stated in Chapter Six, no one is neutral about *lutefisk*. But love it or hate it, everyone has a story about it, and most of these stories are humorous. Norwegian Americans love to poke fun at themselves for their love of the dish, so stories about the smell and the preparation and the eating of *lutefisk* abound. Most Norwegian Americans are also slightly bemused at the Norwegians' confusion for the dish's popularity and longevity here in the states. While Norwegians are just now rediscovering *lutefisk*'s allure, people here in the United States see it as a badge of heritage and identity.

For those Norwegian Texans who like or even love *lutefisk*, the dinner is something to look forward to, and the meal is considered almost a delicacy. That Norwegians in Norway stopped eating it years ago, and would only consider exporting the stuff, is baffling to most. Perhaps the recent trend in Norway to revive the tradition will confirm what Norwegians in America have known all along: that *lutefisk*, when

made properly and served under the right circumstances (i.e., Christmas), is the most culturally and ethnically validating food for Americans of Norwegian descent:

*Lutefisk* evokes that [Christian] faith and symbolizes Norwegian tenacity in the face of hardship as the family recalls its humble past. But the *lutefisk* ritual does even more...It also recognizes the family's migration and celebrates the distance it has traveled from those impoverished circumstances. As such, *lutefisk* has become a powerful expression of what it means to be a successful Norwegian living in the New World. (Stokker, 2000, p. 248)

For the people of Norse, *lutefisk* represents the motherland, the hardships of the immigrants, and the Norwegian community in Bosque County, Texas. While traditionally in Norway the dish was considered peasant food, here in America it is seen as evidence of a thriving ethnic community not willing to let go of its roots.

I wanted to comment on the corresponding importance of the *smørgåsbord*, and why it was not included here in this section. For many people in Bosque County, the *smørgåsbord* dinner is just as much a part of their ethnic heritage as the *lutefisk* dinner, and it is an important part of their holiday celebrations. Many of my interviewees shared their feelings about the *smørgåsbord* dinner with me, and I know it holds a special place in their hearts. It is not my intent to dismiss its place in, nor its importance for, the community in central Texas. I know that the community would not be the same without it.

I felt that the *lutefisk* dinner was more authentically Norwegian in the sense that it represented more of the “peasant” food experienced by the immigrants to Norse. In that way, it was more symbolic of how far the immigrants had come, both geographically and

mentally, when they arrived in Galveston or New Orleans. *Lutefisk* reminds people of those travails and hardships, and also of their humble past. In addition, *lutefisk* is unquestionably Norwegian, and a definite ethnic marker for Norwegians across America. The *smørgåsbord*, while important and symbolic, is more “middle class” and Swedish (or more generically Scandinavian), and somewhat more removed from our immigrant past (Su-Dale, 1995).

I tend to think of *lutefisk* as a symbol of the past, as a tie to the ancestors, whereas I view the *smørgåsbord* as proof of their descendants’ success in Texas. Both ethnic dinners are equally important to the community and are deeply cherished, but I believe they symbolize two different aspects of the immigrants’ experience in Norse. Because of its more direct ties to the motherland, I chose to include *lutefisk* in this section rather than the *smørgåsbord*, but one should not underestimate the symbolism and importance of the *smørgåsbord* for the people of Norse simply because I have not discussed it here.

### ***The Lutheran Church***

Nothing represents Norwegian heritage for the people of Norse more than the Lutheran church. Regardless of the activities they participate in, or the tchotchkies they have in their homes, or in how American or how Norwegian their Christmas celebrations are, most of the Norwegians of Norse see themselves as Lutheran. All but one of my Norwegian interviewees was Lutheran; he changed when he got married. The immigrants who came over were Lutheran, as were all of their descendants. Entire families were born, confirmed, married, and buried within the Lutheran faith.

Whether German or Scandinavian, the Lutheran church in America has historically been an ethnic church. When immigrants brought their religion to America

with them, they naturally established their own churches. This was a situation entirely different from what they were accustomed to, because in Norway the Lutheran church was the state church (Division of Religion and Philosophy, St. Martin's College [DRP-SMC], 1999; Evangelical Lutheran Church in America [ELCA], 2005; Løvoll, 1998, 1999). In Norway, congregations were quite homogenous because the country was fairly homogenous. In America, congregations were also homogenous, at least initially, but not for the same reason. In a land of multiple ethnicities and religious denominations, individual churches and congregations became the focal points for communities who were linguistically and geographically isolated from others. In this sense, the Lutheran church developed an "ethnoreligious" feel within the Norwegian communities (Løvoll, 1998, p. 85), even more so than in others. "The strong attachment to Norwegian Lutheran ideology and the limiting of socializing to the congregation made Norwegians retain national cultural characteristics longer than, for example, Danes or Swedes" (Løvoll, 1999, p. 160). For this reason, the Lutheran church remains strong in the Norse community.

Because of its immigrant roots, the Lutheran church in America began as a scattered and unorganized association of different synods, or factions. Between 1840 and 1875, for example, 58 different synods were formed in the United States. Each group was ethnically defined and was situated around a particular geographic location (ELCA, 2005).

Norwegians, like other ethnic groups, had their own Lutheran synods. In 1917 three of these different groups joined to officially form *den norsk lutherske kirke i Amerika*, or the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America (NLCA). The Germans

followed suit, and in 1918 three of their synods joined to form the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA). Both organizations worked together, along with other smaller groups, to provide relief for U.S. soldiers and sailors in World War I (ELCA, 2005; Løvoll, 1998, 1999).

The Lutheran church in America experienced further consolidations over the next few decades. In 1930, three other German churches merged to form the American Lutheran Church, and in 1946, the NLCA dropped the “Norwegian” from its name, thus becoming the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC). In 1960, the American Lutheran Church, the United Evangelical Lutheran Church, a Danish synod, and the ELC merged to form the American Lutheran Church (ALC). The Lutheran Free Church, a Norwegian group, joined them in 1963 (ELCA, 2005; Løvoll, 1998, 1999).

Other ethnic Lutheran synods were also merging. In 1962 the ULCA, which was comprised of German, Slovak, and Icelandic groups, joined with the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, which was Swedish, the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, a Danish group, to form the Lutheran Church in America (LCA). Finally, in 1988, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) was formed when the American Lutheran Church (ALC) and the Lutheran Church of America (LCA), along with an association of other evangelical Lutheran churches, united (ELCA, 2005; Løvoll, 1998, 1999).

The ELCA was formed with the intent to reflect the various ethnic heritages of its original churches, and also to illustrate the broader American cultural landscape which it now serves. As a result, the Lutheran church in America is no longer as ethnically defined as it once was, at least not on a national level (ELCA, 2005). It is interesting to

note, however, the current geographic distribution of Lutherans across the country.

Eighty percent of the counties throughout the United States where Lutheranism is the predominant denomination are located in the Midwest and the Northern Great Plains. These counties are found mostly in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Montana, all of which have significant Norwegian/Scandinavian and/or German ethnic groups. Likewise, 98% of the counties where Lutherans comprise half of the church members are also located in these seven states (Noll, 2005).

Lutheranism is not the predominant denomination in Texas, yet Lutheran churches exist and thrive there, as evidenced in Norse. In Texas, generally speaking, one cannot and should not assume that if a person is Lutheran, then s/he is of Germanic or Scandinavian origin. In certain immigrant communities like Norse, however, where different ethnic groups lived in their own cultural enclaves, one can certainly claim to have predominately Norwegian and/or German congregants.

The people of Norse define themselves by what church they attend. In fact, for many in Bosque County, Our Savior's Lutheran Church *is* Norse. The church is the community, the identity, of the people who attend. It embodies their religious *and* their ethnic heritage. Without their church, many people in the community would feel lost.

The churches in Clifton, Norse, and Cranfills Gap are always open. One can go to any church during the day and walk on in. Only at night are the doors locked. These churches are small (about 200 to 300 members), but they are active. Most members attend every Sunday, and they serve on different committees, or they sing in the choir or teach Sunday School. The pastors are almost always available as well. The churches, along with their congregations and their pastors, are quite active in the local community.



The congregants of these churches take pride in their buildings and strive to stay up on repairs (“Dinner at St. Olaf’s Church Fund-Raiser,” 2006; “Dinner at St. Olaf’s Church Rescheduled,” 2006; “Former Members, Friends,” 2005; “Restoration Project,” 2006; “Second ‘Dinner,’” 2006; “St. Olaf Restoration,” 2005; “St. Olaf’s Celebration,” 2006; “St. Olaf’s Lutheran Church Fund-Raiser,” 2005; “St. Olaf’s Lutheran Church Seeks,” 2005; “‘Sunday Dinner,’” 2005; “Thrivent Financial,” 2006; Tindall, 2005b). In addition, they keep up their neighboring cemeteries. Old tombstones are being replaced with newer, easier-to-read ones, and fresh flowers or American flags can always be found on many graves. The Norwegian Lutherans of Norse see their faith as a link to the past and as a bridge to the future.

The active church community in Norse is somewhat baffling to Norwegian visitors to the area, who are accustomed to a 3% weekly attendance rate. Despite the fact that almost 90% of all Norwegians in Norway are Lutheran, and that the vast majority are baptized, confirmed, married, and buried in the church, the church has little or no relevance to them outside of these activities (DRP-SMC, 1999). For their contemporary American counterparts, however, their participation in the church defines and guides their lives, and it informs who they are. It also distinctly distinguishes them as ethnic Americans with immigrant roots. In many ways, to be a Norwegian American and a Lutheran American are one in the same.

### **Norwegian Ethnic Identity in Texas Today:**

#### **Communicating Personal Identity and Marketing Civic Pride**

Without a doubt, the people living in Norse, Texas define themselves as Norwegian Americans. They can lay claim to that label because they surround

themselves with Norwegian cultural forms and symbols and participate in various customs, traditions, and rituals which distinguish themselves from other ethnic groups in the area. By sharing their ethnic identity with others, they continually redefine, negotiate, and construct this identity. Interacting with other groups reaffirms the notion of “us” and helps further set the Norwegian community apart – at least ethnically – from the other groups in the area.

By identifying with the Norwegian community in Norse, these descendants of the original pioneers to the area have created their own “in-group.” Membership in this group implies inclusion and its corresponding social identity; it sets its members apart and presents them as their own, unique unit. Within this context, members use cultural forms and symbols and traditions as a means of communicating their differences from others. This interaction with others continually forms and reaffirms the group’s ethnicity for them (Ellis, 1999). In this sense, ethnic identity is dynamic, rather than static (Geertz, 1963, 1973; Higham, 2002).

Chapter Five of this dissertation looked at the ethnic identity of the people of Norse, both historically and today. This chapter focused on RQ1, which asked how the people of Norse, Texas experience ethnicity, and on RQ4, which asked what meaning(s) the people of Norse attribute to the cultural practices that reflect their ethnicity. My research revealed that the people of Norse are keenly interested in their ethnic heritage, and that they take an active role in celebrating and promoting that heritage. Further, they value any public opportunity to validate their identity and to share it with others. These activities reaffirm who they are ethnically and allow them to set themselves apart as a unique, distinct group.

From the beginning, the Norwegian immigrants to Texas were interested in becoming Americans and model citizens. Originally, they were isolated because of their language, religion, and geography, but those elements soon changed. Their children and grandchildren gradually pulled away from the Norwegian culture and migrated more towards the American one. It is important to note, however, that while they were very concerned to become Americans, they were not anxious to obliterate all traces of their Norwegian heritage. For example, parents encouraged their children to learn English while at the same time not necessarily discouraging the use of Norwegian at home. Church services gradually converted to an all-English format, but the Norwegians did not abandon the Lutheran denomination. Norwegian foods and Christmas customs also continued, albeit in a diluted form, and today they still play a prominent role in the community at particular times of the year. And finally, family connections and an understanding of one's roots have always been encouraged within the community. Many people with whom I spoke knew their family trees, attended family reunions, had researched their family's history, and had even made treks to Norway to visit long-lost family members still on the ancestral farm. Consequently, people of Norse today are, indeed, Americans, but they are also Norwegian. They are both because their ancestors embraced both identities as well.

As Glazer and Moynihan (1970) stated, this Norwegian ethnic identity does not influence such activities and events, but rather it is their source. These activities and events sponsored by the community not only benefit the ethnic cause, but they also preserve it. In this sense, they also set apart the Norwegians from the other white ethnic groups, which traditionally had been anonymously lumped together into one racial

category. As a result, the Norwegians are both absorbed by and contribute to the white American experience.

Alba (1990) attributes this particular phenomenon – one of blending and yet maintaining unique characteristics – to the formation of a new white ethnic identity in America: that of the European American (or in words utilized by others, “pan-ethnicity” or “post-immigrant Americans,” neither term preferred by Alba) (p. 312). Under this “new” ethnic identity, whites in America are defined more by the similarities in their immigration experiences than by the unique cultural and ethnic markers inherent in each particular group. Most people living in America today who can claim a European ancestry all tell similar stories: their ancestors left the homeland poor and destitute, seeking a better life in America; they faced discrimination and hardships after arriving on these shores; and that with hard work and perseverance, they lifted themselves out of extreme poverty and gave their children better opportunities. In this way, American national identity, and its corresponding mores and values, are defined by the early (i.e., white) immigrant experience and the opportunity for upward mobility.

This “homogenized” European immigrant experience is not without ethnic variety, however, for another aspect of the American national identity is individualism, which accounts for the continuing presence of distinct white ethnic identities within the larger European American rubric. According to Alba (1990),

the point is not merely that ethnic identities are persisting beyond the life of the objective differences that once nurtured them, but it is rather that there is reason for them to persist, even if ethnic differences within the white population fade into oblivion. (p. 314)

In other words, some white people are choosing to define themselves with a particular subjective ethnic identity even as the social structures, or objective differences, that once separated them from others are no longer quite as clearly distinct.

This white ethnic identity – in this case Norwegian American – arises out of three factors. The first factor is that the ethnic group defines itself partly by its history, which typically includes both “factual and moral dimensions” (Alba, 1990, p. 313). Implicit in this historical view of ethnicity is the notion of shared ancestry, an important element of ethnic identity (Petersen, 1997; Song, 2003). The second factor shaping white ethnic identity is the communal integrity associated with belonging to a particular group with a particular history and heritage (Alba, 1990; Barker & Galasiński, 2001; Ellis, 1997; Petersen, 1997). The final factor involves the maintaining and transference of information which interests the group, such as economic or political issues (Alba, 1990).

As revealed in my interviews, the people of Norse today identify as Norwegian Americans because of the three factors listed above. Most of my interviewees had a general knowledge about the history of the area, and a few others could recite some family immigration stories. These stories, and others, told about the conditions in which these families left Norway, their hardships upon arriving in America, their trials and tribulations during their period of adjustment, and their ultimate success in making a better life for their descendants. These stories also revealed which values the people of Norse regard most: a strong work ethic, as evidenced in the sacrifice and handwork of the early pioneers; a resilient survival instinct, as seen in the immigrants’ experiences with hardship and their strength in adversity; well-established social ethics, such as the settlers’ willingness to help others and their sense of communal obligation; and Christian

love. Most importantly, the people of Norse today understand the familial and social networks of the community, and how everyone is related, both literally and figuratively, to each other. The Norwegian immigrants who came over knew each other and were family, just as the people of Norse are now. This history, communal values, shared ancestry, and sense of family all contribute to the Norwegian ethnic identity of the area and ensure that these elements will be perpetuated into the future.

The Norwegians, along with other Europeans, came to America with the intent to take full advantage of all that this new country had to offer. They were keenly interested in becoming American, and as a result, many of their distinct Norwegian ethnic cultural markers faded away, or at the very least, were somewhat diluted. Of course, this transformation was occurring simultaneously in other groups as well. The irony of this situation is that the very processes through which these ethnic Europeans struggled to become American have themselves become the de facto definition of the American experience. So, in attempting to become more American, these people redefined the term according to their respective histories and struggles.

As a result, ethnic whites maintain their ethnicity not to reaffirm their sense of worth or of belonging (which was never really doubted or debated) to the greater American experience, but rather to uphold the definition of the American dream. Their experiences as the earliest voluntary immigrants to this land shape contemporary notions about what it means to be an American. As seen in Chapter One, the notion of “whiteness” was established as the desired norm, and assimilative pressures were put upon “non-whites” to reach this goal or status. In this sense, “people of color,” such as Native Americans, who originally inhabited the land, African Americans, who were

initially brought over as slaves, and Latino Americans, who occupied much of the southwest, were automatically seen as inferior and were delegated to lower rungs of the social ladder (Fouron & Schiller, 2001; Glazer & Moynihan, 1970; Kibria, 1999; King, D., 2000; Nakayama & Martin, 1999; Petersen, 1997; Song, 2003; Steinberg, 2001; Walzer, 2000).

Because of the significance placed upon whiteness, individual white ethnicities are no longer really needed to further clarify identity. As a result, white ethnicity becomes a choice, a voluntary means of identifying oneself. In fact, given that the “erosion of ethnic differentiation is much further advanced for the population of European-ancestry whites than for other racial and ethnic groups in American society” (Alba, 1990, p. 9), this choice becomes all the more salient for those who make it. It becomes a statement about one’s place in American history, and about one’s desire to not get lost in the “whitewashing” of all the various ethnic groups that arrived from Europe.

This attitude may arise out of the tendency during early American immigration for whites to be hierarchically organized according to more or less desirable ethnic traits. Whites were divided into three groups, depending on the geography of their homeland, their religion, and often times, their education and occupation. The most desirable group was the Nordics, the Protestant groups from the British Isles, followed by the Alpines, the groups from northern and western Europe, and the Mediterraneans, the groups from eastern and southern Europe. Initially these differences were more pronounced or noticed, but as new immigrants came from other parts of the world, these variations among the white groups tended to lose importance (Alba, 1990; Jacobson, 1998).

The Native Americans, African Americans, and Latino Americans, then, by virtue of *not* being white, had no choice but to identify themselves ethnically. They were not valued as people, nor as were their contributions to the building of America herself. Initially, they were not even considered to be Americans: the Native Americans were exterminated and run off their lands, the African Americans were forced into slavery, and the Latino Americans were used as cheap laborers. As far as the early Americans were concerned, they had no worth, they did not belong, and their experiences were ugly blights on the developing American dream.

As a result, contemporary ethnic identity within these groups is about reclaiming and redefining ethnic identity on new terms. It is about opposing the status quo, questioning one's role in society and in the development of the American experience, and about reaffirming one's sense of worth and belonging. In the case for African Americans, who lost their connections to Africa during the Diaspora, it is also an opportunity for families to establish a new history. It is about *choosing* to be ethnic because one can, not simply because one has to. In this sense, non-white ethnic Americans reclaim their identity and construct it with their own experiences and meanings (Asante, 1987, 1989; King, D. W., 1998; Lieberman, 2000; Mackethan, 2003).

Because they were voluntary immigrants, the whites who came to America got to define the American experience according to their terms. As a result, their individual white ethnicities also became voluntary. Those individuals who were already here, or those who were brought over against their will, had no choice but to be labeled as the "other." They could not fade into the ethnic landscape, nor could they blend in. They were not white, and therefore, they were categorized according to those terms. Their



ethnic identities were forced upon them and defined them as different, as inferior, and as “unsalvageable.” They could never be white, so they were “less.” Now that the American experience is being revisited and re-examined, however, ethnic whites are reconsidering their influence on it, while other ethnic groups are asserting their contributions to the American dream and reclaiming their humanity. In the process, each group gains a better understanding of not only itself, but also of others as well.

Part of the American experience for the Norwegian immigrants to Bosque County was the idea that they were settling in “wild west” territory. Texas was rough and unsettled (by whites) in the 1850s, but initially the land was free, there was plenty of prairie for livestock, and the rivers ran clear, so this small group of settlers chose to make a home for themselves there.

The move was not without major adjustments, of course. Stories abound of clashes with the native Comanches, problems with the extreme heat and humidity, encounters with rattlesnakes, and episodes of deadly lightening strikes. Moving to the new world was difficult enough, but the differences between Norway and Texas were several. Perhaps that is the reason that most Norwegians (and other Scandinavians) settled in the Midwest and the Northern Great Plains, where at least the cold winters resembled those in Norway.

The early pioneers were both drawn to and wary of this untamed land. They were worried about the “rough” nature of the state, for there were few European settlers or developments in the area, and Native American raids were frequent. The land, rivers, and game of the area, however, were very appealing to them, so they decided to make a life

for themselves there. For them, immigrant life was hard, regardless of where they lived. Texas was, no doubt, challenging to them, but they survived and thrived there.

The people with whom I spoke in my interviews were in awe of this accomplishment. Many of these people had themselves grown up on a farm in Norse, so they were all too familiar with how difficult it was to make a living as a farmer, even with modern machinery. To think of those immigrants starting from scratch was almost impossible for some, knowing that they came over with so little in terms of tools, language skills, social networks, or money. As a result, the descendants of these pioneers were proud of their community's success and took great pride in being a distinctive Norwegian settlement in Texas. The people of Norse are proud to call themselves Norwegian Americans, but they claim a more unique ethnicity – that of Norwegian Texan. To paraphrase Thaler (1998), these descendants of the original Norwegian pioneers were living a “culturally [Norwegian] expression of [Texan] identity” (p. 121).

Texans have always had a bigger-than-life sense of state identity, so much so that most Texans see themselves as Texans first, and as Americans second. In fact, my father tells me that he has noticed this phenomenon during his worldly travels. He says that whenever their tour bus stops somewhere, the locals always ask, “Where are you from?” Other people on the bus say, “America,” but inevitably the Texans on board, and there are always a few, will say, “Texas.” (Interestingly enough, I have heard people from Alaska do the exact same thing.) My father, in his own way of explaining cultural differences, points out that people in China may not know where Iowa is, but they sure as heck know where Texas is. He and my mom are always asked how big their ranch is

(they do not own one), how many horses they own (zero), and if they have cowboy hats (my father does, my mother does not).

I feel that this strong, pro-Texas sentiment comes from the wild west flavor of the state, its outlaw mentality, and its macho self-sufficiency. Texas, the state, is big and rough, and it grows people with big and rough personalities. I say all this with nothing but affection in my heart, of course, because I am a Texan as well, even though I have lived outside the state for almost as long as I lived in it. For the most part, Texans possess a no-frills attitude towards life, and they have a love-it-or-leave-it take on things. They see themselves as a unique, tough bunch, and the Norwegians of Bosque County are no exception (although their modesty prevents most of them from becoming “too big for their britches,” as Texans say). They are a distinct ethnic group in the state of Texas, and they are a unique group of Norwegian Americans, and for these reasons, they are eager to share their ethnic identity with others.

Chapter Six of this dissertation looked at the communication patterns of the people of Norse, both historically and today. This chapter focused on RQ2, which asked how this community’s ethnicity is communicatively constructed and maintained, on RQ3, which asked how the relationship between ethnic identity and communication contributes to the shared meanings within the community, and on RQ5, which asked how the people of Norse use language and communication to validate their identity. My research revealed that community activities, such as the *lutefisk* and *smørgåsbord* dinners, the Norwegian Country Christmas Tour, historic house renovations, Norwegian visitors, and Norwegian Society of Texas functions, among others, all serve to help form and perpetuate the Norwegian ethnic identity of the area, and that these activities create a

sense of belonging within the community. People find meaning through these activities, and in establishing their ethnic identity through them, these individuals form communal bonds with others. As a result, there is a sense of belonging, involvement, and of place.

Since these cultural activities arise out of the ethnicity of the community, they communicate this ethnic identity to others. They tell others who these people are, and what they believe in. To understand this group, then, one must study these meaningful cultural activities (Abrams et al., 2002; Collier, 1997; Ellis, 1999; Hecht et al., 2003; Lie, 2003; Martin, 1997; Spivey, 1997; Steinberg, 2001; Wood, 1997). Ethnicity creates the need for these activities, which in turn, reinforce that ethnic identity.

Language can be a crucial component of identity, but Norwegian is no longer spoken in the community. The people of Norse, however, have found other ways to communicate and validate their identity through language use, albeit in a diminished and altered form. Many people in the community know enough Norwegian to exchange pleasantries, or to ask how someone is doing. Many others know the names of particular foods or customs, such as the items on the *smørgåsbord* menu, the lyrics to a Christmas carol, or a table prayer. Even though some words have been phonetically spelled or even Americanized, they still express what the speaker intends. People in the community understand the words and what they represent, while others outside the area recognize these words as markers of something different, something from another culture. These words, while few, help distinguish the Norwegians as a unique group in central Texas with their own unique customs and heritage.

As stated earlier, ethnic identity is an ever-changing, fluid notion. The immigrants who came over were undeniably Norwegian, and it took them a while to change their ways, to blend in with others in the surrounding communities. They saw themselves as Norwegian, and the way they lived their lives reinforced that notion. As subsequent generations grew up, however, the community began to shift culturally, but not necessarily ethnically. Descendants of the original pioneers learned English as their first language, and they attended school and church with English as the language of instruction. Many of these individuals married non-Norwegians, and certain customs faded or were diminished by the process of “Americanization.” They never forgot their Norwegian heritage, however, although there were fewer culturally-sanctioned means for expressing it. As time passed and more people experienced a renewed interest in their ethnic backgrounds, more and more customs and traditions were revived, and some new ones were created. The people of Norse, then, have always been Norwegian ethnically, but they have experienced and expressed this notion to varying degrees. At once proud to become Americans, they were also respectful about their roots, their homeland.

In a sense, the people of Norse today choose to be Norwegian, much like their ancestors chose to be American. The pioneers to the area were Norwegian, and that is how they identified themselves. Through the processes of time and ethnic integration, however, they reconstructed and reconfigured how they saw themselves, and they made strides to Americanize themselves. They felt that this change was in their and their offsprings’ best interest, and that, in the end, everyone would experience a better life because of it. Their motives were to survive and to create a better life for themselves in America.

But what do the people of Norse today gain by reclaiming their Norwegian ancestry? I believe that, while these individuals are certainly proud of being Americans, they want to set themselves apart from other ethnic groups to make their families' and community's contribution to the American landscape more unique. These people do not want to be lumped into generic categories such as "whites," or "immigrants," or even the plain label "Americans." They want to be known for the extra-ordinary, unique group that they are, and they want the accomplishments of their ancestors to be recognized.

That being said, I do believe that these motivations are tempered not only with pride, but also with a sense of great humility, as discussed in Chapter Five. Norwegians, in general, both here in the United States and in Norway, are not attention-grabbers by nature, and they do not want to come across as boastful braggarts. This inclination, however, does not prevent them from respecting and admiring their ancestors, and for wanting to honor them by remembering their sacrifices and hard work. One must remember that Bosque County is a rural county, and many of its residents live or have lived on farms, so they are keenly aware of the type of work that goes into maintaining such large tracts of land. Knowing that their ancestors did not have the modern conveniences or farm machinery that we have today only makes them respect their efforts more.

By labeling themselves as Norwegian Americans, the people of Norse are revealing a lot about themselves. In just those two words, they reveal that they are the descendants of immigrants; that these immigrants came from Norway; that these immigrants chose to settle in Texas, rather in the Midwest or the Northern Great Plains, where the vast majority of Norwegians (and Scandinavians) went; that these immigrants

and their offspring made successful lives for themselves in Texas; and that they eventually made the transition to American citizens. Also suggested by the immigrant subtext are the hard work and sacrifices of the early pioneers, as well as their good reputations. I had more than one interviewee say to me how the Norwegians, on the whole, were a respectable, honest group of people who did not have a lot of skeletons in their collective closet. In other words, no one was ashamed to admit a Norwegian ancestry, and no one was compelled to forget it, either, due to unfavorable circumstances. While certainly no ethnic group is without problems, the Norwegians seemed to be least burdened by negative events, at least in the opinion of my interviewees.

Now that the people of Norse are choosing to see themselves as Norwegian, how do they maintain and nurture that identity? How is their situation any different than when their ancestors made the effort to become American? The original pioneers who came over to Texas were 100% Norwegian, so their lives and their activities reflected that. Over time, as they made the transition to Americans, their lives and activities changed as well. In the beginning, being an ethnic Norwegian was simple; at that time, there were no other options. All cultural forms and symbols, along with customs and traditions, were Norwegian. As the community became more mixed, the Norwegian stamp on these activities became less noticeable. People's everyday lived experiences were partly in the Norwegian world, and partly in the American one. They were moving from a thick to a thin identity (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998).

Today, the people of Norse are mostly Americanized. A few Norwegian traditions did survive to modern times, but people today have to make an effort to "go back" to the olden ways. Without the efforts of several key individuals, groups, and

institutions in the community, these traditions would have died out long ago.

Fortunately, many of these traditions have been revived, and many new ones have been created. In a sense, the community is more active in the Norwegian heritage of the area than it has been in the last 50 years or so. Today's Norwegians in Bosque County are choosing to participate in more Norwegian customs and traditions, and through these celebrations they reaffirm and renegotiate their ethnic identity while communicating it to the outside world. They are certainly still Americans, but they are Americans with a unique Norwegian – a *Texan* Norwegian – flavor.

Will this Norwegian flavor fade over time, however? Are these customs and traditions becoming more American? My instinctual answer to these questions is “no,” at least for now. Currently, it seems that the community has been able to maintain the Norwegian ethnic stamp on these social activities over the last few years. In the case of the *lutefisk* and *smørgåsbord* dinners, little has changed over the last few decades. The menus, recipes, and methods of food preparation are still the same. The entire evening, from the pre-dinner activities, to the prayers, to the layout of the dinner, has also remained fairly consistent. One could argue that only the spelling of the Norwegian foods has changed somewhat. With these two Norwegian ethnic dinners, the local patrons know what to expect, and they appreciate the sameness of the experience.

One could even argue that there is more Norwegian flavor now in Norse than, say, twenty years ago. This increased ethnic feel of the area can be attributed to several different factors. First, Bosque County founded a chapter of the Norwegian Society of Texas, and Clifton was named the Norwegian capital of Texas in 1997. With these two events came more public awareness and more ethnic promotion in the form of signs and



banners, businesses and the city getting involved, and social events such as the *syttende mai* celebration and historic building restorations. The Norwegian Country Christmas Tour was also begun around this time to showcase the local heritage and historic buildings and to tie-in with the *lutefisk* dinner. Many of the people who visit the area at this time go to see the old-fashioned Christmas decorations at the old farmhouses and businesses, but they also wind up learning a little bit about the ethnic heritage of the area in the process. Third, there has been a dramatic increase of Norwegian visitors to the area in recent years. This increase all began with the visit of King Olav V of Norway in 1982, and it has steadily grown over the years. Now the area is host to Norwegian exchange students, choirs, musicians, and tourists, all of whom seem to enjoy the visit.

As these Norwegian ethnic celebrations become more known outside the community, there is a potential for them to change. They could become over-commercialized, and their ethnic uniqueness and significance could become over-emphasized or distorted, or they could become diluted or more Americanized. Other groups in the area could be ignored or slighted in the process. In addition, more focus could be placed on the money-making aspect of the events, rather than the cultural significance of the events themselves. Over time, these events could solely become tourist attractions with no personal meaning or importance for the people behind them. At that point, the original intent of celebrating ethnic pride could be reduced to cultural or ethnic theater, replete with stereotypes, misinformation, or the “sanitizing” of history to make the area’s history more appealing. One group of people could wind up being exploited for the promotion of the community as a whole.

At this point, I would say that these rituals have remained fairly consistently Norwegian over the past few years. The only overt Americanized aspect of these rituals that I could find would involve the marketing of the events, or the selling of these ethnic rituals as a consumer commodity. This marketing is necessary, of course, to promote the area, and it is commonly done throughout the nation to promote various ethnic and historic communities, so at this stage, I am not concerned about that aspect. If the people of Norse can remain faithful to the original form of the ritual, as they have in the case of the *lutefisk* and *smørgåsbord* dinners, then I feel that they stand a good chance of maintaining the Norwegian ethnic flavor of the area. If they let the events get too commercialized, or too large, or too “cookie cutter,” however, then any distinct Norwegian ethnic flavor will be lost. It is up to the current keepers of the traditions to ensure that future generations do not let this happen.

By recognizing their ethnic heritage and sharing it with others, the people of Norse are ensuring the perpetuation of the Norwegian ethnic culture in central Texas for many years to come. While they may never regain the thick Norwegian identity of past generations, they can maintain their thin identity with more breadth and depth than ever before. I would argue that that are moving in that general direction, because rather than merely *feeling* their ethnicity, they are once again *being* their ethnicity (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998; Song, 2003; Steinberg, 2001).

The renewed Norwegian ethnic identity of Norse has revitalized not only individuals and families, but the community as well. Other ethnic groups in the area, most notably the Germans, have also been experiencing a rebirth of sorts in interest in their own ancestry (“3<sup>rd</sup> Annual,” 2005; “4<sup>th</sup> Annual,” 2006; “Advance Tickets,” 2006;

Anderson, 2005c, 2005d, 2005e; “Barbecue Dinner,” 2006; CCC, 2004c; “Ed Kadlecek,” 2005a, 2005b; “Free German Lessons,” 2005a, 2005b; “German Delicacies,” 2005; “German Heritage Important,” 1997, 1998, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006; “German Heritage Traced,” 2000, 2002; “Germanic Heritage Important,” 2005; “German Lessons Continue,” 2005; “The History of Oktoberfest,” 2006; Mathews, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d, 2005e, 2005f, 2006c, 2006e; “Museum Welcomes,” 2006; “Oktoberfest ’05,” 2005; “Oktoberfest ’06,” 2006a, 2006b; “Oktoberfest Coming,” 2004; “Oktoberfest Glossary,” 2006; “Oktoberfest Nearing,” 2006a, 2006b; “Oktoberfest Returns,” 2005, 2006; “Oktoberfest This Weekend,” 2005; “Pumpkin Patch,” 2005; “Rotary to Join,” 2006; “Sons of Hermann,” 2006a, 2006b, 2006c; “Tickets Are Now Available,” 2006; “Whitney German Club,” 2005; “Womack Church,” 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006; “Zion Church,” 2006; “Zion United Church,” 1997, 1998; “Zion United Sausage,” 2000). There is now a German fraternal organization and a few German-inspired events in the community, including an Oktoberfest celebration. The German group has become more organized and has made a presence for itself in the community to the point where they are now invited to participate in some of the more traditionally Norwegian events, such as the parade that accompanies the Norwegian Country Christmas Tour. As far as I can surmise, the two groups support each other’s endeavors and there is no real competition for attention during these events. Other ethnic groups, such as the Latino Americans, have also begun to gear up in the area as well.

In promoting themselves and their ethnic heritage, the Norwegians in Norse have inspired other ethnic groups to do the same. Consequently, instead of creating more

“competition” for themselves, they have managed to further distinguish themselves from the others, because now the other groups are becoming more distinct as well. Different people from various ethnicities live and work and celebrate side by side in the community, and as a result, the area is enjoying a more multi-cultural awareness.

Clifton is “the Norwegian capital of Texas” because of its rich, documented Norwegian history, and for that reason, the town promotes itself as such, although the community celebrates the other ethnic groups of the area as well. Because of its unique claim, the city of Clifton tries to attract visitors to see and learn about the Norwegian heritage of the area. Most Norwegians settled in the Midwest and the Northern Great Plains, and there are several German communities between the Austin and San Antonio areas, including New Braunfels, Niederwald, Fredericksburg, and Pflugerville, so for these reasons, the city promotes the Norwegian heritage over the German.

The city’s goal, of course, is to bring money into the small community. In this sense, the Norwegian ethnic flavor of the area is being used to “sell” the town and surrounding areas. Clifton is taking the civic pride of its inhabitants and is applying a commercial aspect to it, taking what is a way of life for part of the community and marketing it to the general masses. This ethnic identity, an everyday lived experience for many Norwegians in the area, is now fueling a large part of the city’s economic engine. Ethnic identity gives meaning to people’s lives, and it also keeps the town working.

This “selling” of the Norwegian ethnic flavor of the area is another way in which the descendants of the original pioneers can reaffirm and reconstruct their ethnic identity. Through the activities promoted by the city, these individuals can communicate who they are and what they believe in to a larger and more diverse audience. In fact, in recent

years the town has experienced an increase in visitors from all over Texas and other parts of the United States. As a result, the small Norwegian community in Bosque County is receiving more recognition from Norwegian communities in the Midwest and the Northern Great Plains. Some people up north had a vague knowledge about the Texas community because Cleng Peerson is buried at Our Savior's Lutheran Church, but most people did not even know that fact.

Interestingly enough, the Norse community has been attracting more Norwegian visitors as well. Through connections with people in the community, and through such activities as hosting exchange students, the word is getting out that there is a small Norwegian community in central Texas. In fact, it is not uncommon for a charter bus full of Norwegians to pull into town. The people are interested in seeing the historic buildings, Cleng Peerson's grave, and the "wild west" of Texas. They also enjoy visiting the museum and learning about the history of the area. Many are amazed to witness such a strong ethnic presence in the area.

In my opinion, this marketing of ethnic identity has helped the city more than harmed it. It has caused a revitalized interest not only within the community, but also outside it. The city has brought in a lot of money, most of which, of course, goes back into planning more events. Because of all the activities that are going on, people are paying more attention to their heritage and are wanting to take part in these activities. They are proud to "show off" and share their ethnic heritage with others.

Does marketing ethnic identity in the consumer culture diminish it in any way? Will the community become too "commercial" for its own good? I suppose these two outcomes are always possible, but I do not believe that here they will become a reality.

The town is too small, and all the people know everyone else, for these events to morph into something they are not. Certain events, such as the *lutefisk* and *smørgåsbord* dinners, for example, have changed little in their entire decades-long histories. People can attend these events year after year, and they know what to expect. The “sameness” of these events brings consistency and comfort to those who attend. The recent upsurge in ethnic revival and the increased numbers of tourists to the area have not changed them, and I do not see these dinners, or any other events, changing in the near future.

The community of Norse is at once a dynamic, changing environment, and also one that remains static. It is dynamic in that the generations of people living there had undergone a shift in their ethnic identity from Norwegian to American, but yet recently had returned to reclaim their Norwegian heritage. Technologies and culture change, too, of course. Conversely, the community is static in that the things which matters most – family, hard work, values, faith – have remained the same throughout the years. By expressing and celebrating their ethnic heritage through cultural activities, and by marketing some of these activities to others, the Norwegians of Bosque County continue to redefine and reaffirm themselves and to communicate their values to others.

### **Summary**

As seen in this chapter, Norwegian culture lives on in the community of Norse, Texas through institutions such as Christmas celebrations, *lutefisk*, and the Lutheran church. While many ethnic communities lose their identity over time, this Norwegian American settlement remains strong. And although many Norwegians in Norse are now marrying outside their ethnic group, the community’s continuance of religious traditions

and food rituals ensures that the ethnic flavor of the area will not be lost for many years to come (Alba, 2000a; Løvoll, 1999; Steinberg, 2001).

As Norwegian as the community is, it is important to remember that it is a Norwegian community situated in the heart of Texas within the United States. It is its own culture, and it has its own unique ethnic stamp. This placement does not diminish its importance nor its relevance, but rather sets the community apart as a witness to a different time and place, as would a snapshot. In his discussion on the Norwegian culture which developed in America, Løvoll (1998) warns against criticizing or devaluing its ethnic symbolism:

In order to proceed, then, it is manifestly imperative to recognize ethnic cultures as legitimate and meaningful expressions of a historical process. Norwegians, like other nationalities, are a people divided by migration. As a consequence, two separate cultures emerged; one developed among Norwegians in Norway, and one took shape among Norwegians in America. From the time of separation in the mid-1820s, these two cultures over time, from generation to generation, evolved in different directions. (p. 36)

Because of this evolution, one may be tempted to judge the Norwegian communities in America as pale imitations or dilute interpretations of nineteenth-century peasant Norway. This would be a mistake. Løvoll suggests we view each community as a living embodiment of ethnicity and history, and that we try to understand the communities through the eyes of the people who live in them.

This was my primary goal of my research. I wanted to understand how this ethnic community descended from Norwegian immigrants could still define itself as Norwegian

in the twenty-first century. I wanted to learn how a community so grounded in its past could be so eager to share its knowledge and experiences with future generations. I also wanted to understand how one could be American, Texan, *and* Norwegian all at the same time.

I did not set out to define “Norwegian-ness” or to determine the authenticity of the area’s ethnicity. I wanted to let the people who lived there to do that. I think they have accomplished that, and I know that they take great pride in who they are and where they came from. For example, Norwegian is no longer spoken conversationally in the community, and much of the printed Norwegian that does exist is misspelled, but the people of Norse know what is being communicated. Some people refer to the authentic *bunader* worn by the ladies, or to the authentic *smørgåsbord* menu. Most Norwegians, however, would argue that the Texas *bunader* are homemade and consequently different than Norwegian ones, and that a few of the *smørgåsbord* menu items are American, so thus, they are not authentic. I would argue, and Løvoll would agree, that these examples support his quote above, illustrating that a Norwegian culture can exist in the middle of Texas and still have its own interpretations and expressions of its ethnic heritage. In other words, what may be considered “authentic” for a Norwegian is something totally different for someone expressing her/his “Norwegian-ness” using a Texan perspective.

For these reasons, the community of Norse is precisely what it is today, simply because the people there have constructed and defined it as a “legitimate and meaningful expression” of their ethnicity as they understand it (Løvoll, 1998, p. 36). They have decided what is important, what has symbolism, and what is worthy of future generations.



They have put their own interpretations on historical processes and are living out their own today.

Some would argue that most Norwegian Americans live with a romanticized, immigrant-based understanding of their cultural heritage (Løvoll, 1998, 1999; Steinberg, 2001), but those same people would also argue that that is exactly how it *should* be. According to Alba (1990), “ethnic Americans have the right to hold on to their particular traditions and differences, that these represent a valid form of self-expression under threat of obliteration by the cultural hegemony implicit in the melting pot” (p. 3). Norwegians living in America, and especially the unique community of Norwegians in Texas, identify with their ancestors who came over, and with their values, beliefs, and hard work. These people’s celebrations of their ethnicity is their own way to validate their past and to ensure their future.

### ***Post Script***

I wanted the reader to be aware that throughout this dissertation, I struggled with the use of “Norse” to describe the Norwegian community in Bosque County, Texas. As I conducted my research, it became clear to me that the word “Norse” could not be used in a generic sense as a blanket statement to refer to the entire community, which was what I had been doing initially. I learned quickly that people thought of the Norwegian community with many different terms, and these terms were highly specific to certain regions, or smaller communities, within the larger settlement: Mustang, Harmony, Norse, Boggy, and Norway Mills. In addition, for some people, “Norse” refers to Our Savior’s Lutheran Church, so I had to be very clear and specific when I was conducting my interviews.

A more accurate description of the Norwegian community would have included the boundaries of Clifton and Cranfills Gap and the entire southwestern section of Bosque County. However, as one can see, this is quite a bulky description, so I needed to find something more definitive for my dissertation. Throughout this dissertation, the reader encountered different names to describe the area, such as the Norwegian settlement of Bosque County, the Norwegian community, and others.

Ultimately, I decided upon “Norse” when referring to the Norwegian settlement there. I picked this name primarily because it was short and descriptive, and also because it refers to the heart of the Norwegian settlement, the Norse community. Our Savior’s Lutheran Church is in Norse, and that church is the mother church to the other (Norwegian) ELCA churches in the county and in Waco. Thus, the area has historic, symbolic, and emotional connotations for the people in the county.

These are the reasons why I chose to use “Norse” to describe the Norwegian settlement in Bosque County. It was not my intent to diminish or exclude the other small communities in the area, and I hope I have not offended anyone living in those communities by doing so. My concern was the community, the settlement, as a whole, and I felt that “Norse” was the most descriptive and expedient name available to me.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **CONCLUSION**

This chapter concludes my investigation of ethnicity and its modes of communication within a Norwegian community in central Texas. In this final chapter, I begin by outlining the primary concepts examined in the previous chapters. Afterwards, I discuss the limitations of this study, and then I examine the ways this study's results may contribute to the field of communication studies and to understanding the link between identity and communication. I conclude the chapter with suggestions for future research.

#### **Summary of Dissertation**

In Chapter One, I began with the argument that identity and communication are inter-related and dependent upon each other. One element of identity, ethnicity, can be critical in the formation of an individual's identity, because identity is formed when individuals align themselves with particular social structures associated with race or ethnicity and then communicate ideas about who they are to others. During this process, identity is continually being clarified, deliberated, and reformulated. This constructed identity is centered around cultural forms and symbols, and also around social behaviors such as holiday celebrations, cultural rituals, and food customs. Individuals may have a "thick" or "thin" attachment to this identity. Related to the notion of ethnicity and identity is the process of assimilation, which I also addressed in this chapter. Historically, proponents of assimilation supported a white, European model of culture, and they adhered to a linear model of cultural transformation, which in later years has been sharply criticized. In America, immigrants, of course, were the focus of

assimilation. The earliest arrivals changed little, but subsequent generations lost more and more of their ethnic identity and thus became, generically, “American.” After the third generation, however, a renewed interest in ethnic identity emerged. White ethnic Americans, because they were considered the “norm” and the “goal” of assimilation, had also lost their sense of ethnic uniqueness, but they, too, were experiencing a renewed interest in their heritage. In looking at the importance of ethnic identity, I also considered the impact of naming and of creating relationships with the land, or in other words, the notion of *place*. The last part of Chapter One is dedicated to my research objective, which includes the five research questions that guided my investigation:

1. How do the people of Norse, Texas experience ethnicity?
2. How is this ethnicity communicatively constructed and maintained?
3. How does the relationship between ethnic identity and communication contribute to the creation of shared meanings within the community?
4. What meaning(s) do the people of Norse attribute to the cultural practices that reflect their ethnicity?
5. How do the people of Norse use language and communication to validate their identity?

Also included at the end of Chapter One are the contributions of this study to the discipline of communication and a preview of the remainder of the dissertation.

Since I was interested in investigating the constructed identity of people living in a Norwegian settlement in Texas, Chapter Two is dedicated to describing this community. In this chapter I discussed Norse, a small, rural community in central Texas. Located in Bosque County, the community includes the towns of Clifton and Cranfills

Gap. The settlement was founded in 1854 when a small group of Norwegian immigrants arrived and built their homes there. Today, 9.3% of the people in this area still claim Norwegian ancestry, compared to 0.6% of people across Texas as a whole. Consequently, in 1997 Clifton was named the “Norwegian Capital of Texas.” Many significant historical and cultural buildings and artifacts can be found in this section of Bosque County. Several of the pioneers’ original rock homesteads are still standing, along with some rock fences, well-houses, and old barns. The two churches built by the Norwegian settlers are also still there: Our Savior’s Lutheran Church, and the Old Rock Church. Both churches utilized Norwegian well into the twentieth century, and both congregations are still quite active today. Of particular interest is Cleng Peerson, the father of Norwegian immigration to America, who is buried in a prominent place in the cemetery at Our Savior’s. In Clifton, the Bosque Memorial Museum exhibits the largest collection of Norwegian memorabilia in the south and southwestern United States, while Clifton College stands as a testament to the immigrants’ desire to foster religion and education within their community. The area has also hosted several guests over the years, from Norwegian exchange students to the sitting king of Norway, Olav V, in 1982. Descendants from the original pioneers to the area have also formed their own group, the Norwegian Society of Texas, Bosque County Chapter, and they celebrate certain holidays throughout the year: *sankthansaften*, or summer solstice, Leiv Eiriksson’s birthday, *juletefest*, or winter solstice (Christmas), and *syttende mai*, May 17, Norway’s Constitution Day. These celebrations draw large crowds, and they are popular among non-Norwegians as well. Finally, the Norwegian community in Bosque County holds its annual *smørgåsbord* dinner in November and the Norwegian Country Christmas Tour

and *lutefisk* dinner each December. These events are much anticipated, and they are well-attended. The Norwegians in Norse take great pride in these events, and they use these events to share their ethnicity with others and to pass their heritage on to future generations.

I presented the methodological approach of phenomenology in Chapter Three. Phenomenology arises from the interpretive paradigm, which is concerned with describing a phenomenon with the words and experiences of those being studied. Interpretive researchers use thick description to describe small groups in an attempt to understand how meanings are expressed. In this chapter I also discussed the theoretical framework of constructionism. Under this worldview or paradigm, reality is relative and subjective, and the subjects being studied act as agentive social actors in the creation of their own meaning. I then outlined phenomenology, which is concerned with revealing the “essence” or true nature of a phenomenon as it is experienced by different individuals. When using the phenomenological approach, researchers do not start with hypotheses, but rather with meaning questions, and they seek to understand the lived experiences of their subjects’ daily lives. Because of the cooperative nature of this type of research, both the subjects and the researcher have an active role in the creation of shared meaning. I concluded Chapter Three by discussing the methodological approach to analyzing data. This procedure includes Epoche, or the researcher bracketing her/his preconceived notions, description, and imaginative free variation.

Chapter Four was devoted to a description of the methods and procedures that I used in this study. I began the chapter by discussing my experiences and how they related to my research. I then described my research setting and participants, who

included people with Norwegian ancestry (N = 30) and people with non-Norwegian ancestries (N = 7). Of my Norwegian participants, over half (N = 16) were 100% Norwegian. I interviewed 15 men and 22 women, logging over 53 hours of recorded interviews. The rest of this chapter dealt with my research procedures. In this part of the chapter I discussed my data collection techniques, which primarily consisted of in-depth interviewing. I also outlined my ethical concerns, my data analysis procedures, and my verification procedures.

The next three chapters were a discussion of the results of my research, and they were organized according to the different types of research questions. In Chapter Five I addressed the first and fourth research questions by describing how the people of Norse, Texas experience their ethnicity and what meanings they attach to the cultural practices that reflect that identity. My research findings correlate to what I encountered in the literature review with regards to assimilative patterns among the different immigrant generations. In the first part of Chapter Five, I outlined the reality faced by the first generation of Norwegian immigrants. During this period of the community's development, the pioneers dealt with ethnic isolation, loneliness, and tension with other white ethnic immigrants. Also during this time the Norwegians carried on some of their familiar traditions, such as Norwegian-language church services and school lessons, various Christmas celebrations, and marrying within their ethnic and religious group. In the second part of this chapter, I discussed the transition experienced within the community during the second generation. Descendants of the original pioneers to the area experienced a decline in the use of their native Norwegian and an increase in the use of English. People were also beginning to leave the family farms to seek higher

education. In doing so, many individuals met non-Norwegians and married outside their ethnic group. During this time, many people thought of themselves more as American than they did Norwegian. In the final part of Chapter Five, I examined the changes within the community in the third generation and beyond. By this time, people were beginning to take a renewed interest in their heritage. A visit by the king of Norway jump-started the local movement. People began relocating back to the area, either for retirement or to raise their families there. Others became more active in the community and supported local ethnic events. Many individuals learned about their family history and about their family trees. They were proud to be Americans with Norwegian blood.

Having covered the ethnicity of the people of Norse, Texas, in Chapter Six I addressed their communication patterns, answering research questions two, three, and five. Here I looked at how their ethnicity is communicatively constructed and maintained, how the relationship between ethnic identity and communication contribute to the creation of shared meanings within the community, and how the people of Norse use language and communication to validate their identity. My findings indicate that although families do not readily communicate their histories or immigration experiences, and that Americanized names were now the norm within the community, people within the community construct their identity through various cultural forms and symbols and through other rituals, customs, and activities. Exhibiting Norwegian paraphernalia throughout their homes or businesses, wearing Norwegian clothing, or eating Norwegian foods all contribute to a shared ethnic identity in the area. In addition, many people in the community regularly visit with family and friends in Norway, and they continue their correspondence with them. In turn, some folks host Norwegian guests in their Texas



homes, and they are proud to show off the local area. Other popular events in the area include various family reunions, Christmas celebrations, including Christmas Eve candlelight services and the Norwegian Country Christmas Tour, and the very popular *lutefisk* and *smørgåsbord* dinners. The Lutheran church also plays a dominant role in the construction of ethnic identity for the people of Norse.

In Chapter Seven I summarized the previous two chapters and offered my explanations for the continuing strong ethnic flavor found in the central Texas community of Norse. First, I revisited the connections between identity and communication, once again reiterating the importance of culture or ethnicity to the formation of one's identity and how that influences communication. Then I discussed the three most influential Norwegian cultural markers found within the community which I believe are the main sustainers and communicators of Norwegian ethnicity. The first of these cultural markers includes the various ethnic Christmas celebrations, which are still carried on by many in the community. While some of the old world traditions, such as putting out the *julenek* and *julebukking*, are no longer celebrated, other important Scandinavian traditions flourish. Celebrating on Christmas Eve, singing Norwegian Christmas carols, and eating Norwegian holiday foods – especially the cookies – are important elements of Christmas celebrations for many. The second of the cultural markers is actually a part of the Christmas festivities, but because of its prominence, it is being treated separately. The *lutefisk* dinner held the first Saturday in December is one of the defining cultural moments within the community. The small town of Cranfills Gap takes great pride in presenting this annual dinner, and people come from far and wide to eat the fish meal. Although many people joke about the smelly fish and its long

preparation time, they are very fond of the tradition and see it as a definitive sign of their Norwegian roots. The third cultural marker active within the community is the Lutheran church. People identify with their particular church and congregation, and they cannot see themselves being anything else. For many in the community, being Norwegian and being Lutheran are one in the same. Without the strong presence of the Lutheran church in the area, it is doubtful that the Norwegian ethnic identity would have held on for as long as it has. Finally, I conclude Chapter Seven with a discussion on the motives for maintaining a Norwegian ethnic identity in the community today, and how the people of Norse keep that identity salient and meaningful in their daily lives. I also discuss Clifton's marketing of ethnic identity as a means of commodifying ethnic identity to not only promote the heritage of the area, but to bring in money to the community as well.

### **Limitations of Research**

While there are many potential benefits of this study, there are also a few limitations. The first limitation involves the concept of reliability, which is concerned with the consistency of observations and the quality of the human research instrument. Since interpretive research deals with multiple, changing realities, we could not be sure that another researcher studying my same topic would arrive at the same conclusions as I. This phenomenon is due, in part, to the situational nature of interviews, and to the individual nature of the researchers themselves. All we could know was that I, along with the agentive social actors with whom I spoke, interpreted their words according to how we agreed they should be interpreted at that particular place and time (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002).

A second limitation of this study is that it is not generalizable to the general population. One may compare my study with similar ones, but I would not claim that my research is representative of all white ethnic communities across the United States. What is true for a small, rural, Norwegian community in central Texas may be very different from a large, German settlement in a big city. While I am confident that ethnic groups, especially white ethnic groups, share similar histories, I would not assume all experiences to be the same, even among different Norwegian ethnic communities. In addition, one would have to consider the cultural politics found even among white ethnicities, for significant historical, cultural, political, and religious differences exist between northern and southern white European cultural groups. For these reasons, Patton (2002) suggests that interpretive researchers may find establishing validity difficult as well. As a solution, he offers new criteria for determining validity within a qualitative study. These criteria include subjectivity, trustworthiness, authenticity, particularity (considering the importance of unique cases), and deeper understanding (*Verstehen*), among others.

The third limitation arises from the fact that I predominately focused on Norwegian informants. While my dissertation's focus was a Norwegian community in Texas, and while I did speak to a few non-Norwegians, most of whom were German, this study could benefit from a more extensive look at the German community in the county and how the two settlements grew and developed alongside each other. It may also prove enlightening to flesh out how people from the two settlements feel about each other and the other's ethnic identity and presence in the area.

The fourth limitation was the make-up of the participants in the study. All of my participants were aged 50 or older. Research shows that younger generations are

interested in fostering ethnic identity, but I experienced difficulties finding people in this age range to interview. I suspect this problem occurred for many reasons, the primary of which was scheduling. Most people in this age bracket are still raising families and working, so time was always an issue for them. Many younger people no longer lived in the central Texas area, so access to them was also a problem. And finally, while many individuals in this age bracket were interested in their family history and genealogy, they had not researched their families enough to be considered good sources.

### **Putting the Results into Perspective**

Despite the limitations listed above, this study does support several areas of communication research. First, this study builds upon current knowledge about the links between identity and communication, and on how ethnic identity is constructed through communication and cultural practices. This knowledge can help others understand the importance of interaction for identity formation and the influence ethnic identity can have on communicative processes, and thus it could enhance our understanding of intercultural communication.

Second, this study illustrates the importance of giving research subjects or participants – here referred to as “agentive social actors” – the opportunity to speak for themselves. Allowing research participants to actively engage in the creation of their own meanings and realities could give previously silent or ignored groups an opportunity to present their own view of themselves to the world. In this case, a white ethnic group comprised of Norwegians was able to tell their story and to distinguish themselves from other white ethnics housed under the larger, more ambiguous, “American” label.

Third, this study shows how phenomenology can be used as a methodological tool to understand the role of communication in everyday worlds and contexts, and how that communication creates relativist realities for its users. Focusing on the everyday, lived experiences of individuals allows us as researchers to see how these agentive social actors shape their identity and create their own meanings, both of which influence communication. It also forces us to consider the contexts in which these everyday, lived experiences are occurring, and how these contexts influence meaning, interaction, identity, and communication.

Fourth, the interactive role of the researcher and the agentive social actors can enhance our knowledge about how meanings are constructed through communication. It is through the interacting and the sharing of ideas that meaning is created and identities are reinforced. No longer can the researcher deny her or his role in the interpretive process. S/he should not be viewed as an objective, silent witness, but rather as a subjective, vocal participant in the creation of meaning in these people's lives. It is her/his job to tell their story as they would tell it in their own words.

Finally, this study contributes to our knowledge about the impact of assimilative processes upon ethnicity, and how certain groups develop adaptive strategies to combat that assimilation. In particular, this research illustrates the diversity within white ethnicity, and how a particular group of Norwegians in central Texas has insisted upon maintaining a uniquely Scandinavian environment for themselves while living in a more diverse cultural landscape. It is my hope that this dissertation, in some small way, can contribute to a better understanding and a deeper appreciation of the various white, European groups which immigrated to America. White ethnicity is not a homogenous,

idealized identity, but rather is a amalgamation of several different and divergent groups, all of which deserve attention and study.

### **Directions for Future Research**

Given that there is little or no published communication research about ethnicity and culture, at least from a phenomenological point of view, the directions for future research in this area are practically boundless. Future studies could focus on how ethnic Americans define and view themselves, and how these perspectives further influence their communication. Special emphasis could be placed upon the importance of cultural forms and symbols in order to understand their role in sustaining and communicating ethnicity.

Looking at ethnicity and its concurrent revival among certain groups may also prove enlightening, since ethnic revivals can be usually associated with societal transformations (and vice versa). Connecting the link between personal identity and societal change would prove useful in our contemporary age of popular culture, mass media, politics, and white privilege (Alba, 1990; Jacobson, 1998). The implications for intercultural and international communication are many, particularly with regards to white ethnic groups, which historically have been under-researched.

I would also suggest that future researchers consider looking at ethnicity as a commodity, where collective ethnic identity is marketed as a product. Future studies could investigate what cultural elements drive the “demand” for such readily-available and neatly-packaged ethnicity, how this “selling” of this ethnic identity benefits and/or harms the community, and how that ethnicity is maintained or revived in spite of the commercialism, consumerism, and industrialization which would have otherwise

destroyed it. These studies could also uncover how these cultural processes affect the importance or saliency of this ethnic identity for the people being studied (Eriksen, 2005; Halter, 2000; see Alba, 1990, for a discussion on the “supply” side of ethnicity).

Finally, as this dissertation shows, more research is needed on white ethnicity and communicating identity. Despite the dilution and melding of objective ethnic structures, such as native languages, endogamous marriages, and adherence to one religion (and, to a lesser extent, to particular politics), some people claiming white European ancestry thrive and find meaning within the framework of subjective ethnic identity. In other words, the cultural institutions that once held people together ethnically now have less influence on the ways people see and define themselves, and yet ethnic identity continues to be an important part of the way many white people categorize themselves. For these people, ethnic identity becomes a choice, or a voluntary identity.

Alba (1990) addresses this apparent paradox and offers researchers several issues to consider when investigating white ethnicity. The first issue “is the personal meaningfulness or felt intensity of identity” (p. 25). He points out that while some people may use ethnic labels with which to define themselves, this ethnic identity may be peripheral to the way these individuals see themselves as a whole, and they may not see it as pertaining to many aspects of their lives. How does an individual’s level of saliency with regards to ethnic identity shape her/his solidarity with others from the same group? The second issue involves the degree and way in which this identity is revealed to others. Since an individual’s name, language, occupation, and place of residence are no longer reliable or consistent indicators of ethnic identity, how individuals gain social recognition for their ethnicity is of interest here. Without more obvious indicators, how is an

individual's ethnic identity acknowledged and validated by society? The third issue of interest here concerns the "practical significance" of ethnic identity (p. 26). For ethnic identity to move from the personal sphere to the public one, it must associate itself with different functions and connections which have an ethnic flavor to them. Included in this category are rituals, holiday traditions, and food customs, all of which must be shared with others. How are these public customs experienced by the ethnic community, and how does this participation contribute to the group's understanding of its ethnicity? The final issue deals with ethnic identity as a meaningful collective identity. In this case, one should ask if "the ethnic identities of individuals aggregate in ways that sustain ethnic solidarity" (p. 26), rather than being concerned solely with finding ethnically-identified individuals who attach meaning to their identity. People can claim a particular ethnic background as the basis for their personal identity, and yet for them, this ethnicity may not be a crucial component of their social lives. How, then, do different individuals from the same ethnic group join their identities together to form a larger, more meaningful collective ethnic identity?

As seen in this section, white ethnic identity and its relevance and impact on communication is a diverse and dynamic field of study worthy of more inquiry. More research needs to be done in this area. Consequently, communication studies research programs are needed to investigate this topic and to augment the current body of literature on other ethnicities. By understanding the nature or essence of all ethnic groups and how that essence influences the communication of identity, we can gain a better grasp on the fluid nature of identity and its relationship with communication.



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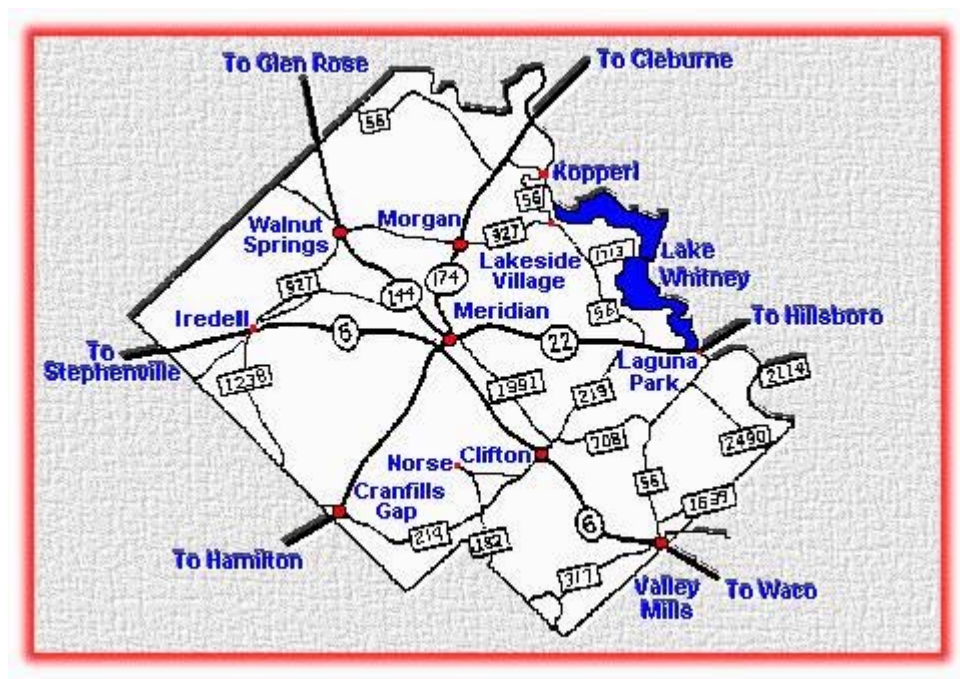


**APPENDIX A****TEXAS MAP WITH BOSQUE COUNTY HIGHLIGHTED**

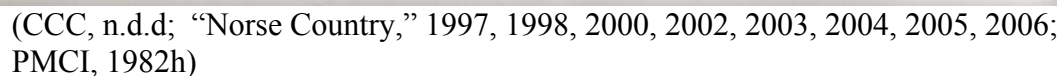
(Texas Association of Counties, 2000)

APPENDIX B

BOSQUE COUNTY MAP



(Bosque County Properties, 2003)



## APPENDIX D

## TEXAS HOUSE AND SENATE RESOLUTIONS

## House Concurrent Resolution HCR150

WHEREAS, The Texas Legislature is proud to designate the community of Clifton the Norwegian Capital of Texas and to join with our fellow citizens in paying tribute to the region's rich cultural heritage; and

WHEREAS, The area's history dates back to 1854, when noted settlers Cleng Peerson and Ole Canuteson established the community of Norse in Bosque County, and today the town of Clifton is home to the largest population of Norwegian Americans in the South and Southwest; and

WHEREAS, The people of Clifton have done an admirable job of preserving the community's vibrant past; visitors and residents alike can tour the historic Norway Mill and the log home of the Joseph Olson family, and they can learn more about the region and its early settlers at the Bosque Memorial Museum, which is a legacy of immigrant farmer Jacob Olson; and

WHEREAS, In addition, people of all ages can sample a traditional Norwegian dish, *lutefisk*, at Our Savior's Lutheran Church, which also hosts an immensely popular *smørgåsbord* every Christmas; and

WHEREAS, Clifton's unique historical and cultural significance has earned the community great renown; a portion of State Highway 219 has been designated the Cleng Peerson Memorial Highway, and King Olav V of Norway visited the area in 1982; more recently, the Texas Historical Commission named the town a Texas Main Street City in recognition of its warmth and diversity; and

WHEREAS, These fine attributes and many more have made Clifton a charming and friendly place where visitors can stop by and experience firsthand the community's special atmosphere, and it is truly a pleasure to honor the town and its residents at this time; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the 75<sup>th</sup> Legislature of the State of Texas hereby designate Clifton the Norwegian Capital of Texas and commend its citizens for their outstanding efforts in preserving the region's past.

-Sponsored By Rep. Arlene Wohlgemuth

## Senate Resolution No. 74

WHEREAS, It is a distinct pleasure for the Texas Senate to honor the City of Clifton for being the home of the largest Norwegian American population in the South and Southwest; and

WHEREAS, Enriched both culturally and economically by the presence of Norwegian immigrants and Norwegian Americans, the City of Clifton was recognized by King Olav V of Norway as a substantial and sociologically important city when he visited there in 1982; and

WHEREAS, The City of Clifton is working diligently to preserve and to nourish its Norwegian American heritage; and

WHEREAS, The Texas Historical Commission recognized the significance of Clifton's Norwegian cultural heritage and designated it as a "Texas Main Street City" in 1995; and

WHEREAS, The festivals and activities of Clifton contain events which express the Norwegian nature of the city's heritage; and

WHEREAS, The City of Clifton feels a dedication to maintaining the Norwegian heritage it so highly prizes; and

WHEREAS, Exceptionally gifted and determined in all forms of endeavor, Norwegian settlers in Texas helped achieve success in many different fields; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Senate of the State of Texas, 75<sup>th</sup> Legislature, hereby recognize the City of Clifton the "Norwegian Capital of Texas," and, be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution be prepared for the city as an expression of the highest regard of the Texas Senate.

-Sponsored by Sen. David Sibley

(CCC, 1997; PMCI, 1982p)

## APPENDIX E

**PASTORS OF LUTHERAN CHURCHES (ELCA) IN NORSE AREA**Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Norse

Rev. Ole Olsen Estrem*	1869-1877
Rev. John Knudsen Rystad*	1878-1925
Rev. Elmer Robert Larson**	1925-1929
Rev. P. Edward Thorson*	1929-1943
Rev. Perry V. Sampson*	1943-1947
Rev. Edmund A. Beaver*	1947-1954
Rev. Joel E. Nelson*	1954-1963
Rev. Albert A. Petrich†	1963-1972
Rev. Lawrence C. Jenson*	1973-1979
Rev. John M. Homerstad*	1979-1988
Rev. Ben J. Warrenburg†	1988-2000
Rev. Beverly A. Blackman†	2000-present

(OSLCW, 2000, p. v; OSLCW, 1990; Pierson, O. E., 1947/1979; Tindall, 2003)

St. Olaf Lutheran Church, Cranfills Gap

Rev. John Knudsen Rystad*	1886-1902
Rev. G. G. Odegaard*	1902-1912
Rev. Herman W. Estrem*	1912-1920
Rev. J. A. Urnes*	1920-1935
Rev. Walter J. Maakestad*	1935-1941
Rev. B. R. Maakestad*	1941-1952
Rev. Einar Jorgenson*	1953-1958
Rev. Ivar Haugen*	1958-1963
Rev. Martin Ottmers†	1964-1977
Rev. Howard Ollila§	1977-1980
Rev. Lawrence C. Jenson (interim)*	1980-1981
Rev. David Smith‡	1981-1985
Rev. Mark Vinciguerra§	1986-1992
Rev. Kenneth Schmidt†	1993-1999
Rev. Terry Atkins‡	1999-present

(Finstad, 1996; Pierson, O. E., 1947/1979; Tindall, 2003)



Trinity Lutheran Church, Clifton

Rev. Olaus Thorleivson Rikansrud (interim)*	1902
Rev. S. B. Brevig (interim)*	1902
Rev. John Knudsen Rystad (interim)*	1902
Rev. J. B. Kilness*	1903-1905
Rev. O. T. Boe (interim)*	1905-1907
Rev. P. Edward Thorson*	1907-1914
Rev. Theodore Lerud*	1914-1924
Rev. Hans Allen (interim)*	1924-1925
Rev. O. T. Boe*	1925-1940
Rev. Walter T. Gigstad*	1941-1957
Rev. Stanley B. Knudsen*	1958-1962
Rev. Erwin H. Knitt <sup>†</sup>	1963-1971
Rev. Hans C. Ziehe (interim) <sup>†</sup>	1971
Rev. Ted Steenblock <sup>†</sup>	1972-1981
Rev. Joel E. Nelson (visitation)*	1973-1975
Rev. Alvon Nelson (visitation)*	1974-1978
Rev. Lawrence C. Jenson (interim)*	1981-1982
Rev. George L. (Joe) Dahl*	1982-1989
Rev. Garland Gotoski (visitation) <sup>‡</sup>	1985-1989
Rev. John M. Homerstad (interim)*	1989-1990
Rev. Peter K. Anderson*	1990-1998
Rev. Bernt I. Dahl, Jr. (visitation)*	1991-1998
Rev. Wayne Pouppirt, Jr. (interim) <sup>‡</sup>	1999-2000
Rev. Glenn Kramer <sup>†</sup>	2000-present

(Trinity Lutheran Church, 2002, p. 15)

\*full-blooded Norwegian

\*\*half Norwegian, half German

<sup>†</sup>full-blooded or predominately German

<sup>‡</sup>mixed European heritage

<sup>§</sup>other heritage

## APPENDIX F

## HYMNS

365

## Built on a Rock

1 Built on a rock the Church shall stand, E - ven when stee - ples are  
 2 Not in our tem - ples made with hands God, the Al - mighty, is  
 3 We are God's house of liv - ing stones, Built for his own hab - i -  
 4 Yet in this house, an earth - ly frame, Je - sus the chil - dren is

fall - ing; Crum - bled have spires in ev - 'ry land, Bells still are  
 dwell - ing; High in the heav'ns his tem - ple stands, All earth - ly  
 ta - tion; He fills our hearts, his hum - ble thrones, Grant - ing us  
 bless - ing; Hith - er we come to praise his name, Faith in our

chir - ing and call - ing— Call - ing the young and old to rest, Call - ing the  
 tem - ples ex - cel - ling. Yet he who dwells in heav'n a - bove Deigns to a -  
 life and sal - va - tion. Were two or three to seek his face, He in their  
 Sav - ior con - fess - ing, Je - sus to us his Spir - it send, Mak - ing with

souls of those dis - tressed, Long - ing for life ev - er - last - ing,  
 bide with us in love, Mak - ing our bod - ies his tem - ple  
 midst would show his grace, Bless - ings up - on them be - stow - ing,  
 us his cov - e - nant, Grant - ing his chil - dren the king - dom.



## COMMUNITY IN CHRIST

- 5 Through all the passing years, O Lord,  
 Grant that, when church bells are ringing,  
 Many may come to hear God's Word  
 Where he this promise is bringing:  
 I know my own, my own know me;  
 You, not the world, my face shall see;  
 My peace I leave with you. Amen

*Ed. Text: Nikolaus F. S. Grundtvig, 1782-1872, in: Carl Dreyer, 1867-1933, and  
 Rose Luthy M. Lindeman, 1822-1887*

KIRKEN DEN ER ET GÅSEMELT HUS  
 SE SE SE SE

(Grundtvig & Lindeman, 1978)

474

## Children of the Heavenly Father

1 Chil - dren of the heav'n - ly Fa - ther Safe - ly in his bo - som gath - er;  
 2 God his own dox tend and nour-ish, In his ho - ly courts they flour - ish.  
 3 Nei - ther life nor death shall ex - er From the Lord his chil - dren sev - er;  
 4 Though he giv - eth or he tak - eth, God his chil - dren ne'er for - sak - eth.

Nest - ling bird or star in heav - en Such a ref - uge ne'er was giv - en.  
 From al - e - vil things he spares them, In his might - y arms he bears them.  
 Un - to them his grace he show - eth, And their sor - rows all he know - eth.  
 His the lov - ing pur - pose sole - ly To pre - serve them pure and ho - ly.

© 1978, Copyright © 1978 by Berg, C. V. S., Inc. All Rights Reserved.  
 From "Children of the Heavenly Father"

TRIOGARE KAN INGI NAYARA  
 1-51

(Berg, C. V. S., 1978)

## 369

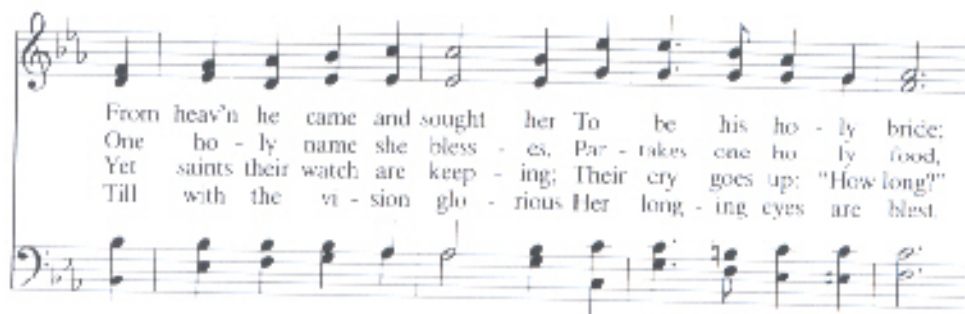
## The Church's One Foundation



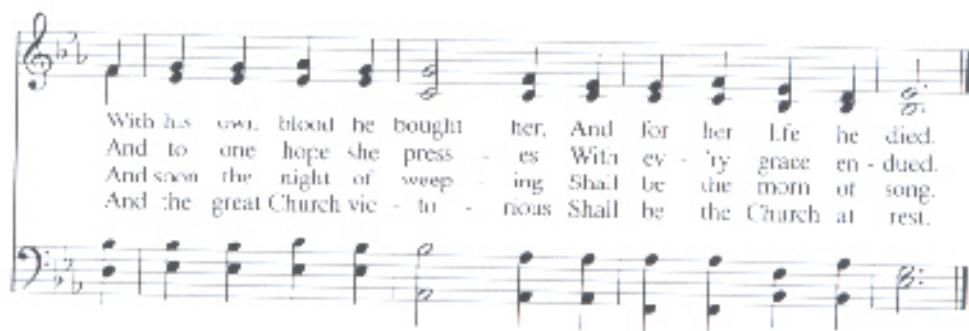
1 The Church's . . one foun - da - tion Is Je - sus Christ, her Lord;  
 2 E - lect from ev - 'ry na - tion, Yet one o'er all the earth;  
 3 Though with a scorn - ful won - der This world sees her op - pressed,  
 4 Through toil and trib - u - la - tion And tu - mult of her war.



She is his new cre - a - tion By wa - ter and the Word,  
 Her char - ter of sal - va - tion; One Lord, one faith, one birth.  
 By schisms . . rent a - sun - der, By her - e - sies dis - tressed,  
 She waits the con - sum - ma - tion Of peace for - ev - er - more;



From heav'n he came and sought her To be his ho - ly bride;  
 One ho - ly name she bless - es, Par - takes one ho - ly food,  
 Yet saints their watch are keep - ing; Their cry goes up: "How long!"  
 Till with the vi - sion glo - rious Her long - ing eyes are blest.



With his own blood he bought her, And for her life he died.  
 And to one hope she press - es With ev - 'ry grace en - dued.  
 And soon the night of weep - ing Shall be the morn of song.  
 And the great Church vic - to - rious Shall be the Church at rest.

## COMMUNITY IN CHRIST

5 Yet she on earth has union  
 With God, the Three in One,  
 And mystic sweet communion  
 With those whose rest is won

O blessed heav'nly chorus!  
 Lord, save us by your grace,  
 That we, like saints before us,  
 May see you face to face.

---

*From: Arthur J. Stone, 1859-1955  
 From: Samuel A. May, 1806-1878*

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*© 1978  
 by Stone*

(Stone & Wesley, 1978)

## Faith of Our Fathers

500

1 Faith of our fa - thers, liv - ing still In spite of dan - geon,  
 2 The mar - tyrs, chained in pris - ons dark, Were still in heart and  
 3 Faith of our fa - thers! We will love Both friend and foe in

fire, and sword. Oh, how our hearts beat high with joy  
 con - science free; And blest would be their chil - dren's fate  
 all our strife; Pro-claim thee, too, as love knows how,

*Refrain*  
 When-e'er we hear that glo - rious word.  
 If they, like them, should die for thee. Faith of our fa - thers,  
 By sav - ing Word and faith - ful life.

ho - ly faith, We will be true to thee till death.

*Text: Frederick W. Faber, 1814-1863, alt.  
 Tune: Henry F. Hemy, 1828-1888; James G. Bachus, 1821-1905, refrain*

ST. CATHARINE  
 38 38 38

(Faber, Hemy, & Walton, 1978)

120

7, 6, 9L.

## The Church

L. A. Mason, 1823

From Greenland's icey mountains, From budha's coral strand,  
Where Afric's sunny fountains Roll down their golden sand;  
From many an ancient river, From many a palm-y plain,  
They call us to deliver Their land from error's chain.

2 What though the spicy breezes  
Blow soft o'er Ceylon's isle;  
Though every prospect pleases,  
And only man is vile;  
In vain with lavish kindness  
The gifts of God are strown;  
The heathen in his blindness  
Bows down to wood and stone.

3 Shall we, whose souls are lighted  
With wisdom from on high,  
Shall we to men benighted  
The lamp of life deny?

Salvation! O salvation!  
The joyful sound proclaim,  
Till earth's remotest nation  
Has learned Messiah's name.

4 Wait, wait, ye winds, His story,  
And you, ye waters, roll,  
Till, like a sea of glory,  
It spreads from pole to pole;  
Till o'er our ransomed nature  
The Lamb for sinners slain,  
Redeemer, King, Creator,  
In bliss returns to reign!

121

R. Heber, 1819



69

## I Am So Glad Each Christmas Eve

The musical score is written for a four-part vocal ensemble (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and piano accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is common time (C). The score is divided into two systems. The first system contains the first four lines of the lyrics, and the second system contains the remaining lines. The piano accompaniment consists of chords in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The lyrics are as follows:

1 I am so glad each Christ-mas Eve, The night of Je - sus' birth!  
 2 The lit - tle child in Beth - le - hem, He was a king in - deed!  
 3 He dwells a - gain in heav-en's realm, The Son of God to - day;  
 4 I am so glad each Christ-mas Eve! His prais - es then I sing;

Then like the sun the star shone forth, And an - gels sang on earth  
 For he came down from heav'n a - bove to help a world in need.  
 And still he loves his lit - tle ones And hears them when they pray.  
 He o - pens now for ev - ry child The pal - ace of the king.

5 When mother trims the Christmas tree  
 Which fills the room with light,  
 She tells me of the wondrous star  
 That made the dark world bright.

6 And so I love each Christmas Eve,  
 And I love Jesus too;  
 And that he loves me every day  
 I know so well is true.

Lyrics: Anne Wesley, 1812-1813; John A. Steigman, 1861-1875  
 Tune: Peter Bakula, 1812-1813

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN  
 C. M.

(Knudsen & Wexelsen, 1978)

342

## I Know of a Sleep in Jesus' Name

1 I know of a sleep in Je - sus' name, A rest from all  
 2 I know of a bless - ed e - ven - tide, And when I am  
 3 I know of a morn - ing bright and fair When tid - ings of

toil and sor - row; Earth folds in its arms my wea - ry  
 taint and wea - ry, At times with the jour - ney sorc - ly  
 joy shall wake us, When songs from on high shall fill the

frame And shel - ters it till the mor - row; With God I am  
 tried Through hours that are long and drea - ry, Then of - ten I  
 air And God to his glo - ry take us, When Je - sus shall

safe un - til that day When sor - row is gone for - ev - er.  
 yearn to lay me down And sink in - to peace - ful slum - ber.  
 bid us rise from sleep; How joy - ous that hour of wak - ing!

© Jes. Nigam & Javviam, 1967, 1969; n. Service Book and Hymnal, 1958, ed.  
 Dan. Christoph & E. Hesse, 1974, 1982

DEN SIGSTEDEN  
 11 98 98

(Landstad & Weyse, 1978)



## 229

## A Mighty Fortress Is Our God



1 A might - y for - tress is our God, A sword and shield vic -  
 2 No strength of ours can match his might! We would be lost, re -  
 3 Though hordes of dev - ils fill the land All threat -'ning to de -  
 4 God's Word for - ev - er shall a - bide, No thanks to foes, who



to - rious; He breaks the cruel op - pres - sor's rod And  
 ject - ed, But now a cham - pion comes to fight, Whom  
 your us, We trem - ble not, un - moved we stand; They  
 fear it: For God him - self fights by our side With



wins sal - va - tion glo - rious, The old sa - tan - ic foe  
 God him - self e - lect - ed, You ask who this may be?  
 can - not o - ver - pow'r us, Let this world's ty - rant rage;  
 weap - ons of the Spir - it, Were they to take our house,



Has sworn to work us woe! With craft and dread - ful might  
 The Lord of hosts is he! Christ Je - sus, might - y Lord,  
 In bat - tle we'll en - gage! His might is doomed to fail;  
 Goods, hon - or, child, or spouse, Though life be wrenched a - way,

He arms him-self to fight. On earth he has no e - qual.  
 God's on - ly Son, un-dared. He holds the field vic - to - rious.  
 God's judg-ment must pre - vail! One lit - tle word sub - duces him.  
 They can - not win the day. The King dom's ours for - ev - er!

© Rev. Martin Luther, 1483-1546; v. Hermann Kretzschmar, 1928  
 arr. Albert Luther, 1483-1546

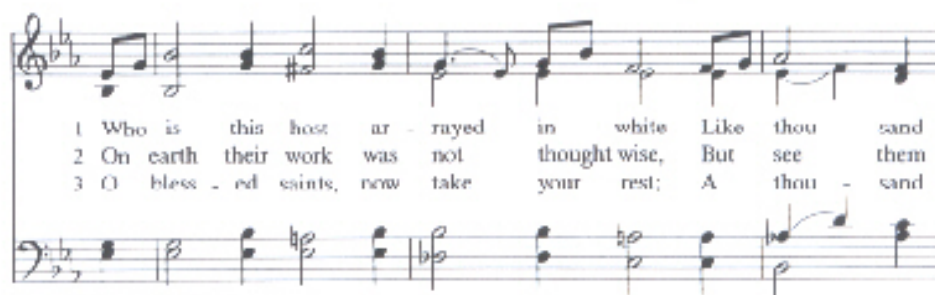
UP 2552, B. 100-  
 87 81 14 66 7

(Luther, 1978)


CAROLINGLIT 1901-2

## 314


## Who Is This Host Arrayed in White



1 Who is this host ar - rayed in white Like thou sand  
2 On earth their work was not thought wise, But see them  
3 O bless - ed saints, now take your rest; A thou - sand



snow - clad moun - tains bright, That stands with palms and  
now in heav - en's eyes. Be - fore God's throne of  
times shall you be blest For keep - ing faith firm



sings its psalms Be - fore the throne of light? These are the  
pre - cious stone They shout their vic - t'ry cries. On earth they  
un - to death And scorn - ing world - ly trust. For now you



saints who kept God's Word; They are the hon - ored  
wept through bit - ter years; Now God has wiped a -  
live at home with God And har - vest seeds once



of the Lord He is their prince who drowned their sins,  
 way their tears, Trans - formed their strife to heav'n - ly life,  
 cast a - broad In tears and sighs. See with new eyes



So they were cleansed, re - stored. They now serve God both  
 And freed them from their fears. For now they have the  
 The pat - tern in the seed. The myr - iad an - gels



day and night; They sing their songs in end less light. Their  
 best at last; They keep their sweet e - ter - nal feast. At  
 raise their song. O saints, sing with that hap - py throng. Lift



an - thems ring when they all sing With an - gels shin - ing bright.  
 God's right hand our Lord com-mands; He is both host and guest.  
 up one voice; let heav'n re - joice In our Re - deem - er's song!

© Text: Alice A. Brorson, 1894-1904, or Teresa Ständahl, b. 1903  
 Tune: Norwegian folk tune, 17th cent.

DEN STORE HVILDE FLØK  
 P.M.

(Brorson, 1978)

## APPENDIX G

## KING OLAV V'S SPEECH

The 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the voyage of the *Restauration* from Stavanger to the New World was widely celebrated in 1975, both in Norway and in the United States, and my visit at that time brought me to many of the early Norwegian settlements in America.

Since an over-filled schedule made it impossible for me to include Texas in my visit then, I am particularly pleased to be visiting Clifton today for the celebration of the anniversary of the pioneer emigrant Cleng Peerson's birth in Tysver, Norway, 200 years ago.

Some Norwegians must certainly have come to America before Cleng Peerson came in 1821, since Norway has always been a seafaring nation. But still it is correct to say that Cleng Peerson was the "Father of Norwegian Emigration to America," as we read on his memorial.

The church played a vital role in the life of the Norwegian emigrants and settlers who came in Cleng Peerson's footsteps to the New World. And it is with a feeling of deep respect that I have attended the service today in this, Our Savior's Lutheran Church, which for more than a hundred years has served this community in Bosque County.

For over a century people have come to this church with their faith, their joys, and their sorrows. And they will certainly continue to do so. Many things have changed during that time. But the need for contemplation and man's urge to seek comfort, forgiveness, and inspiration will never change.

It is very different indeed to arrive here today by helicopter, compared to the first Norwegian settlers who struggled through the wilderness before finally finding their home in this beautiful place.

Cleng Peerson, who had set out in 1849 for Texas "to investigate the possibility of a new settlement," was impressed by the immense stretches of still unsettled land. He urged Norwegians who had now come in great numbers to the Midwest to move to Texas. However, only a few families followed him when he returned to Texas a year later.

Although he was now 68 years old, Cleng Peerson still found it difficult to remain in one place. He began to explore the land to the west and in 1854

when the Texas Legislature created Bosque County and offered free land there, the Norwegian Bosque Settlement was created. It was appropriately called Norse and has up to the present time remained the most genuinely Norwegian community in Texas.

Many names deserve to be mentioned in the history of Norwegian emigration to America and Texas. But Cleng Peerson symbolizes all the hardships and toil, the hopes and vision of our countrymen who came here and laid a foundation for the strong ties between two nations who so gladly share the same ideals, the same values, and the same culture ("King Olav's Speech," 1982).

## APPENDIX H

***LUTEFISK DINNER MENU***

*lutefisk*

white sauce

melted butter

turkey

boiled potatoes

cornbread dressing

green beans

cranberry sauce

homemade bread with butter

various homemade pies

coffee

iced tea

(Cranfills Gap Lions Booster Club Lutefisk Dinner [CGLBCLD], 2004)

## APPENDIX I

**SMØRGÅSBORD MENU****APPETIZERS:***søt suppe***MEATS:***kjøttboller*

ham

*rullepølse*

turkey

*sylte*

salmon mold

*sild**sild salat***VEGETABLES:***brune bønner*

lima beans

**SALADS:***potet salat**rødbeter salat*

molded fruit salad

**BREADS:***limpa*

light bread

*flat brød**lefse***CONDIMENTS:**

pickled beets

cranberries

pickles

jelly

relish

*smør***CHEESES, ETC.:***geitost*

cheddar cheese

*mysmør*

bleu cheese

*nøkkelost*

stuffed eggs

*gammelost***DESSERTS:***sandbakkels**rosetter**krumkaker**spritzbakkels**Berlinerkranser*

rice pudding

*fattigmannsbakkels*

whipped cream

**BEVERAGES:***kaffe**klumpe sukker**kaffe fløte*

(OSLC, n.d.d, 1998; OSLCW, 1960, 1990, 2000)



## APPENDIX J

## PRAYERS

Norwegian Table Prayer

*I Jesu navn går vi til bords  
å spise og drikke på ditt ord.  
Deg Gud til ære, oss til gavn,  
så får vi mat i Jesu navn. Amen.*

(OSLC, n.d.d, 1998; OSLCW, 1960, 1990, 2000; Sons of Norway, 2002)

The Lord's Prayer

*Fader vår, du som er i himmelen!  
La ditt navn holdes hellig.  
La ditt rike komme.  
La din vilje skje på jorden som i himmelen.*

*Gi oss i dag vårt daglige brød.  
Forlat oss vår skyld,  
som vi og forlater våre skyldnere.*

*Led oss ikke inn i fristelse,  
men frels oss fra det onde.  
For riket er ditt, og makten, og æren i evighet. Amen.*

(Sons of Norway, 2002)

Lutheran Table Prayer (to be sung)

Be present at our table, Lord.  
Be here and everywhere adored.  
These mercies bless, and grant that we  
may strengthened for Thy service be. Amen.

(OSLCW, 2000, p. vi; OSLC, n.d.d, 1998; OSLCW, 1960, 1990)

## APPENDIX K

## PRONUNCIATION GUIDE FOR NORWEGIAN LETTERS

Vowels

æ/Æ.....sounds like the vowels in “hat” and “man”

ø/Ø.....sounds like the vowels in “bird” and “heard”

å/Å.....sounds like the vowels in “fall” and “more”

(Borgos, 2002a)

Consonants

j.....sounds like a “y”

kj.....sounds like “sh”

Norwegian Alphabet

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z Æ Ø Å

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z æ ø å

## APPENDIX L

## GLOSSARY OF NORWEGIAN TERMS

<i>Aftenposten</i> .....	Evening News, Norway's largest daily newspaper
<i>-alm</i> .....	farm surname suffix, indicating an ash tree
<i>aquavit</i> .....	potato liquor
<i>bakkels</i> .....	pastries, sweet cakes (slang for cookies)
<i>-berg</i> .....	farm surname suffix, indicating a rock
<i>Bergen</i> .....	a city in Norway
<i>Berlinerkranser</i> .....	shortbread wreaths
<i>bestefar</i> .....	grandfather
<i>bestemor</i> .....	grandmother
<i>-bjørk</i> .....	farm surname suffix, indicating a birch tree
<i>bjørn</i> .....	bear
<i>bordbønn</i> .....	table prayer
<i>brune bønner</i> .....	brown beans
<i>bukk</i> .....	billy-goat
<i>bunader</i> .....	Norwegian folk costumes
<i>-dahl</i> .....	farm surname suffix, indicating a valley
<i>-datter</i> .....	patronymic surname suffix, indicating a daughter
<i>den norsk lutherske kirke i Amerika</i> .....	the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America
<i>domkirke</i> .....	cathedral
<i>-eik</i> .....	farm surname suffix, indicating an oak tree

<i>fattigmannsbakkels</i> .....	poor man's tarts, fry cakes
<i>-fjell</i> .....	farm surname suffix, indicating a mountain
<i>fjell hjem</i> .....	mountain home
<i>flat brød</i> .....	flat bread
<i>"fy da!"</i> .....	"for shame!"
<i>"fysj da!"</i> .....	stronger form of " <i>uff da!</i> "
<i>gaffel</i> .....	fork
<i>gammelost</i> .....	aged cheese
<i>geitost</i> .....	goat cheese
<i>"Gi oss i dag vårt daglige brød"</i> .....	"Give us this day our daily bread"
<i>glad jul</i> .....	merry Christmas
<i>gløgg</i> .....	hot spiced wine punch
<i>"God dag!"</i> .....	"Good day!," "Hello!"
<i>godt nyttår</i> .....	happy new year
<i>gøro</i> .....	rectangular cookies pressed in an iron
<i>"Ha det bra!"</i> .....	"Have it good!," "Good-bye!"
<i>hardanger</i> .....	whitework embroidery
<i>Hardanger</i> .....	a region of Norway
<i>-haug</i> .....	farm surname suffix, indicating a hill
<i>"Hilsen!"</i> .....	"Greetings!"
<i>hjortetakk</i> .....	crullers, or unraised doughnuts
<i>"huff da!"</i> .....	(see " <i>uff da!</i> ")
<i>"Hvordan står det til?"</i> .....	"How are you?"

<i>i Jesu navn</i> .....	in Jesus' name (table prayer)
<i>"Ikke noe å takke for"</i> .....	"Nothing to give thanks for," "Don't mention it"
<i>jeg elsker deg</i> .....	I love you
<i>"Jeg gir ikke!"</i> .....	"I don't give (a care)!"
<i>"Jeg har det bare bra, og du?"</i> .....	"I am very well, how about you?"
<i>"Jeg snakker lite grann norsk"</i> .....	"I speak very little Norwegian"
<i>jul</i> .....	Christmas, December 25
<i>julebukk</i> .....	Christmas billy-goat, Christmas fool
<i>julebukker</i> .....	one who participates in <i>julebukking</i>
<i>julebukking</i> .....	Christmas custom of wearing costumes and seeking treats
<i>julegeit</i> .....	Christmas female goat
<i>julekveld</i> .....	Christmas Eve, December 24
<i>julenek</i> .....	sheaf of oats given to the birds at Christmas
<i>juletrefest</i> .....	Christmas tree party, winter solstice, Christmas festivities
<i>kaffe</i> .....	coffee
<i>kaffe fløte</i> .....	coffee cream
<i>kald</i> .....	cold
<i>kalkun</i> .....	turkey
<i>kirke</i> .....	church
<i>kjøttboller</i> .....	meatballs
<i>klumpe sukker</i> .....	lump sugar
<i>kniv</i> .....	knife
<i>Konge Tinn</i> .....	Royal or King's Pewter

<i>krumkaker</i> .....	cone-shaped wafers
<i>ku</i> .....	cow
<i>kålrot stappe</i> .....	mashed rutabagas
<i>-land</i> .....	farm surname suffix, indicating farm land or “my” land
<i>lefse</i> .....	flat tortilla-like potato bread
<i>leikarringen</i> .....	Norwegian folk dancers
<i>Lillehammer</i> .....	a city in Norway; site of the 1994 winter Olympics
<i>lillejulaften</i> .....	Little Christmas Eve, December 23
<i>limpa</i> .....	Swedish rye bread
<i>lite norsk hus</i> .....	little Norwegian house
<i>Lofoten Islands</i> .....	islands off Norway’s northern coast
<i>lutefisk</i> .....	dried cod, lye fish
<i>Løten</i> .....	a city in Norway
<i>“Mange takk”</i> .....	“Many thanks”
<i>“Mange tusen takk”</i> .....	“Many thousand thanks”
<i>medisterkaker</i> .....	pork patties
<i>medisterpølser</i> .....	pork sausages
<i>midnattsolen</i> .....	midnight sun
<i>molter</i> .....	cloud berries
<i>mysmør</i> .....	whely cheese
<i>“Nei, fem hundre er nok”</i> .....	“No, five hundred is enough”
<i>nisser</i> .....	gnomes
<i>Norge</i> .....	Norway

<i>Norge i Texas</i> .....	Norway in Texas
<i>Norse</i> .....	Nordic
<i>Norse hjem</i> .....	Nordic home
<i>Norse vind</i> .....	Nordic wind
<i>nøkkelost</i> .....	caraway cheese
<i>Oslo</i> .....	the capital of Norway
<i>pinnekjøtt</i> .....	steamed rib of lamb
<i>potet salat</i> .....	potato salad
<i>pute</i> .....	pillow
<i>ribbe</i> .....	roast rib of pork
<i>rosemaling</i> .....	rose or flower painting
<i>rosetter</i> .....	rosettes
<i>-rud</i> .....	farm surname suffix, indicating a clearing or pasture
<i>rullepølse</i> .....	sausage
<i>rødbeter salat</i> .....	beet salad
<i>sandbakkels</i> .....	sand tarts
<i>sandkaker</i> .....	(see <i>sandbakkels</i> )
<i>sankthansaften</i> .....	summer solstice
<i>sild</i> .....	herring
<i>sild salat</i> .....	herring salad
<i>sirupssnipper</i> .....	gingersnaps
<i>skjegg</i> .....	beard
<i>“Skjorta di folde!”</i> .....	“Tuck in your shirt!”

<i>skuff</i>	drawer
<i>smultringer</i>	doughnuts
<i>smør</i>	butter
<i>smørgåsbord</i>	Norwegian-style supper buffet
<i>sol hjem</i>	home of the sun
<i>-son (or –sen)</i>	patronymic surname suffix, indicating a son
<i>spise</i>	to eat
<i>spritzbakkels</i>	“S” cookies
<i>-stad</i>	farm surname suffix, indicating a homestead
<i>-stein</i>	farm surname suffix, indicating a stone
<i>St. Olavs kirke</i>	St. Olaf’s church
<i>St. Svithuns domkirke</i>	St. Svithun’s cathedral
<i>surkål</i>	sour cabbage
<i>sylte</i>	pork roll, head cheese
<i>syttende mai</i>	Norway’s Constitution Day, May 17
<i>søt suppe</i>	sweet soup
<i>“Takk for maten”</i>	“Thanks for the food”
<i>“Takk for samværet”</i>	“Thanks for the time I have spent with you”
<i>“Takk for sist”</i>	“Thanks for our last meeting”
<i>tante</i>	aunt
<i>Thor</i>	ancient Norse thunder-god
<i>tine</i>	oval wooden box
<i>Tor</i>	(see <i>Thor</i> )



<i>“Tusen takk”</i>	.....	“A thousand thanks”
<i>tusslete</i>	.....	pitiful, miserable; feeling or looking small
<i>Tyr</i>	.....	ancient Norse god of war
<i>“uff da!”</i>	.....	“darn it!,” “ugh!,” “oh, dear!,” “good grief!”
<i>Valhalla</i>	.....	hall of dead heroes, according to pagan Norse mythology
<i>“Velbekomme”</i>	.....	“You’re welcome”
<i>velkommen</i>	.....	welcome
<i>velkommen til Clifton</i>	.....	welcome to Clifton
<i>vesterheim</i>	.....	western home
<i>Viking</i>	.....	pagan Norseman from the 8 <sup>th</sup> to 10 <sup>th</sup> centuries
<i>vil gå gungre</i>	.....	down in the back, out back
<i>vår frelsers kirke</i>	.....	our savior’s church

### Jeg er saa glad ----- I Am So Glad Each Christmas Eve

I am so glad each Christmas Eve,  
 The night of Jesus’ birth!  
 Then like the sun the star shone forth,  
 And angels sang on earth.

(Knudsen & Wexelsen, 1978)

### Norwegian Table Prayer

In Jesus’ name to the table we go  
 to eat and drink according to His word.  
 To God the honor, us the gain,  
 so we have food in Jesus’ name. Amen.

(OSLC, n.d.d, 1998; OSLCW, 1960, 1990, 2000; Sons of Norway, 2002)

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in Heaven,  
hallowed be Thy name.  
Thy Kingdom come,  
Thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.  
Forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory. Amen.

(Sons of Norway, 2002)

You are a child of a thousand years,  
not merely a child of today.  
Your roots extend back through time –  
generation to generation.

-Knut Hauge

**APPENDIX M****NORWEGIANS' INTERVIEW PROTOCOL****IDENTITY:**

- \*How much does your Norwegian side influence your identity, or your notions of who you are as a person?
- \*Would you describe your Norwegian identity as personal and private, or as public?
  - \*Why?
- \*When interacting with a group of other Norwegian Americans, how do you feel?
- \*How is it different than when you interact with other people who do not share your heritage?
- \*How do you feel when someone inquires about your heritage?
- \*In your own words, tell me what it means to be a Norwegian American.
- \*In your opinion, what sets Norwegian Americans apart from other ethnic Americans (i.e., non-Norwegians)?
- \*Describe your thoughts on being a Norwegian American from Texas.

**ETHNICITY:**

- \*How often do you think about your ethnicity?
- \*What causes you to think about it?
- \*How does your ethnic identity influence your daily life?
- \*How important is this ethnic identity to you?
- \*Describe your family's feelings about your interest in your ethnicity.
- \*How relevant is this ethnic identity to living in modern America?

\*Have you ever been challenged or forced to think about your ethnicity in ways you never had before?

\*Please explain.

**FAMILY GENERATIONS / COMMUNICATING ETHNICITY:**

\*Did you know your grandparents (aunts & uncles, extended family)?

\*Did they speak Norwegian? Do you?

\*What did they tell you about your family and your family's history?

\*Please tell me any interesting stories that you remember.

\*Do you remember some of their stories about the original pioneers and the founding of Norse?

\*Please elaborate.

\*How do you account for the pioneers' success in Norse?

\*What did they do that allowed them to make it when so many other settlements failed?

\*Did your grandparents (aunts & uncles, extended family) acknowledge their ethnic identity?

\*How?

\*In your opinion, how important was this ethnic identity to them?

\*How did they communicate this ethnic identity to you?

\*What did they tell you about your Norwegian roots or about Norway?

\*Do you share your ethnic identity with your family?

\*How?

\*Why?

\*To what extent?

\*What are/were your goals as a parent/grandparent?

\*What crucial "life lessons" would you want to pass on to your children and/or grandchildren?

\*If you could only teach your children/grandchildren one thing, what would it be?

\*Why?

\*Pretend one of your friends is talking about you to someone who has never met you. What would be the nicest thing that friend could say about you?

\*If you could handpick your new next-door neighbors, what kind of people would they be?

\*What qualities would they possess?

\*Why?

\*How important is it for you to communicate your ethnicity to others?

\*Do you want others to know you're a Norwegian American?

\*Why?

\*How do you communicate this identity – through words or deeds or both?

\*How do you nurture and maintain your ethnicity?

\*What would you like your legacy to be?

\*What would you like to leave behind with your family?

### **CULTURAL PRACTICES:**

\*How would you describe Norse, Texas to an outsider unfamiliar with the area and the people?

\*How would you feel if you could give a person from Norway a tour of Norse, Texas?

\*How active are you in the Norse community?

\*What do you do?

\*What is your favorite event or festival in Norse?

\*Why?

\*In your opinion, how important are these events or festivals?

\*Do you feel that they honor and celebrate the Norwegian heritage of the area?

\*Why?

\*If you could only attend one event in Norse each year, what would it be?

\*Why?

\*Please share any special memories or stories about the *lutefisk* dinner, the *smørgåsbord*, or any other event or festival that you may have.

\*Do you participate in any activities that enhance your knowledge about your Norwegian heritage (i.e., reading, genealogy, cooking, traveling, etc.)?

\*Please describe.

\*Do you incorporate Norwegian traditions in your Christmas celebrations with your own family?

\*What do you do?

\*What sort of Norwegian things do you have in your house?

### **CHURCH:**

\*What do Our Savior's Lutheran Church and the Old Rock Church (St. Olaf) symbolize to you?

\*Why?

\*How do you feel when you visit those churches?

\*Do you attend the special Christmas celebrations there?

\*What are those like?

\*Do you visit the cemeteries next to the churches?

\*How does that make you feel?

\*What do you think of Cleng Peerson, a leader in Norwegian immigration, being buried at Our Savior's?

\*Did you see King Olav V when he came to visit Norse in the early 1980s?

\*What did you think of that?

\*Are you a member of either church?

\*Do you attend church services there?

\*If "no:" What church are you a member of?

\*What do you like about your church?

\*What aspects about your church do you dislike?

\*Do you have any special memories or stories about the churches in Norse?

\*Please tell me.

\*In your opinion, what significance do these churches have for the community of Norse?

\*What is their role in the community?

\*In your opinion, what significance did these churches have for the original pioneers to Norse?

\*What was their role for that community?

### **NAMES:**

\*Your last name is \_\_\_\_\_. (Your maiden name was \_\_\_\_\_.) Is that Norwegian?

\*If "no:" Do you wish you had a Norwegian name?

\*Do you still tell people you're Norwegian, despite the non-Norwegian last name?

\*How important to your identity as a Norwegian American is it for you to have a Norwegian last name?

\*When you named your children, what kinds of considerations did you keep in mind when picking out names?

\*Did you consider Norwegian names?

\*How did you handle the spelling?

\*Have you ever used Norwegian names for other things (i.e., nicknames, pets, livestock, toys, land)?

\*Do you use any Norwegian words for anything else?

\*Do you ever combine Norwegian with English to describe certain things?

\*How familiar are you with your family tree?

\*Does that topic interest you?

\*To your knowledge, are there particular first names that are common in your family tree (i.e., Lars, Kristina)?

\*To your knowledge, was your last name changed or altered through the years (i.e., Pederson > Peterson > Pierson)?

\*Do you know why this happened?

\*Do you care?

\*Do you know of any family back in Norway with your last name?

\*Have you looked them up?

**LAND:**

- \*How do you feel when you drive through the farmlands of Norse?
- \*When you travel (or live) far from the Norse area, do you ever think about it?
  - \*What do you think about?
- \*Do you have any special memories or stories about a particular place in Norse?
  - \*Please share.
- \*How would you describe the lands around Norse?
- \*If you could take only one picture in Norse to hang over your fireplace, what would you photograph?
  - \*Why?
  - \*What would you have inscribed under the photo?
  - \*Why?
- \*In your opinion, what attracted the first Norwegian pioneers to the Norse area?
- \*What do you think they would say about Norse today?
- \*What are your general thoughts or feelings on the towns of Clifton and Cranfills Gap?

**IN CONCLUSION...:**

- \*Pretend you are creating a time capsule (about the size of a bathtub) that will be buried for 100 years. In this capsule, you want to place certain items that in the year 2104 will tell people about Norse. What items would you place in the time capsule?
  - \*Why?
- \*Is there anything else you would like to add before we conclude this interview?



## APPENDIX N

## SAMPLE PAGE FROM NORWEGIAN'S TRANSCRIPT

LP – OK. In your own words, tell me what it means to be a Norwegian American.

?? – It means that, first of all, I am an American and grateful that I was planted in America. But I'm thankful for my Norwegian roots because they gave to me a rich faith in God, a work ethic, integrity, honesty, morality, and fun.

LP – And fun. What part of fun? I mean, define "fun."

?? – Good, clean, wholesome fun.

LP – OK. In your opinion, what sets Norwegian Americans apart from other ethnic Americans who are not Norwegian?

?? – Well, in this area we have Germans and Swedes, and they very much are like Norwegians. Now if you get over into the Hispanic ethnic group, they, of course, have different styles and ethnic treasures, and so do the blacks.

LP – But for the most part you don't really feel that distinct from – or do you feel distinct from others?

?? – Oh no, no.

LP – OK. Describe your thoughts on being a Norwegian American specifically from Texas.

?? – Well, it would seem that we would feel almost lost in Texas because we have so few Norwegian areas. We have the one in east Texas of course, and one in west Texas and one down by Beeville. But the largest complex of Norwegians is in the Bosque County area. And since the Chamber of Commerce has made this the Norwegian capital of the state, then we're pretty well known as an ethnic group throughout the state.

LP – So do you think it's special to be a Norwegian in Texas as opposed to Minnesota? I mean, everyone in Minnesota's Norwegian, right? I always thought it was kind of special...

?? – I suppose you could say it's uniquely special to be a Norwegian in Texas.

## APPENDIX O

## NON-NORWEGIANS' INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**IDENTITY:**

- \*You're not Norwegian...what is your ethnic heritage?
- \*How does it feel for you, a non-Norwegian, living in Clifton, which has been named the Norwegian Capital of Texas?
- \*Do you feel there's a divide between the different ethnic groups in Bosque County?
  - \*Do you feel there's a sort of rivalry between the different ethnic groups?
- \*What sort of other ethnic celebrations are there in Bosque County?
  - \*Do you feel that these celebrations are open to everyone?

**ETHNICITY:**

- \*Being faced with all the Norwegian heritage of the area, how often do you think about your ethnicity?
- \*What causes you to think about it?
- \*How does your ethnic identity influence your daily life?
- \*How important is this ethnic identity to you?

**FAMILY GENERATIONS / COMMUNICATING ETHNICITY:**

- \*Are you familiar with local folklore?
  - \*Tell me some stories that you know about Norse.
- \*How do you account for the pioneers' success in Norse?
  - \*What did they do that allowed them to make it when so many other settlements failed?

**CULTURAL PRACTICES:**

\*How would you describe Norse, Texas to an outsider unfamiliar with the area and the people?

\*How would you feel if you could give a person from Norway a tour of Norse, Texas?

\*How active are you in the Norse community?

\*What do you do?

\*What is your favorite event or festival in Norse?

\*Why?

\*In your opinion, how important are these events or festivals?

\*Do you feel that they honor and celebrate the Norwegian heritage of the area?

\*Why?

\*If you could only attend one event in Norse each year, what would it be?

\*Why?

\*Please share any special memories or stories about the *lutefisk* dinner, the *smørgåsbord*, or any other event or festival that you may have.

\*Have you adopted any Norwegian customs because of living in Norse?

**CHURCH:**

\*What do Our Savior's Lutheran Church and the Old Rock Church (St. Olaf) symbolize to you?

\*Why?

\*How do you feel when you visit those churches?

\*Do you attend the special Christmas celebrations there?

\*What are those like?

\*Do you visit the cemeteries next to the churches?

\*How does that make you feel?

\*What do you think of Cleng Peerson, a leader in Norwegian immigration, being buried at Our Savior's?

\*Did you see King Olav V when he came to visit Norse in the early 1980s?

\*What did you think of that?

\*Do you have any special memories or stories about the churches in Norse?

\*Please tell me.

\*In your opinion, what significance do these churches have for the community of Norse?

\*What is their role in the community?

### **LAND:**

\*How do you feel when you drive through the farmlands of Norse?

\*When you travel (or live) far from the Norse area, do you ever think about it?

\*What do you think about?

\*Do you have any special memories or stories about a particular place in Norse?

\*Please share.

\*How would you describe the lands around Norse?

\*If you could take only one picture in Norse to hang over your fireplace, what would you photograph?

\*Why?

\*What would you have inscribed under the photo?

\*Why?

\*What do you think the original pioneers would say about Norse today?

### **IN CONCLUSION...:**

\*Pretend you are creating a time capsule (about the size of a bathtub) that will be buried for 100 years. In this capsule, you want to place certain items that in the year 2104 will tell people about Norse. What items would you place in the time capsule?

\*Why?

\*Is there anything else you would like to add before we conclude this interview?

## APPENDIX P

## SAMPLE PAGE FROM NON-NORWEGIAN'S TRANSCRIPT

LP – OK. We were – as you know, my paper's about the Norwegians in Bosque County, the southern part of Bosque County. And you yourself are not Norwegian.

?? – Correct.

LP – What is your ethnic heritage?

?? – Probably more Irish/English.

LP – How does it feel for you not being Norwegian to live in this community which is the Norwegian capital of Texas? Does that make any difference for you?

?? – It makes absolutely no difference.

LP – It doesn't bother you one way or the other?

?? – Not a bit.

LP – Do you feel that the – I know there's a German community here and there's, I guess, a sizable English population – do you think that the groups mix well here? Are there any problems?

?? – I think they mix very well.

LP – No resentment about it being Norwegian capital?

?? – Occasionally you hear somebody say something, but very seldom.

LP – Now, what about the German community? I know they've been here as long as the Norwegians, and they're starting to do a few things like Oktoberfest, and I'm not sure what else. But do you feel their interest has been revived because of all the Norwegian interest, or do you know? Have you heard anything?

?? – Well, I think that the, for instance, the Chamber of Commerce is trying to promote equally the various heritages, not just the German and the Norwegian, but also the black and the Hispanic – those are fairly prominent here. They're trying to include everybody. They're trying to include the Germans in the Norwegian festivities. And there's a little Norway in the German festivities also. So I think it's a matter of trying to show appreciation for all the heritages.

## APPENDIX Q

### CONSENT STATEMENT



DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES

#### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

IRB # 2002-07-374 EP

**Identification of Project:**

"Communicating Ethnicity: A Phenomenological Analysis of Constructed Identity"

**Purpose of the Research:**

This study is involved with the construction of ethnic identity through communication. More specifically, this study will look at how the descendants of the original Norwegian immigrants to central Texas identify themselves ethnically and how they communicate that ethnicity to others.

**Procedures:**

You have been selected to be a participant in this study because you are over the age of 19 and because of your familiarity with the Norwegian community in Bosque County, Texas. You will be asked to answer questions about your experiences with and thoughts about these issues within the Norwegian community in Bosque County. Data will be collected by interviews. These interviews may run up to 90 minutes in length, and they will take place in your home. These interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed by the principal investigator. All audiotapes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home for no longer than 10 years. The data from these audiotapes will primarily be used for dissertation research, although they may be also be used in conference presentations or in published research.

**Risks and/or Discomforts:**

There are no known risks involved with participating in this study.

**Benefits:**

There are no benefits involved with participating in this study, other than getting the opportunity to record what you know about this group's history.

(Please initial.)

433 Oldfather Hall / P.O. Box 880329 / Lincoln, NE 68588-0329  
(402) 472-2070 / FAX (402) 472-6921 / Dept. Home Page: [www.unl.edu/cs/COMST.html](http://www.unl.edu/cs/COMST.html)

**Confidentiality:**

Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the investigator's home and will only be seen by the investigator. The information obtained in this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings, but your identity will be kept confidential.

**Opportunity to Ask Questions:**

You may ask questions about this study and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate or anytime during the study. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject that have not been answered by the investigator, you may contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board, telephone (402) 472-6965.

**Freedom to Withdraw:**

You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators or the University of Nebraska. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:**

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in a research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

**Signature of Subject:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Research Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Name and Phone Number of Investigators:**

Laura Pierson, (208) 524-8890 (H); (208) 521-5822 (cell)  
Dr. Ron Lee, (402) 472-2255

## APPENDIX R

### PHOTOGRAPHS



The 17 original Norwegian immigrants who arrived in Bosque County in 1854.

Top row, left to right:

Hendrick & Christine Dahl  
Ole & Ellen Canuteson  
Jens & Kari Jenson

Bottom row, left to right:

Karl & Sedsel Questad  
Berger & Anne Rogstad  
Ole & Anne Pierson

Middle row, left to right:

Jens & Kari Ringness  
Ole Ween  
Knut & Berte Canuteson

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The Pierson homestead, mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, before major repairs and additions were made. Note that the stairs leading to the upstairs were placed outside the house on the porch.

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