Danish Emigration to the U.S.A.

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Published by the Danes Worldwide Archives
in collaboration with
the Danish Society for Emigration History
Aalborg, Denmark

1992

Sponsors:

Dronning Margrethes og Prins Henriks Fond
The Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs
The Danish Ministry of Education and Research
The Danish Brotherhood in America
Rebild National Park Society, Inc.
Dansk-Amerikansk Klub i Aalborg
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Rockwool Fonden
ISS International Service System A/S
Konsul George Jorck og hustru Emma Jorck's Fond
Nørresundby Bank
Sparekassen Nordjyllands Fond af 29. marts 1976
Tuborgfondet
Aalborg Portland

Illustrations:
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Cartography by Jan Slot-Carlsen

Printed by: Special-Trykkeriet Viborg a-s, Denmark
Published by: Danes Worldwide Archives
ISBN 87-982912-5-4

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Danish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Uffe Ellemann-Jensen. (Photo: Mogens Holmberg, API)

THE MINISTER FOR
FOREIGN AFFAIRS

June, 1992

Dear Friends,
No other country has attracted more Danish emigrants than the United States of America. The warm and friendly relations between Denmark and the United States, at all levels, are to a large extent founded on this emigration.

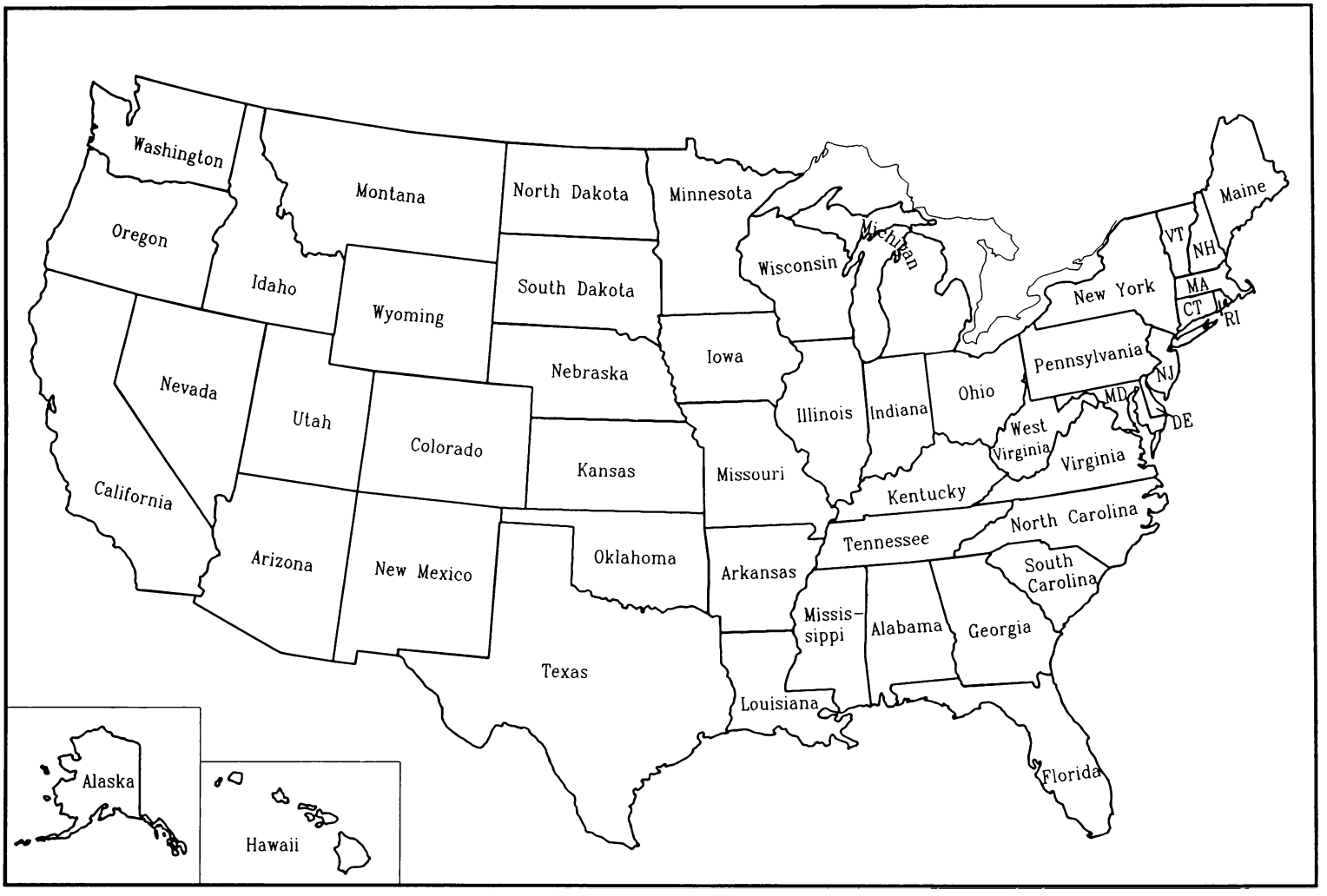
This book portrays Danish emigration to the United States over the last two centuries. In Denmark we are proud of the contributions of Danes to the development of American society, and we are grateful for the inspiration and support we have received from Americans as well as from Danish emigrants.

Emigration does not imply cutting off ties with the native country. Every year Danes and Americans together celebrate Independence Day on the Fourth of July in the small town of Rebild, Denmark. I have been told that outside the United States the Fourth of July is celebrated in no other country but Denmark. This event thus reflects the unique relationship we have with the United States through the Danish emigrants.

"Danish Emigration to the U.S.A." is the result of the efforts of both Danish and American migration researchers. The Danes Worldwide Archives was founded 60 years ago, and the book thus also marks the sixtieth anniversary of this institution.

I wish to thank the Danes Worldwide Archives and the authors for this valuable contribution to Danish-American relations. I would also like to express my gratitude to the private and public foundations that made publication possible.

Uffe Ellemann-Jensen
Minister for Foreign Affairs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Preface

1992 is an anniversary year. First of all, it marks the 80th anniversary of the 4th of July celebrations held in Rebild National Park where thousands of Danes, Americans and Danish-Americans have gathered to celebrate Independence Day since 1912.

In 1992, Aalborg's Danish-American Club can celebrate 70 years of activity, including the festive garden parties and luncheons held in connection with the 4th of July celebrations.

And 1992 is also an anniversary year for the Danes Worldwide Archives, celebrating 60 years of recording the history of Danes who have emigrated. We felt there could be no better time to publish a book about Danish emigration to the U.S.A.

In *Danish Emigration to the U.S.A.* authors from the United States and Denmark have joined forces in describing many different aspects of both emigration and assimilation. We wish to thank all those who contributed to this volume, the fourth in a series of books about emigration history published by the Danes Worldwide Archives.

The Danes who traveled to the United States to settle and make their futures there carried with them a particularly Danish philosophy of life. The churches they founded were modeled on the churches of their homeland, and the schism which developed between the Inner Mission and the Grundtvigian branches of the church in Denmark also characterized Danish-American church life. This schism between "the holy Danes" and "the happy Danes" had great significance in the cultural life of the Danish settlements, and traces of it are woven into nearly every account of the Danish immigrants given in this book.

What did those Danes who emigrated to America expect to find on the other side of the Atlantic? Information about the "new world" was available from a number of sources in the 1800s. While official reports sent to king and government rarely reached the general public, there was no lack of targetted propaganda – leaflets and pamphlets containing emigration instructions. And, as reported by Poul Erik Olsen, newspaper articles also played an important roll in giving the Danes an impression of America.

Emigrant letters were another important source of information, and, in some cases, the actual stimulus to emigration. As Niels Peter Stilling tells us, letters written by the emigrant in an effort to maintain contact with those he or she had left behind are historical documents, often revealing the individual goals and motives of the writer.

In spite of the decision to emigrate, love of the homeland was often strong, and this love gave rise to a wealth of Danish-American literature.

More than 100 authors wrote books and pamphlets describing the Danish-American experience, and the theme of much of their writing is a longing for Denmark. In his article, Stig Pilgaard Olsen treats the most significant of the Danish-American writers and their work.

In 1990 Mette Hald traveled to the United States in search of what remains of Danish immigrant settlements and libraries in order to determine how books and libraries had helped to maintain the cultural identity of the Danish immigrants. Her article, "The Books and Libraries of the Danish Immigrants," describes how Danish reading circles have also made it possible for second and third generation immigrants to find elements of their Danish heritage in the literature.

Did the immigrant have an unconscious need to surround himself with familiar pictures and symbols? This question is discussed in "The Importance of Images," in which Aase Bak presents her preliminary study of Danish-American religious art – the pictures and symbols used as ethnic markers in the Danish churches in the United States. Her study represents a new area of research in Danish emigration history.

Language is a particularly important aspect of ethnic identity. Philologists Iver Kjær and Mogens Baumann Larsen provide a number of examples of the Danish immigrant's process of language assimilation. The authors demonstrate how a group of Danes from Thy in northern Jutland who settle in South Dakota – where they are isolated from other Danish settlements – maintain their particular variant of the Danish language for at least two generations. Nonetheless, it is concluded that spoken Danish is a sporadically recollected language in the United States today.

Peter L. Petersen and John Mark Nielsen have contributed a biography of the Danish-American minister and historian, Peter Sørensen Vig. Vig's tireless efforts and numerous books and articles about the Danish immigrant experience did much to ensure the historical heritage of Danish-Americans. This article is followed by a bibliography of the published works of P.S. Vig.

Although there are Danes scattered throughout the United States, many of those who emigrated to America settled in the Midwest, and some found their way to Kansas. In her article, "Paradise or Disaster?", Nancy Mitchell relates how the Danish settlers in Kansas experienced all the hardships of homesteading, including Indian raids, the plague of grasshoppers, prairie fires, burning summer heat and prolonged drought. She also describes the failure of the Danish Socialists, Pio and Geleff, to found a colony in Kansas based on their political ideology.

The towns of Elk Horn and Kimballton in southwestern Iowa take pride in being the home of the largest concentration of Danish immigrants in the United States. The first Danes settled in the area in 1868, and the first

Danish folk school in the U.S. was founded in Elk Horn in 1878. The story of Elk Horn and Kimballton is told by Jette Mackintosh.

Steffen Elmer Jørgensen describes family or "chain" emigration based on the experiences of three farming families from the island of Møn. These families suffer an attack of "emigration fever," resulting in a series of emigrations within family clans. A combination of genealogical and demographic research has made it possible to detail the transplantation of an entire community.

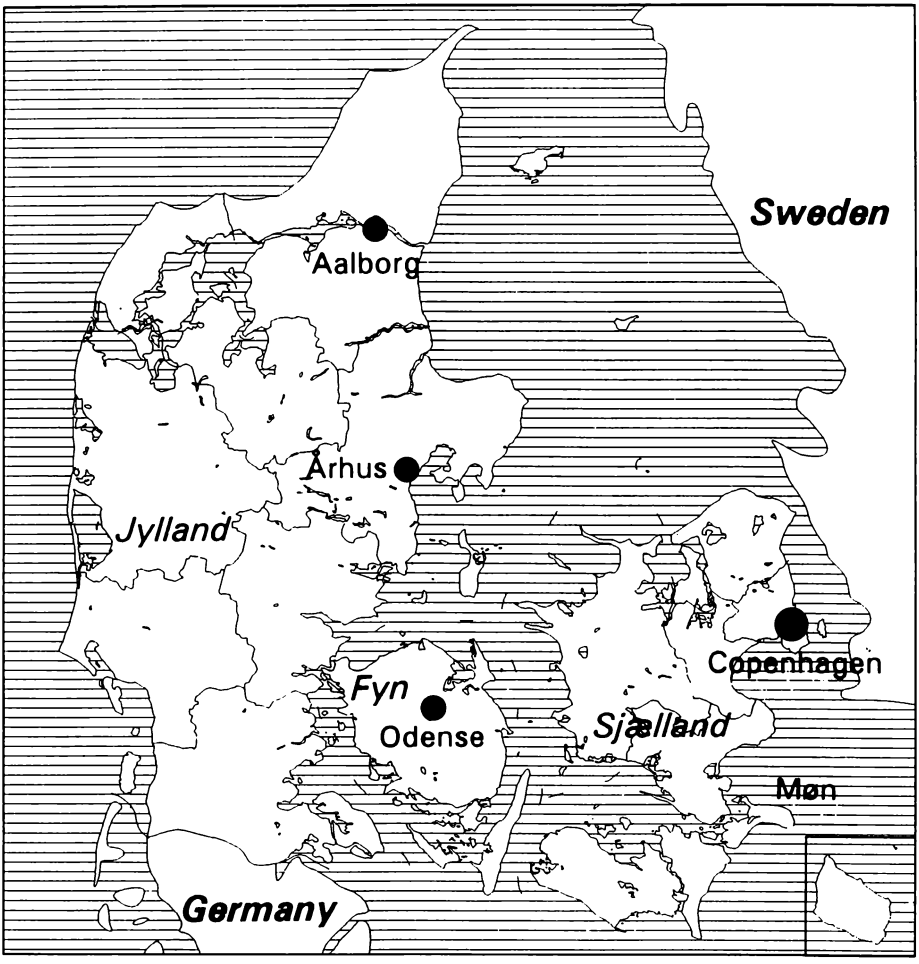
The historiography of Danish emigration to America carried out by Danish historians is reviewed by Erik Helmer Pedersen.

It is of utmost importance that the sources of emigration history are preserved for future generations. Archives which throw light on the history of Danish immigrants are kept in many different places in the United States. John Mark Nielsen and Peter L. Petersen have prepared an overview of Danish-American collections in the United States and of current research efforts there to preserve Danish-American history. Following their article is a bibliography of books, articles and dissertations published after 1976 which treat the Danish-American experience.

Danish-American history is preserved in museums as well as in archives, and the first museum to serve such a purpose, "The Lincoln Log Cabin," was opened in 1934 at the initiative of the enterprising Danish-American, Max Henius. This museum of Danish emigration, located in Rebild National Park near the site of the annual 4th of July celebrations, is visited by thousands of people every year. In 1983, a committee was appointed to establish The Danish Immigrant Museum in the Elk Horn-Kimballton area. Years of preparation, fund raising and collecting of material will soon culminate in the opening of this museum. The history and purpose of the museum, its collections and the philosophy behind its exhibits are described in an article by June Sampson.

In completing this volume, Henning Bender relates the turbulent history of the Danes Worldwide Archives in Aalborg, Denmark, which was officially opened in 1932.

Birgit Flemming Larsen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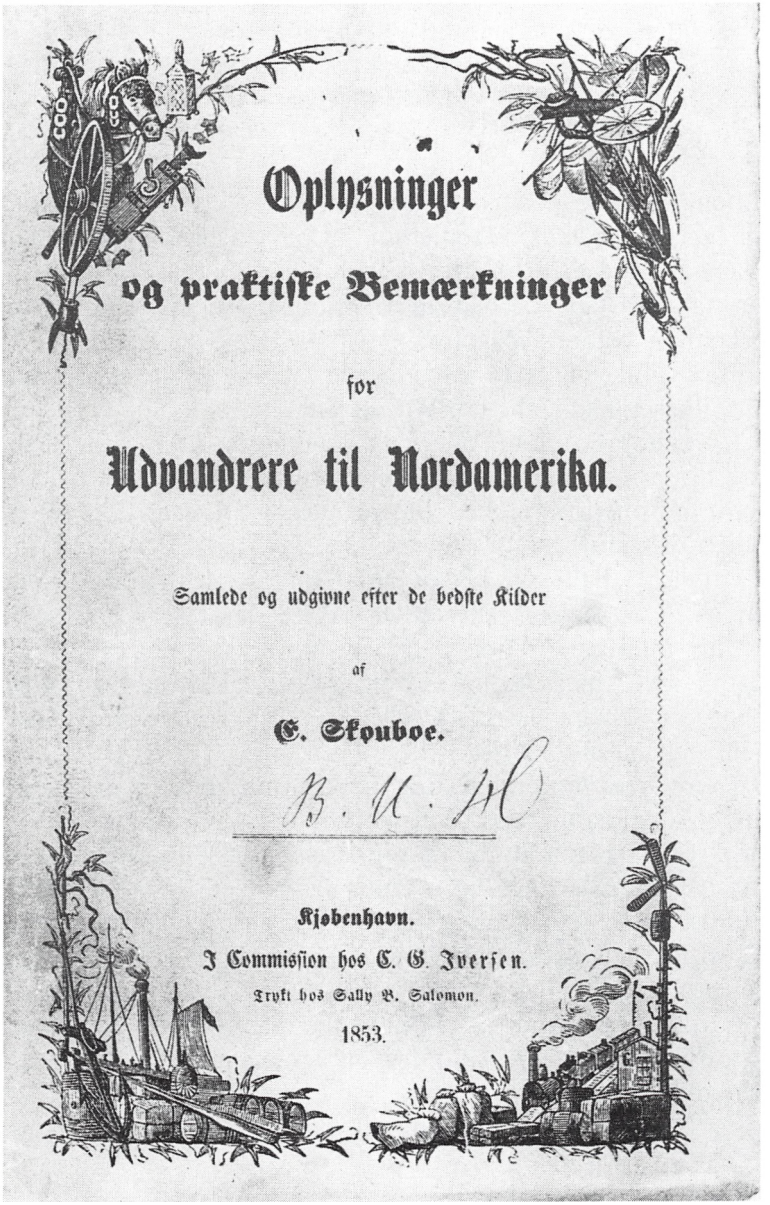
Visions of Freedom

Impressions of America in Nineteenth Century Denmark

by Poul Erik Olsen


Oplysninger
og praktiske Bemærkninger
for
Udvandrere til Nordamerika.
Samlede og udgivne efter de bedste Kilder
af
E. Skouboe.
Kjøbenhavn.
I Commission hos C. G. Iversen.
Trykt hos Sally B. Salomon.
1853.

Instructions for emigrants. 1853.

In the 1860 census report for the provincial town of Aalborg, Denmark, there is an entry for Else Kirstine Nielsen, née Thomsen, 48 years old, profession: "repairer of china." Two children are listed, a 25-year-old son, a typesetter, and a 10-year-old daughter, both living at home. The two children are registered as members of the Lutheran church, while Else Kirstine indicates that she has no church affiliation. Her marital state is given as a cryptic: "not divorced." More dramatic facts have been added to this laconic information in the space for "Remarks." Here we read:

> My husband, Ole Christian Nielsen, born in Nibe 1819, traveled as a Mormon to America and on the journey he has entered into a Mormon marriage; after six months in the Mormon state, he fled to California where they still live together. All this was reported by a returned Mormon.[1]

In addition to these details of Else Kirstine Nielsen's own foundered marriage, the report tells us something of her husband's disappointed expectations of the promised land, America. One thing is certain: Life in the Mormon state of Utah – perhaps in America, in general – did not live up to his expectations before departure.

It is impossible for us to know, however, just what expectations Ole Christian Nielsen had as he crossed the Atlantic.

In fact, the impression of America in the minds of the general public in Denmark in the 1800s is of greater interest. How much information about conditions in America reached the people of Denmark? How was this information distributed?

It was typical of the times that different information was available to different levels of society. The crown prince, later King Christian VIII, received his information first hand. While on a diplomatic mission to Washington, D.C. in 1830, the Governor-General of the Danish West Indies, Peter von Scholten, wrote a private letter to the crown prince, detailing his impression of America:

> There is nothing interesting or beautiful about the exterior of the city of Washington, and it seems truly to be a forced piece of work as the streets are laid out for an immensely large city, and a few brilliant public buildings have been erected, while in large sections in the middle, one sees little more than a single cottage, and altogether 10 or 12 ordinary houses at the most. There is, therefore, a very great contrast to the other towns, and to the country as a whole, where everything is grown up and can be compared to a fertile spring field. There are incalculable natural resources in a land of such great dimension and advantageous location as the States, and the energy employed in opening and easing communications with railroads, canals and

steam transport must lead to remarkably fast development. As an example of the perfection of one branch of communications which in a big country is one of the major sources of progress and prosperity, I can simply cite that a man can travel from New York to Albany by steamboat, a distance of 140 English miles, in 11 to 12 hours for 2 1/2 piasters [1 piaster = $1] or 5 Rbd.v.C, and that one can travel from New York to Philadelphia either by steamboat or by stage coach, a distance of about 105 English miles, in 10 to 11 hours for 4 1/2 piasters, including dinner, which is all the more strange as hotel prices are extremely high, but as easy as it is for an ordinary man to live and travel in this Land, just as excessively expensive it is, when, because of your position, you must live in some other way, in which case I dare claim that there is no country in the world as expensive as this one. – The President has completed his negotiations with the Indians, they have agreed to move over to the other side of the Mississippi River, to the west of that river, whereby the United States has not only rid itself of restless neighbors, but has won a very large, fertile section of land.

As impressed as Peter von Scholten was by the material resources in America, he was extremely skeptical when it came to the political system:

> Everything here has to do with personalities and is led by party spirit so that, in spite of intended democracy and individual independence, there is no place on earth where the common man is more watched over than here, nor no place where intrigues and schemes are more ingrained. It has on many occasions occurred to me, and to those around me, how mistaken one can be about the exalted and happy pictures called to mind by thoughts of Freedom, Equality and other such magical words, and I would highly recommend that all hysterical Liberals should be sent over here, where their dreams will soon perish.[2]

So much for the official representative of the Danish kingdom.

Added to these messages at royal level were those which came to the government via official channels, reports from the Danish legation and the Danish consuls in North America.

Very little of the information collected by official, professional observers – diplomats, naval officers and other public officials – was disseminated outside their circles.

It was not official notices and reports that gave those Danes considering emigration their impression of America. In 1977, historian Jens N. Nielsen studied the information about America provided by Danish newspapers

from 1870 to 1897 and found that only 4% of the stories published had official reports as their source. Most such reports were warnings against emigrating at all or were more specific warnings against the highway robbery and confidence tricks which posed a great threat to a newly arrived emigrant in America.[3]

Neither was the information about America available in the early years of the 19th century remarkable in its quantity.

More remarkable was the general agreement that America was a land of very big opportunities. A widely read world history textbook of the time, written by the head of the boarding school, Sorø Academy, H.F.J. Estrup, contains the following description of the United States: "In no country is there greater freedom or faster growing trade and lower taxes..."

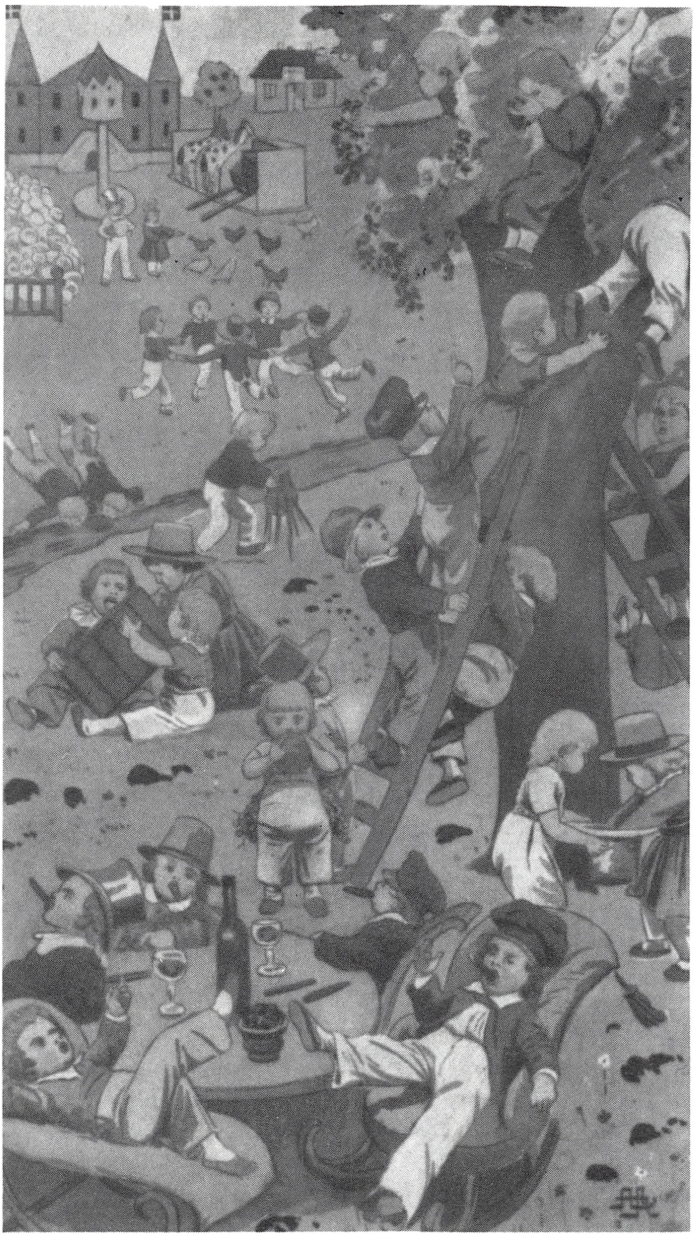
Danish enthusiasm

The Danish people were enthusiastic – far too enthusiastic in the eyes of some. In one of the songs he wrote for the operette, "Festen på Kenilworth" (The Party at Kenilworth), Hans Christian Andersen penned the ironic refrain: "Skade at Amerika ligge skal så langt herfra" (What a shame that America should be so far away). The operette depicts the new world as a branch of Paradise where gold and silver grow in the fields, roast pigeons build their nests in the woods, etc.[4]

We find the same irony in poet Christian Winther's children's book, *Flugten til Amerika* (Flight to America) in which the hero, feeling great disappointment in the wiles and cruelty of the world, talks his brother into going with him to America. There is nothing to fear and everything to gain. As soon as you get there, you are given a castle – yes, and even money, and there is no lack of the ordinary necessities of life: It snows sugar and candy and rains chocolate!

There were also the novels of James Fenimore Cooper. *The Last of the Mohicans* appeared in Danish translation in 1828, and there is no doubt that Cooper greatly influenced the impression of America forming in Denmark at that time.

More down-to-earth information became available in the late 1840s with the appearance of the first of many guidebooks for emigrants. In 1847, L.J. Fribert published *Haandbog for Emigranter til Amerikas Vest med Beskrivelse af Overreisen samt af Livet og Agerdyrkningsmaaden nærmest i Wisconsin* (Handbook for Emigrants to the American West with a Description of the Journey as well as the Life and Methods of Farming, mostly in Wisconsin) – all this in just 96 pages. These books brushed aside all the fears of Indian raids, lawlessness, rattle snakes, frequent hurricanes, earthquakes and storms which might have begun to grow in the minds of potential emigrants



Raisins and almonds and walnuts abound
and jars full of syrup and honey,
lollipops cluster on all trees around,
and nothing costs any money.
(From *Flight to America* by Christian Winther, illustrated by Alfred Schmidt. 1830.)

after reading Cooper's novels. Neither do the guidebooks promise the emigrant the life of a millionaire. The main theme is, however, a positive one: "Conditions in America promise people a greater degree of true happiness than can be found in Europe..."[5]

Fribert's guidebook was soon followed by many others. In 1852, *Udvandringsbog for Skandivaver eller Fører og raadgiver ved udvandring til Nordamerika, Texas og Californien* (Emigration Book for Scandinavians or Guides and Advisers for Emigration to North America, Texas and California) was published in Copenhagen, and E. Skouboe's *Oplysninger for Udvandrere om Nordamerika* (Information for Emigrants about North America) appeared the year after. At least the title of one guidebook, *Et Slangeland. Nogle veiledende vink for nogle udvandrere til Amerika* (A Land of Snakes. Some Instructive Advice for Some Emigrants to America) (1853), reminded the prospective emigrant of the dangers lurking in the wilds. The market continued to be flooded with emigration guidebooks throughout the remainder of the century. One of them, M.A. Sommer's *The Little American*, was reprinted 10 times from 1864 to 1891.[6]

American immigration propaganda

The guidebooks, which had to be purchased, were primarily intended for those who had already made a decision to emigrate or were well into the planning stages. This can scarcely be said of the American immigration propaganda which began to trickle into the market after 1850. In 1852, the state of Wisconsin was the first to create the job of Commissioner of Immigration. The position disappeared again in 1855. Some ten years later, after the Civil War, immigration propaganda appeared once again. Boxes of material were soon on their way to Europe, and an advertising campaign, especially in German and Scandinavian newspapers, was initiated.[7] This propaganda included a pamphlet written by Sophus Listoe entitled *Om Udvandringen til Amerika. Staten Wisconsin som Hjem for den Skandinaviske Udvandrer* (About Emigration to America. The State of Wisconsin as a Home for the Scandinavian Emigrant). An immigrant himself, Listoe held the title of "Special Emigration-Agent for Wisconsin." Having written a similar pamphlet for the Immigration Council of the state of Minnesota the year before, he was well versed in the topic. The Wisconsin pamphlet begins with the rhetorical question "What shall I do? Should I travel to America?" Listoe wisely refrains from offering direct encouragement to emigrate – he simply points out that hard-working, steady people can make good, secure lives for themselves, especially, of course, in Wisconsin, a healthy, fertile and "well-watered" state.

Later, competition among states needing to increase their population

sharpened. In 1879, Wisconsin published a pamphlet which included, in addition to facts about Wisconsin itself (a veritable Paradise for emigrants), considerable information about other places in an effort to make the choice of destination easier. It is pointed out that there is no room for more people in the eastern states, and that Minnesota, in particular, is plagued by land speculators and has poor railroad connections. Little information is provided about the western states except for the fact that conditions there are, if possible, even worse than in Minnesota.[8] Minnesota and the neighboring states of Iowa and Nebraska had their own propaganda machines, however, and the railroad companies also provided considerable, if not always disinterested, information.

The recipient of all this propaganda must have been somewhat confused by the conflicting information provided as each state singled itself out as the only sensible choice for settlement. The railroad companies and steamship lines were more neutral in their presentation, their main purpose being to sell transportation.

Newspapers

The newspapers played a more important role in determining the Danes' impression of the United States than these targeted propaganda efforts. Jens N. Nielsen put the information provided by the newspapers into several different categories: political conditions, the judicial system, the employment situation, religious and ethnic minorities, etc. and analyzed those articles which dealt with the situation of the emigrant. He found that as far as politics were concerned, there was nothing but praise for the Constitution of the United States – an article in the newspaper *Vejle Amts Folkeblad* (1885) reports that the Constitution of the United States is the only constitution based on the principle that everyone is equal before the law. On the other hand, in 1897, the newspaper *Politiken* pointed out that, in spite of the Constitution, political power was in the hands of those who had money; trusts and monopolies controlled the country. In general, the Danish press gave the Democrats more positive coverage than the Republicans, regardless of the politics of the newspaper concerned. The corruption of the American administration, although not specifically denounced, was stressed in political articles which appeared after 1876. The Socialist press often expressed amazement that socialist ideology had such a poor foothold in America. In 1892, the newspaper *Social-Demokraten* noted that the American people had a poorer understanding of socialism than Europeans had had 20 years earlier. Jens N. Nielsen concluded that the information in Danish newspapers was simply too diffuse to provide the Danes with any real picture of the political situation in America.

The negative view of the judicial system in the United States was in sharp contrast to the positive attitude toward the Constitution, and positive commentary about the system of justice was rare. There are shades of the Wild West in the following statement printed in *Vejle Amts Folkeblad* in 1897:

> Opinion is based on what happened in the old days, and it is felt that murder and killing and other violent crimes are the order of the day in America, and there is no doubt that there have been times, and not long ago at that, when a murder did not cause much of a stir in America. The laws of the far west have, however, been considerably improved...

There was undoubtedly some way to go before life and property were as secure in America as in Denmark. The newspapers generally agreed that there was much more crime in America than in Europe. This was felt to be due to the fact that the legal system in America gave the criminal far better protection than the victim. The posting of bond and trial by jury were put forward as examples that should certainly not be followed. It was believed to be possible to buy your way out of punishment by posting bond, and the subtleties of the American jury system, which were difficult to understand in Denmark, left the impression that the rule of law often did not apply.[9]

There were mixed views with regard to the labor market and the opportunities it offered. It was difficult to get a job in the towns, and you couldn't be certain of getting the kind of work you were trained for – you had to take what you could get. It was worst for the newly arrived emigrants, as the *Social-Demokraten* pointed out in 1876: "The foreign worker must often wander around seeking work for weeks or months, and in the end probably will find a job for which he is unsuited." The situation of the unemployed worker was dramatically portrayed – often whole families died of hunger. On the other hand, it was also pointed out that the social position of the worker was much better in America than in Europe. You didn't have to bow and scrape for your employer in America; there the situation was characterized by mutual respect and equality. Information about working conditions was also colored by reports from the numerous and often bloody strikes where it was usually the worker who got the rawest deal.[10]

The media also provided a somewhat distorted view of the religious situation in the United States. News of the Mormons took up most space. Dramatic stories were made available to the Danish media, and it is hard to believe that the relatively large number of Mormon Danes who did, in fact, emigrate to Utah found their inspiration in such articles. Utah is portrayed as a despotic society under the absolute rule of the clergy, led by Brigham Young who, like other despots, has a secret police force, murder squads, etc. And, of course, bigamy always made good front-page headlines. Re-

ports of that sort of thing could only fuel the worst fears of women like Else Kirstine Nielsen from Aalborg.

As far as religion in America was concerned, not much could be learned from the Danish newspapers. What interest there was in this topic had, naturally, to do with the church life of the Danish immigrants. It was stressed, rather negatively, that many Danes joined the American "sects." In general, the Danish press was deeply concerned about the spiritual welfare of the emigrants. While efforts to keep the Danes together in Danish congregations was rather thoroughly covered, this coverage often took the form of reports from meetings held in Denmark by the "Commission to Further the Preaching of the Gospel among Danes in America."[11]

Although information about America – taken piecemeal from the political, legal, social and religious arenas – gave cause for criticism, there remained a positive overall view of what America stood for. In the Danish press, America was also the land of prosperity and progress. Anything was possible there, and whether you were talking about building a house or a railroad or moving up the social ladder, this could be done more quickly in America. Skyscrapers and newspaper-boy millionaires became the symbols of American society in the second half of the 1800s. Exaggerated examples of social mobility made good reading in the Danish press, and occasional pieces on unfortunate political conditions, etc. appeared to be exceptions to the rule of how life really was in the Promised Land.

Land of plenty

The continued emphasis on the virtually inexhaustible resources of the American continent also formed an important part of the picture of America. Governor-General von Scholten had also mentioned these to the crown prince. In keeping with this theme, the Danish civil servant, C.F. von Schmidt-Phiseldeck, in his book, *Europa und Amerika* (Europe and America) (1820), emphasizes that its resources make America independent of Europe. He points out that America will not only be capable of providing for itself, but will have a surplus as well.

The same impression was given in the widely read book, *Fra Amerika* (From America) (1897) by Henrik Cavling, which describes the United States from north to south and east to west. The conditions of Danish immigrants and, in a chapter by P. Groth, Norwegian immigrants, are also described. Having completed a trip by train from New York to Chicago, Cavling concludes, "Everything is the biggest, the strangest, the busiest and the most wonderful in the world" – his only derogatory remarks have to do with the stuffed turkey he is served in the dining car. American food doesn't reach the same heights as the skyscrapers!

A new street. (From *Fra Amerika* (From America) by Henrik Cavling. 1897.)

He goes on to say that in America the keyword is efficiency, and competition is stiff:

> You scarcely reach the street before you feel you are among people who are all about to set a record... You look in vain for someone who is just passing the time, but there is no such person... You are knee deep in work. There is sweat on every brow. Every muscle is tensed, there is high pressure in every look. You soon get the feeling that all of these people will die suddenly and that it is the fear of not really being finished that, at the same time, makes them move more quickly and marks them with the solemnity of the grave.[12]

Cavling's book, characterized as it is by Danish self-righteousness, also gives the impression that Danes who survive the meager first years in America will naturally attain influential positions in American society and win the respect of their fellow man.

What impression of America was formed in the minds of Danes by the information from these many sources? As an observer of the times, author Henrik Cavling didn't feel those who emigrated had been inspired by any impression of specific conditions on the other side of the Atlantic. As he put it:

> It is Freedom that unites the many peoples in North America. It is Freedom which irresistably makes America one Nation. It is Freedom the immigrants love. The land itself is empty and cold; they could never love it with the quiet, intense love they feel for their beloved homeland. What the immigrants in America feel for America is admiration of the country's enormous progress, pride in participating in this great life as free citizens, and happiness at earning money.

Was it then visions of freedom that characterized the average Dane's impression of America? Or was it his impression that America was a real life El Dorado? There is no unequivocal answer to the question of how the Danes really imagined conditions to be in that huge country across the sea. On the one hand, the word "Americanism" entered the Danish language as a negative term in the 1890s. The Danish literary critic Georg Brandes defined Americanism as "a certain lack of intellectual subtlety," and in 1907 the Copenhagen newspaper *Berlingske Tidende* described advertising as "the twentieth century's great, crude Americanism." On the other hand, the popular encyclopedia *Salmonsens Conversationsleksicon* had an entry which read: "As regards culture, North America, with its excellent location, its good harbors, its fertile soil and great mineral resources and, first and foremost, the energy and enterprising character of its population is the diametrical opposite of South America..." The same article describes North America as "a unique analogy to Europe."

It is possible, therefore, with some degree of accuracy, to claim that the quarter of a million Danes who emigrated to the United States between 1864 and 1914 at least had the impression that, whereas conditions in the U.S. were far better than those at home, they were also somewhat similar. Such trite statement of fact is probably as close to the truth as we can ever come. And yet: in 1930 Karl Jørgensen, a Danish-American, published a little book entitled *Dansk Amerika* (Danish America). He described his impression of America as follows:

> When I left in 1904, America was for me a foggy place with few clear figures. [He had a maternal uncle there who often wrote home

and told of his loss of huge fortunes.] We all realized, however, that if such big amounts could be lost, there must have been even bigger ones to begin with, and to my youthful mind this bad luck seemed of lesser importance and served only to make [uncle] more interesting. ...Furthermore, Father had in his youth spent a couple of years in Canada, and even though his descriptions were more down-to-earth than the impressions given by my uncle's correspondence, they were always characterized by a certain enthusiasm for America as the land of the future for young men like me.

He concludes:

> I could not imagine what the true conditions were and expended no effort in discovering what they might be. ... It is on such a foundation and with such inconsistent impressions of America that the emigrant usually leaves Denmark.

Notes

1. *Folketælling 1860* (Census 1860), Aalborg 6. rode, Lille Nygade 425 (The Danish National Archives).
2. Kongehusarkivet (Royal Archives), Christian VIII. Peter von Scholten to the crown prince, 26 October, 1830 (The Danish National Archives).
3. Jens N. Nielsen, *Danske dagblade som informationsspredere om Amerika 1870-1897* (Danish Newspapers as Spreaders of Information about America 1870-1897) (unpublished paper), 1977.
4. Erik Helmer Pedersen, *Drømmen om Amerika* (The Dream of America), Copenhagen: Politikens Forlag, 1985, p. 46-47.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 59-60.
6. Elisabeth Riber Christensen and John Pedersen, *Bibliografi over Dansk-Amerikansk Udvandrerhistorie: Den danske udvandring til USA fra 1840 til 1920 og den dansk-amerikanske historie til 1983* (Bibliography of Danish-American Emigration History: Danish Emigration to the USA from 1840 to 1920 and Danish-American History to 1983), Aalborg, Denmark: Aalborg Universitetsforlag, 1986.
7. Kristian Hvidt, *Flugten til Amerika* (Flight to America), Århus, Denmark: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 1971, p. 380 ff.
8. Erik Helmer Pedersen, *op.cit.*, p. 109 ff.
9. Jens N. Nielsen, *op.cit.*, pp. 38-40.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 41-44.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-55.
12. Henrik Cavling, *Fra Amerika* (From America), vol. 1, Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1897, p. 30.

Letters from America

The Emigrant Letter – An Emigration Stimulus

by Niels Peter Stilling

Letter from America. (From the magazine, *Illustreret Tidende*, 1888.)

Introduction

The letters of those who emigrated are a primary source of the history of Danish emigration to overseas countries. They comprise the emigrants' own record of participation in one of history's great eras of exodus: the migration of enormous numbers of people from one part of the world to another over a period of a few hundred years. For the first time in history, the common man provided a written account of events in which he participated.[1] Because of the school reforms carried out in Denmark in 1814, those who took part in the large-scale emigration which occurred after 1840 could write – an important ability for someone prepared to exchange life in familiar village surroundings for an existence on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Many who emigrated found themselves writing letters for the first time in their lives.[2]

In the long perspective of written history, private letters written by so-called ordinary people take up very little space. In 1876 Alexander Graham Bell (an emigrant himself) invented the telephone – a monstrosity which, in the long run, will contribute to a great loss of historical source material in the form of the private letter. In fact, historians are left with a period of little more than 100 years, from about 1840 to 1940, in which to become acquainted with the "ordinary person" through his or her private letters.

In honor of the 40th anniversary of the first celebration of Independence Day on the 4th of July in Rebild National Park in Denmark, Danish historian Peter Riismøller wrote a little book entitled: *Rebild. Motiver og Mål for Udvandring og Hjemfærd* (Rebild. Motives and Goals for Emigration and Homecoming). The author maintained that emigrants were the outcasts of Danish history:

> ...written Danish history mentions them only as statistics and lists a few names as the common denominator, as their work and significance lay elsewhere. But the letters and books about their lives sent to their homeland are inalienable documents in the history of our people. We don't know enough about ourselves if those half a million who could find no place at home are not included as a group and as individuals.[3]

Most historians, however, have been unwilling to make use of emigrant letters in their research. The cornerstone of emigration research in Denmark was laid with Kristian Hvidt's 1971 thesis *Flugten til Amerika* (Flight to America). Kristian Hvidt based his work almost entirely on the so-called Emigration Records of the Danish police, or, in other words, on statistical sources.[4] Since then, emigrant letters have been thought of as secondary sources in relation to statistical material. This is most tragically expressed in

Letter from home.

the recently published *Dansk Kulturhistorisk Opslagsværk* (Reference Book of Danish Cultural History) (1991).[5] Under the heading "Emigration," historian Hans Christian Johansen presents this exciting topic as a mere statistical phenomenon. One searches in vain for any mention of emigrant letters or literature describing this invaluable source material. In recent years, a number of publications have provided proof of the fact that it is possible to describe emigration without the statistical dressage with which primarily the work of Swedish historians has plagued emigration research since the 1960s[6]. The book, *Brev fra Amerika* (Letter from America), (1981) describes the fates of a number of Danes in the United States on the basis of six large collections of letters.[7] Such comprehensive collections of letters which seem, in particular, to have been preserved when writer and recipient were separated by an ocean, provide an outstanding opportunity to follow persons and families from cradle to grave in that special historical context known as "emigration."

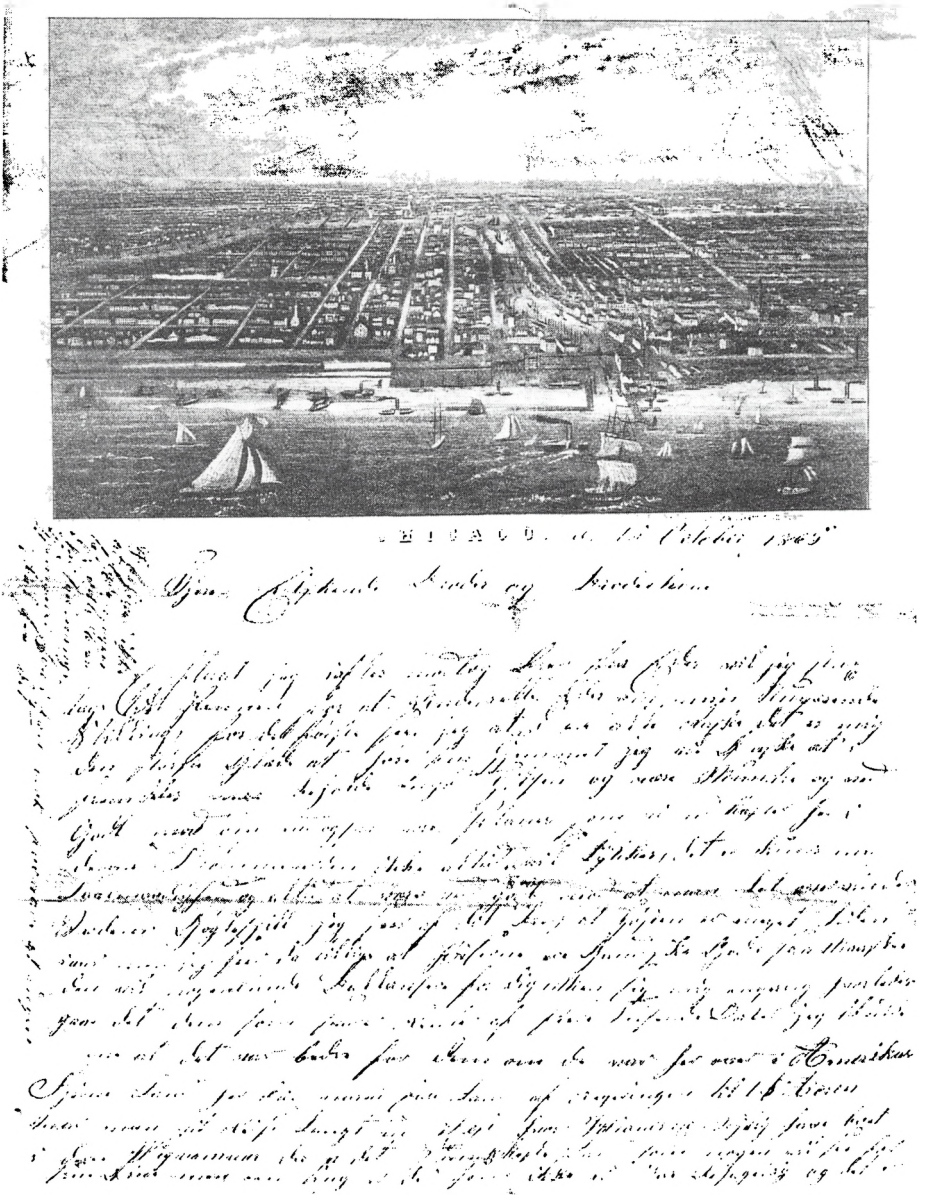
Emigrant letters are approached in quite a different way in the book *Et Nyt Liv*[8] (A New Life) (1985) in which the most important aspects of emigration history are described solely on the basis of emigrant letters. The current article is based on a study of more than 2,000 emigrant letters written between 1840 and 1940.

Some authors showed an interest in America early on. Swedish author Vilhelm Moberg's monumental work, *Udvandrerne* (The Emigrants) (1949-1959) has a significant, if less well-known, Danish counterpart from an earlier date. The pioneer in emigration fiction among Danish authors, Karl Larsen (1860-1931), describes the period of emigration prior to the First World War. Taking literary realism as his point of departure, Karl Larsen went one step further than fiction by basing some of his books, not least the four volume work *De, Der Tog Hjemmefra* (Those Who Left Home) (1912-14), on intimate, private collections of emigrant letters.[9] Contemporary intellectuals praised *De, Der Tog Hjemmefra*. Nobel prize-winning author, Johannes V. Jensen, who, based on his own travels, greatly admired American society, stressed that this work was "one of the strangest and most absorbing portrayals."[10] In 1912, upon the publication of volume 2, which tells the appalling story of the broken ambitions and sad life of a young couple on the plains of Nebraska, author Jeppe Aakjær wrote that he "would not hesitate to sacrifice dozens of novels – my own and the work of others – for this brief personal account."[11] But with the exception of travel books from America, for which there was a tradition in Denmark stretching as far back as the early 1800s,[12] the personal narratives of emigrants have not had a prominent place in literature since the days of Karl Larsen.[13]

Emigrant letters as historical sources

Obviously, emigrant letters must be subjected to critical evaluation before they can be used as historical documentation. In referring to *De, Der Tog Hjemmefra* prior to its publication, Karl Larsen wrote that "the confidential letter is the unwitnessed meeting of two people." If one contrasts such confidential, personal letters with those "emigrant letters" written expressly for publication in newspapers, magazines, etc., the difference is quite apparent.[14]

The emigrant letters dealt with in the following were written to be read by none other than the private recipient and, perhaps, his or her family and friends. Only these letters can tell the personal, inside story of emigration history. Only these documents can bring to life those anonymous persons who contributed to the founding of modern America. They make it possible for us to "interview" the letter writers and enquire about their aims, their choices and their goals. The various biases and motives leading to its writing in the first place often lay hidden in the private letter. An attempt, conscious or unconscious, is made to influence the recipient, either by the words themselves or between the lines. The letter writer has made choices about what to describe and what not to describe, about the way to tell the story, what words to use, what to suggest and what to distort. In using



A letter written in Chicago on October 15, 1865, by Carl Christian Jensen. This letter, with its lithograph of Chicago in the 1860s, is unique.

Århus, Denmark. 1909. On the left-hand corner an *udvandrings kontor*, the office of an emigration agent. (With the exception of the page from the Copenhagen Police Emigration Records, the pictures accompanying this article are the property of Søllerød Museum, Søllerød, Denmark.)

emigrant letters as something more than absorbing, often exciting reading, the historian must put himself in the place of the recipient and attempt to uncover the realities behind the confidential letter. Only then can such letters become valuable, both as personal and as historical documents.

Danish emigration to North America was at once both a mass movement and an individual departure. It was a mass movement in that at least 380,000 Danes emigrated between 1820 and 1930. Each individual leave-taking, however, was based on a personal decision. No country parishes or towns in Denmark were left completely uninhabited as a result of emigration. Emigration was an individual-psychological phenomenon very much influenced by external factors.[15] The most important of these was the letters from America. News from overseas, as reported by those who had seen the new world, spread in ever-widening circles in local communities. The letters rarely contained a definite promise of riches and gold, yet, for better or worse, the tempting words told of a world free of the confining limitations of home. Occasionally, a letter would contain a prepaid ticket to America, and sometimes the letter writer himself returned home to collect family, friends and whoever else might want to accompany him.

The effect of the emigrant letter as a stimulus to emigration must be seen in light of the motives to write from America.[16]

Roughly speaking, emigrant letters can be divided into 3 main categories:

1. The propaganda letter: either a letter filled with optimism, containing more or less obscure enticements, or the opposite, a letter full of critical remarks about America, based on the writer's negative experience in his new country. On the surface, the propaganda letter is not very different from the "public letter" written to newspapers and other publications in praise of, or censoring, conditions in America. The difference is that the propaganda of the private letter is kept on the personal level and is a response to the immigrant's own experience of hardship, loneliness, homesickness, etc.
2. The money letter: often, but not always, a request for funds. It should be noted that, contrary to an oft-repeated myth, the source of that private flow of money across the Atlantic was not always the "rich uncle" in America. Many emigrant letters were written for the sole purpose of seeking financial assistance from home. There are, of course, also letters from well-established immigrants who sent money to Denmark as proof of the comfortable life they were enjoying in the United States.
3. The contact letter: a letter written simply to maintain contact with the family back home. While the first two types of letter were written primarily during the period of adjustment in America, the contact letter became more common as the emigrant adapted to his new life and established himself as an immigrant. Paradoxically, the contact letter was written during that period in which contact with the homeland was slowly weakening. This was the period in which the emigrant burned his bridges, became assimilated and perhaps found it difficult to write correct Danish, in short, a period in which letter-writing called for some effort or a really good tale to tell. Many such letters are from emigrants who had not been heard from for many years.

Naturally, the distinctions between these three types of letters are not always clear. Every emigrant letter has a much more varied content than is suggested by these three categories. But behind the often "higgledy-piggledy" reeling off of news, it is possible to identify a few primary motives behind the dispatch of a particular letter. The personal letters as such are the emigrant's own "inside story" as he or she wished to tell it. At the same time, these documents provide excellent source material for the historian wishing to analyze the immigrant experience in general, and how emigration was promoted by personal contact, in particular. The following will deal with that category of letter described here as "the propaganda letter."

Letters pave the way

In the early days of mass emigration, prior to 1870, the immigrants acted in a sense as pathfinders in "unfamiliar territory." The reports they sent home were read with curiosity and interest in the communities they left. One of those who succeeded in encouraging large groups of people from his home in Herslev, on the Danish island of Zealand, to follow him across the sea was Andreas Frederiksen.[17] The son of a smallholder, he was a "real life" Danish counterpart to Vilhelm Moberg's fictional Karl Oscar. Andreas emigrated in 1847. In the course of a single year, aided in part by money he had brought from home, he became a prosperous farmer in Wisconsin, where he helped to found New Denmark, one of the first Danish colonies in America. His letters tell us that it was still relatively easy to obtain land in the Midwest at that time – and this was a point of special interest back home in Herslev. In July, 1850, Andreas wrote the following letter, in which he refers to Rasmus Sørensen, one of the most influential writers about America in Denmark in the mid-1800s:[18]

> I would not absolutely advise anyone to come over here as, of course, I have no way of foreseeing the consequences; but if I should follow the commandment: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," then I can only say to all young men who have no one to provide for and no one to provide for them: Come over here, the sooner the better, if you can scrape together money for the journey. I did quite well back home, as you know, but if things had been 100 times better than when I left you, I would still choose to emigrate to America every time. I had about 425 Rix-dollars [old Scandinavian coinage] when I left home. Now, after 3 years, and much of that time was spent traveling, I have 240 acres [about 96 hectares] of good land and 600 Rix-dollars. It is, of course, not likely that everyone will be as lucky as I have been in buying land and earning money; but some of our Danes have also bought more cheaply than I. I would still warn people against making a too hasty decision to come over here; everything here will be new to them, and it is not so easy to learn anything as long as you don't understand English...
>
> Rasmus Sørensen writes about how hospitable the people are here. I, however, have never heard of any such thing. You have to pay dearly everywhere for whatever you get. I suggest that anyone who comes over here to work for the farmers should go to Racine. Those who want to buy land should go to Green Bay. Milwaukie is a bad place to end up, as government land[19] has already been sold in a radius of 30 to 40 miles, and small wages are paid for work...

No lack of space! A view of Montana's prairie. c. 1905.

A letter to his brother from October, 1851, is also filled with the lure of America:

> ...If Denmark should disappoint you, you need not be afraid to come over here. If Father and Mother are well, they can certainly stand the journey, as it is patience and not a lot of effort that is required, and old folk are rarely sick, but infants die for the most part..., but I have never heard of any who have died. You must not think that I am writing all this based only on my own experience, as I have only made the journey once. You must remember that every day I talk with people who have come over from Europe, and all of those I meet say the same. – I would advise young men who have only themselves to look after and no one to help them to come over here, even if they do not have much more money than it costs to cross the Ocean. But they

must be prepared to take the first job they can get, even if they have to work only for board the first month or so. They will soon find an opportunity to earn four times as much as at home...

Andreas' brother and parents never came to America. But his message was nonetheless heard in and around Herslev. During the 1850s, several groups of emigrants from Herslev came to Wisconsin. Andreas himself led a large party of emigrants in 1855 when he came home to collect his childhood sweetheart, Johanne.

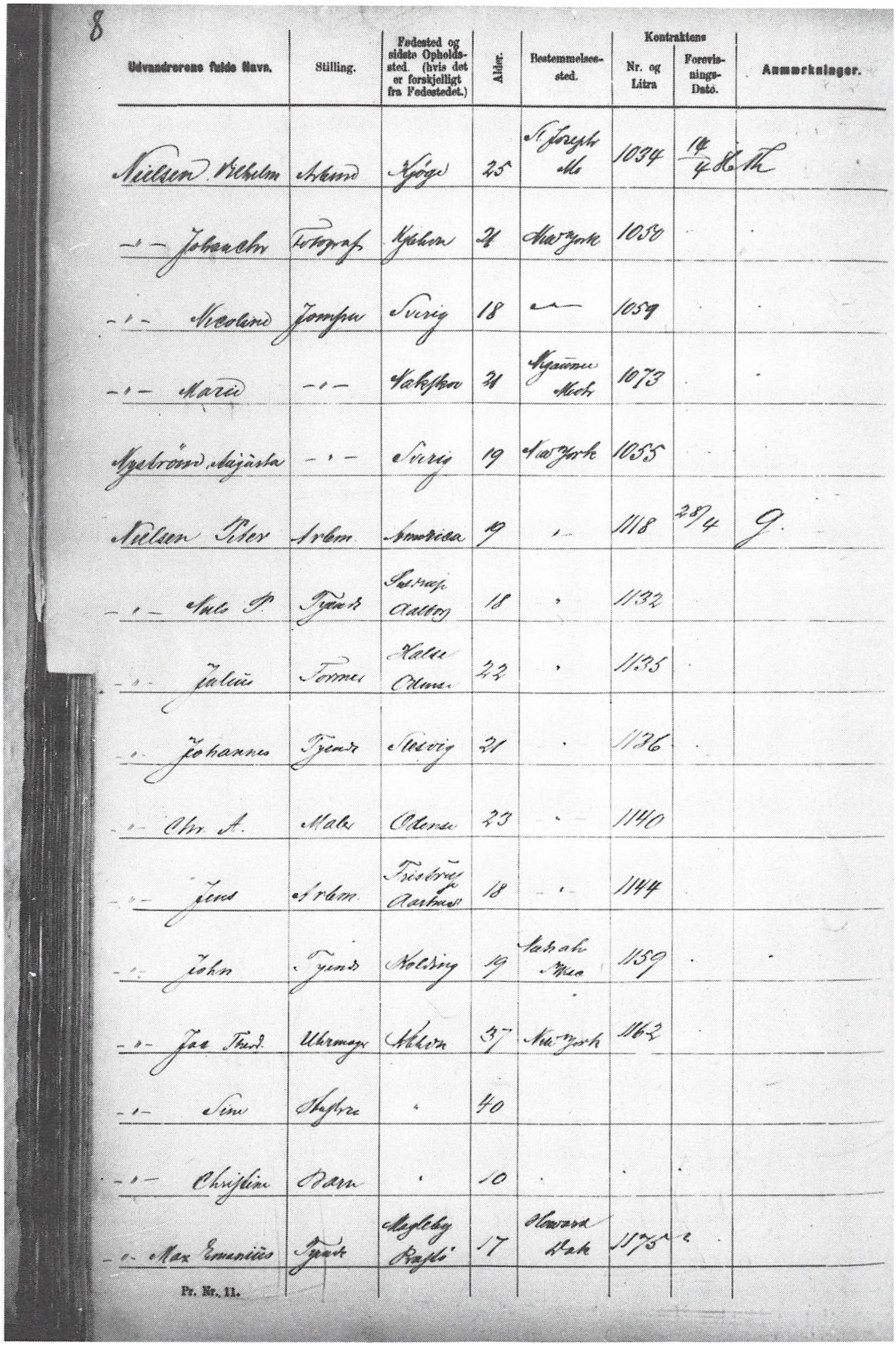
Between brothers

The importance of letters as a stimulus to emigration can hardly be given too much emphasis. There is a direct line from the first "pathfinders" who spread the rumor of America in books and letters to the "ordinary emigrant" who, with more or less optimistic letters from America, attempts to entice family and friends to follow him.

A millworker, Peter Nielsen, left his home in Køge, a town on the east coast of Zealand in the spring of 1884.[20] In 1885, after a year in Iowa, he found work as a railroad worker in northwestern Missouri. He wrote letters to both his mother and his brother in Køge, and, while his letters to the former were brief and rather neutral in tone, he began a veritable campaign shortly after his arrival in the United States to convince his younger brother to emigrate to America. He sent the following direct invitation, one his brother Wilhelm could scarcely ignore, on January 6, 1886:

> ...You write that you are having a bad time at home, as I can well imagine, and I doubt that it will get much better. If I can find a good place for you over here, will you come over? And if so, send me your answer immediately. I think I can get you a job with the same man I work for. You can earn six kroner a day. You can save an average of 80 kroner a month, and you will live well... If you decide to come, you can just write to me and let me know when you will leave home and by which steamship line you will travel. Just think of such a journey as though it is a journey to Copenhagen, except that it takes somewhat longer, and if you come and don't like it here, you can go home again; but I assure you that you will like America; it is a free country and a money country. You need never lack anything, as long as you are a bachelor...

Wilhelm Nielsen landed in America late in the summer of 1886. But the difference between the restless pathfinder, Peter, and the slower, "invited" immigrant, Wilhelm, is apparent in the letters written by the two brothers



8

Udvandrerens fulde Navn.	Stilling.	Fødested og sidste Opholdssted. (hvis det er forskjelligt fra Fødestedet.)	Alder.	Bestemmelsessted.	Kontraktens Nr. og Litra	Kontraktens Foreviisnings-Dato.	Anmærkninger.
Nielsen Vilhelm	Arbmd	Kjøge	25	St. Joseph Mo	1034	14/4	H. th
— " — Johan Chr	Fotograf	Kjøbhvn	21	New York	1050		
— " — Nicoline	Jomfru	Sverig	18	— " —	1059		
— " — Marie	— " —	Nakskov	21	Nygaunee Mich	1073		
Nyström Augusta	— " —	Sverig	19	New York	1055		
Nielsen Peter	Arbm.	America	19	— " —	1118	28/4	9.
— " — Niels P.	Tjener	Sæbyrup Aalborg	18	"	1132		
— " — Julius	Former	Halse Odense	22	"	1135		
— " — Johannes	Tjener	Sverig	21	"	1136		
— " — Chr. A.	Maler	Odense	23	"	1140		
— " — Jens	Arbm.	Frisbrog Aarhus	18	"	1144		
— " — John	Tjener	Kolding	19	Salt Lake Utah	1159		
— " — Jac. Fred.	Uhrmager	Kbhvn	37	New York	1162		
— " — Sine	Hustru	"	40				
— " — Christine	Barn	"	10				
— " — Max Emanuel	Tjener	Maglebye [illegible]	17	Howard Dak	1175		

Pr. Nr. 11.

A page from the Copenhagen Police Emigration Records, 1886. At the top of the page there is an entry for Vilhelm [Wilhelm] Nielsen of Køge, 25 years old, a workman by profession.

to their mother in Køge. It soon became obvious that Wilhelm and Peter were to go separate ways in America. Wilhelm Nielsen tells his mother about his job in St. Joseph in this letter from February 15, 1891:

> ...I am a driver for a merchant here in town and drive almost all day and night... I am well, but have a lot to do because there is so much driving. I don't have much time to do my work in. But it is a good position I have found: with livery and good vehicles, and everyone who knows me thinks that I am doing very well. It is certainly different from the tileworks: a funny thing for a farmer, and I think I will stay here for a while...

Wilhelm ends his letter with a telling characterization of his restless brother:

> ...Peter sends his regards, I have recently had a letter from him. He is in California in the town of San Francisco and is well. I did not hear from him for three months. I could have got him a job like mine; but he was afraid to take it because he doesn't know anything about this kind of work, and, then too, he likes to be his own man. He doesn't like to be tied down, and, true, that can often be unpleasant...

Danish emigration to North America culminated in the 1880s. Approximately 80,000 Danes left their homeland during that decade, and one emigrant often drew another after him in a kind of chain reaction.

Lars Pedersen, the 17-year-old son of a smallholder, left his home in the village of Hellested on east Zealand in 1886 with a group of other young people.[21] Their goal was Nebraska where many from the same area of Denmark had settled in the 1870s. Like Peter Nielsen, Lars used his literary talents to tempt other family members to cross the Atlantic. Lars sent the following letter to his parents in Hellested from Minden in southwestern Nebraska on April 15, 1887:

> ...I can see from your letter that my uncle plans to marry, so I guess now he will never come to America, even though I think he has always wanted to. He has not had the courage to make a quick and definite decision to leave right away. It is not so wild and difficult in America as you may think back home. It is just as easy to meet honest people here as it is at home...

Fortunately, there were other members of Lars' family who wanted to emigrate, for example, his younger brother, Hans:

> ...You wrote that you think Hans is too young to make the journey over here next spring. But he will be almost as old then as I was when I came over here, and if Rasmus and Ane leave in the spring, then he

This picture of Christian Feddersen's farm in Nebraska told people back home just how successful he was in his new homeland.

> could come with them right to where I am, I will do everything I can to help him.
>
> I can understand how hard it must be for you to lose him; but we are not dead to you because we are over here. You will always hear from us, and when we are here, you can also expect that we will be able to help you from time to time. We couldn't do that in Denmark...

Over the next year and a half, Lars scarcely writes a letter without including a more or less clear invitation to his brother to emigrate. In the fall of 1888, his parents and Hans begin to give in to this constant pressure, and it must be admitted that Lars' arguments are convincing. He comes closest to the central issue for Danish smallholders in a letter to his brother sent from Lincoln, Nebraska, on December 18, 1888. It was written in reply to his brother's description of a harvest celebration back home:

> ...Yes, it is a wonderful time when you are young and have no one but yourself to think about – and don't have to worry about the annual wage disappearing too quickly, so you have to tighten your belt for

the rest of the year. There is no question of being able to save anything, that I know only too well; but youth doesn't last forever, and what to do when it comes time to marry? Now take, for example, all the young people you wrote about who got married back home last summer, what will happen to them? It is necessary, of course, for most to marry, but how shall they now support a wife and perhaps soon a whole family. Maybe they can find a house to rent and get work on the big estate, where they must work from early morning to late at night six days a week, and on the seventh there is enough to do at home. Maybe they can live that way for a few years, that is, if the husband can earn enough so that they have food from one day to the next; but that can't go on forever. The husband will grow old and won't be able to do his work, and what is he to do then: Yes, the Poor House, of course. That will be the best for him, they say. And, under ordinary circumstances, it is difficult for someone like us to avoid that back home. No matter how hard-working and economical he has been, he will have to have help from the parish at the end. I have not written this to tempt you to come over here...

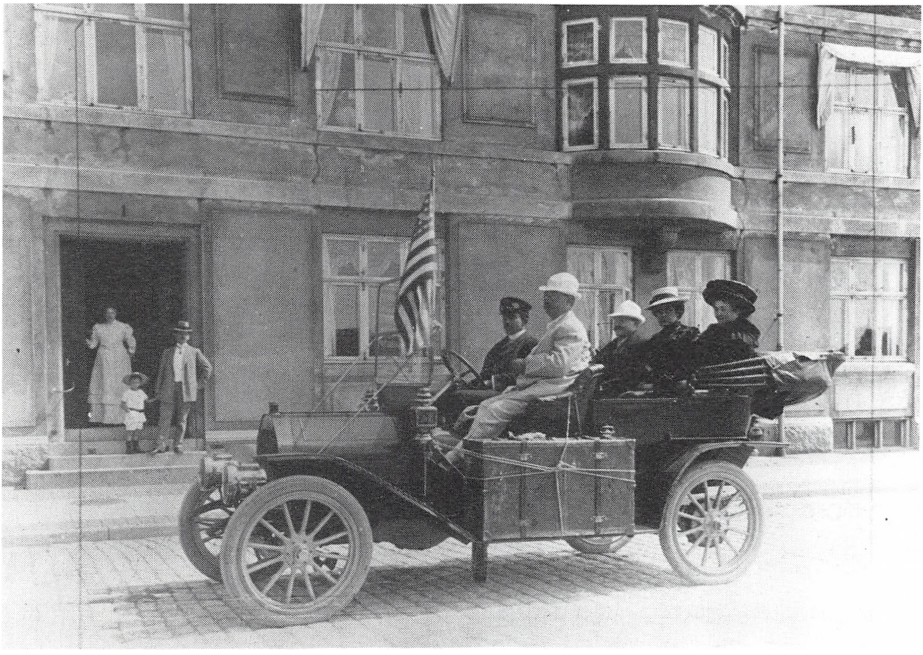
Lars Pedersen provided here an unusually precise description of the condition of the smallholder in Denmark, and brother Hans came to America six months later. Lars' letter is also a good illustration of how emigrant letters can be a good source of information when compiling the history of Denmark. The bias of the letter writer is perfectly clear, but this does not detract from the value of his information about the smallholders' view of their own situation as the 1800s drew to a close.

The propaganda letter

As previously stated, the propaganda letter was most often written during the emigrant's first years away from home, in the adjustment phase, during which the lack of familiar surroundings and family and friends was most acutely felt. The passages from the three letters cited in the following, from 1885, 1893 and 1874, respectively, are strikingly similar in theme.

Peter Nielsen from Køge had a very clear purpose in writing as he did to his brother in the following letter from Gallatin, Missouri, written on June 23, 1885. Peter was lonely in America, and in his old home town, his brother, recently discharged from military duty, was unemployed. It was just possible that a general reference to the desire of old friends to emigrate might help to serve his real purpose in trying to get his brother to join him in America. And it isn't really an untruth when Peter writes:

...I wish neither to advise them [friends from the Køge area] against



A successful emigrant returns to his homeland. The Danish-American newspaper editor, Sofus Neble (dressed in white), in Copenhagen. c. 1920.

> or in favor of coming over here. As far as I'm concerned, I could never have stayed in Denmark. I will come back to Denmark for a short visit in four years; but I will return to America. Here there is freedom and no trace of obligation: If I don't want to work today, then I don't, and if I want to work, then I am able to do so. That means that when I don't work, I don't get any pay, therefore, I do work every day. Here everyone is equal, I have been together with ministers and doctors and all kinds of businessmen, they treat me like their equal, which I also am over here. Here there are no distinctions: Rich or Poor, they are equally good...

Maren Lorensen from the Danish mainland peninsula of Jutland confirms Peter Nielsen's statement.[22] She had worked as a hired hand for farmers in Denmark, but when she wrote the following in May, 1883, she was in the wonderful United States and lacked only one thing, her friend Stine:

> ...You and your sister should come over here, you would have a much better life and could even send money to your mother; but perhaps you don't want to do that. I would not be in Denmark again and work for the uppity farmers for anything in the world. Over here there are

no differences like that. Here a poor man is thought just as well of as a rich one...

Farmhand Hans Madsen was also interested in attracting one or more girls from his home district to America.[23] In 1874, at the age of 17, he was part of a large group who left their village in southeast Jutland to emigrate to Iowa. Although he was not alone, he felt things could be even better if some of his own family were nearby. This is most apparent in the letters from his first years in America. One example among many is the following passage from a letter from Delmar, Iowa, written in August, 1874:

> ...Yes, dear sisters, you can believe the days here are different from back home, we live better and don't work so much. Here they don't treat people differently, as they do at home. Here everyone is equal. They don't tip their hats for anyone. The rich are just as straightforward as the poor. There is no difference between them, but the girls have the best life of all. This is because there are so few of them. They have the best days anyone in the world could want. They neither milk nor carry water. The farmhands do all of that...

But Hans Madsen never succeeded in tempting any of his sisters to cross the Atlantic. He had better luck with similar phrases in writing to his brothers, although eight years passed before two younger brothers emigrated. When they did finally come, they were sure of getting jobs as Hans Madsen had worked his way up the ladder and was an independent master blacksmith in the prairie village of Clarksville, Nebraska. He could both pay his brothers' passage and give them jobs. Once he had his brothers by his side, his rather one-sided praise of America ceased, and eventually he wrote fewer and fewer letters to his old home.

A farmer's son from southern Jutland, Hans Jacobsen, from Brøns in North Schleswig (from 1864 to 1920 occupied by the Germans), emigrated to America in the summer of 1893.[24] For the first few years he earned his living as a milkman in Chicago. He was quick to try to tempt his younger brothers with the promise of jobs and good futures in a country where you could earn "a good wage" and where American employers don't

> ...worry about little things and don't take their bad temper out on the people who work for them. This may be because of their love of money and not of their fellow man, but they leave you alone, and that is the important thing for me... (letter written in February, 1895).

Hans' letters from Chicago, where he lived until 1897, often contain passages similar to this one from his seventh letter from America, written on January 28, 1894:

Progress. A Danish emigrant couple photographed with their firstborn in San Francisco. This picture accompanied their next letter to Denmark. c. 1900.

> Be sure to send Viggo [his brother] over here in the spring, he can surely get a job at the [milk] company, if he doesn't prefer to work on a farm...

If Viggo read the newspapers in Denmark, he was no doubt somewhat surprised by his brother's assurances that there were jobs available in the United States – and in Chicago in particular – in 1894. The newspaper reports which had appeared since the big "money crisis" in the United States in 1893 dealt largely with the enormous number of unemployed, the 8,000 bankruptcies, and the numerous demonstrations and political confrontations taking place. Hans Jacobsen, however, wasn't concerned with such things as market conditions. The important thing was to have someone with whom to share "the Jungle" of Chicago.

Not far from Chicago, in Ford River on the shore of Lake Michigan, another Dane by the name of Hans Jørgensen had problems similar to Hans Jacobsen's. Hans Jørgensen had emigrated to America in 1892 and had left a wife and six children in Vester Skerninge on the island of Fyn.[25] Now, after two years in America, he had to make the all-important decision of whether to return home himself or to send for his wife and children. But while Hans Jacobsen, just a few months earlier, expresses optimism about conditions in America, Hans Jørgensen's letter of May, 1894 is more critical:

> ...I have some misgivings about bringing them [his wife and children] over here in these terribly bad times, where thousands and thousands are out of work.

Hans Jacobsen's optimistic words did not have the desired effect. None of his brothers or sisters ever joined him in America. Hans Jørgensen, on the other hand, after spending three years on his own in northern Michigan, was reunited with his family in Ford River in 1895.

Hans Jacobsen's motives for tempting his relatives with a future in America have a universal validity as expressed in the following letter written in February, 1895:

> ...I cannot see why he should not come to America. There are much better conditions here and much more freedom. If it wasn't for the fact that I don't have a single relative here, I wouldn't miss Europe for a moment.

Not until 1897, when he got a job as a traveling salesman in Cincinnati, Ohio, did Hans Jacobsen stop trying to get his family to come to America, and his letters from the following years concentrate largely on his work and his travels throughout the southern and eastern states. His period of adjustment in America ended with his new job as a salesman in Ohio. He climbed the ladder both economically and socially when he exchanged a position as

Pioneer Hans Johnson (formerly Jørgensen) in front of his house in Ford River on Lake Michigan with his daughter and grandchildren. 1917.

driver and worker at the Chicago Milk Company, which recruited workers from among the ethnic minorities, for a position which called for both language ability and social assimilation in an area where there were only a few immigrants.

Although most propaganda letters were written during the assimilation phase, there were, of course, Danes who continued to write propaganda letters after many years in America. One such Dane was Frederick Andersen, a tailor's son from Nærum, a village north of Copenhagen, who, in 1863, went with a group of Mormons from northern Zealand to the promised land in order to avoid military service in a war with Germany known as the Second Schleswig War.[26] He left the Mormons, however, as did many others, and got a job in Omaha at one of the large railroad workshops. In a letter to his brother, a blacksmith in Vedbæk, written in 1885, he extends the invitation to America characteristic of the established immigrant:

> ...I can see from your last letter that our nephew Jens Johansen wants to get out and have a look at the world. Concerning this, you must not advise him one way or another, but let him exercise his own free will. Sometimes a person's whole future can depend on a piece of advice. He is alone and has only himself to support and if he wants to work, as the rest of us have always had to do, then he will succeed wherever he goes.
>
> I talked to the foreman in the ironworks, and he said: "Let him come..."

Most emigrant letters contain a few gentle "puffs" to fan the flames of emigration desire, but in the above passage from Frederick Andersen's letter we also sense that, though he favors the idea of his nephew's coming to Omaha, he really doesn't care much one way or the other. After 13 or 14 years in the U.S. and an American marriage, his need for a Danish family circle has diminished.

The motives of the assimilated immigrant in writing a propaganda letter were different from those of the recently arrived immigrant: Once one had accepted the fact that the future lay in the new world, the task became one of convincing the family back home that the right choice had been made and that there were no regrets. It was, likewise, important to vindicate the decision to discard the homeland in favor of America. This attitude is well expressed in Frederick Andersen's 1888 letter from Omaha to his brother Johannes. The last two pages of the letter are given here in their entirety:

> ...You write that there is still food to be found in Denmark, I should hope so, but I should not want to pay for it with work, for in that case it is easier to get where I am now, here we live in a land of freedom, where nobles and bishops are non-existent, but the banner of freedom

> waves, and freedom is priceless. I spoke with a man a few days ago who returned to the island of Fyn two years ago and bought a farm, now he is back here again, he said that even if they gave him half of Fyn, he couldn't accept things as they are back home. The next thing, brother Johannes, is that emigration is something like when the bees swarm, when there are too many in the hive, then they have to leave, that's the way it is with people, too. In America there are now twice as many Irishmen as there are in Ireland, think of all their children and how many that would be, in Omaha alone there are 2,000 Danes, if all the Danes in the United States with all their children gathered at one time in Denmark, then they could eat the whole country for lunch, but now back to the emigrant, for the most part he rarely does as much for himself as for his descendants, he has climatic conditions against him, language and the traditions of the other country to hold him back, and many give up in the face of climate fever, the day before yesterday they buried a Swedish smith, 21 years old, he had to give up. Johannes Matisen sends his regards. His eldest daughter was married last Sunday.

The emigrant situation clearly defined! And, it should be kept in mind that Frederick Andersen, as well as the other letter writers quoted in this article, had only seven years' schooling, at the most.

The emigrant letter and mass emigration

Kristian Hvidt's 1971 thesis represented the statistical paradigm of Scandinavian emigration of that period. It is therefore not surprising that the author was interested only in the number and not the content of emigrant letters.[27] Hvidt takes the great increase in the number of letters from the United States to Denmark in the years from 1875 to 1914 as an indication of an increased "pull" on the Danish population, as more and more Danes settled on the other side of the Atlantic and wrote of their blissful lives in America to family and friends back home. He thereby establishes that one of the purposes of these letters was to tempt others to emigrate to America. The following statistics are based on Danish postal records from 1875 to 1914:[28]

Average number of letters per year from America to Denmark

	Danes in the United States	Average number of letters per year	Letters per Dane in the United States
1875-1885	64,200 (1880)	238,200	3.6
1885-1895	132,500 (1890)	493,600	3.7
1895-1905	154,600 (1900)	586,500	3.8
1905-1914	181,600 (1910)	1,283,000	7.1

Of course, not all of these letters were written by Danish emigrants (business letters, for example, are also included). In spite of this, there is no doubt that these statistics indicate that an enormous number of emigrant letters were written. Such statistics serve to set the small number of existing, available letters in relief. It should be noted that, of course, many emigrants wrote no letters at all.

The fact of greatest significance is not, however, the overwhelming number of letters, but the importance of personal contact across the Atlantic. The emigrant letters explain better than anything else the motives and goals of emigration. Emigration was a mass movement of individuals. The letters written as the migration took place have a central position in the interplay between the individual and the general. Measurable socio-economic factors alone cannot explain the concentration of emigration within certain social groups, within certain years and within geographically clearly defined areas, both in the country left behind and in the country of destination. The explanation of the distribution of emigration must be found in a correlation of the socio-economic factors and the influence of personal contact through letters.

Notes

1. The current article is based on the author's study of Danish emigrant letters. An overview of the letters used is given in Anne Lisbeth Olsen and Niels Peter Stilling, *Et Nyt Liv* (A New Life). Copenhagen, 1985, pp. 176-179.
2. Niels Peter Stilling, "Det private brevs betydning i udvandringshistorien" (The importance of the private letter in emigration history), *Emigranten*, no. 1, 1985, pp. 27-28.
3. Peter Riismøller, *Rebild. Motiver og Mål for Udvandring og Hjemfærd* (Rebild. Motives and Goals for Emigration and Homecoming), Copenhagen, 1952, p. 33.
4. Kristian Hvidt, *Flugten til Amerika* (Flight to America), Århus, Denmark, 1971, and *Københavns Politis Udvandringssager: Registre over udvandrede, direkte og indirekte 1868-1940* (Copenhagen Police Emigration Files: Records of Those Who Emigrated, Directly and Indirectly 1868-1940), Landsarkivet for Sjælland (The Provincial Archives of Zealand), Copenhagen.

5. Hans Christian Johansen, "Udvandring" (Emigration), *Dansk Kulturhistorisk Opslagsværk* (Reference Book of Danish Cultural History), vol. II, Copenhagen, 1991, pp. 923-924.
6. Hans Normann and Harald Runblom, *Translatlantic Connections*, Oslo, 1987, appears to be a first Swedish step in the direction of a new approach to emigration history.
7. *Brev fra Amerika* (Letter from America), M. Hjort Hansen, et al. eds., Copenhagen, 1981.
8. Anne Lisbeth Olsen and Niels Peter Stilling, *op.cit.*
9. Karl Larsen, *De, Der Tog Hjemmefra* (Those Who Left Home), vols. I-IV, Copenhagen, 1912-1914.
10. Johannes V. Jensen, a review published in the magazine, *Riget*, 1912.
11. Jeppe Aakjær, a review published in the newspaper, *Politiken*, Copenhagen, 1913. See also Karl Larsen, *op.cit.*, vol. IV, 1914.
12. The most important travel books from America written by Danes are: Axel Felix (= H.P. Hansen), *Langt fra Danmark. Skizzer og Scener fra De Forenende Stater i Nordamerika* (Far from Denmark. Sketches and Scenes from the United States in North America) I-III, Copenhagen 1852-1855; Vilhelm Topsøe, *Fra Amerika* (From America), Copenhagen, 1897; Hans Andreasen, *Amerika, Seet fra et Landbostandpunkt* (America, Seen from a Farmer's Viewpoint), Copenhagen, 1884. Jacob Riis' books are, likewise, part of this tradition, as is *Amerikanske Billeder* (American Pictures), Copenhagen, 1977, by the modern America observer, Jacob Holt.
13. Important early collections of letters include H.F. Feilberg, *Hjemmeliv på Prærien* (Homelife on the Prairie), Copenhagen, 1927, and Torben Lange's letters in the book, *Fra Roskildefjord til Mississippi* (From Roskilde Fjord to the Mississippi), Copenhagen, 1945. Over the past ten years a number of collections of emigrant letters have been published. Benedicte Mahler's *Cathrine og Valdemar, et Udvandrerpars Skæbne Skildret Gennem Breve* (Cathrine and Valdemar, the Fate of an Emigrant Couple Described in Letters), Copenhagen, 1975, deserves special mention.
14. See, for example, Thomas C. Blegen, *Land of Their Choice. The Immigrants Write Home*, Minneapolis, 1955, and Holger Munchaus Petersen, *Vi Tredie-Klasses Udvandrere* (We Third-Class Emigrants), Esbjerg, 1978. These two works are comprised of letters previously published in newspapers; the main purpose of these letters was either to warn fellow countrymen against emigration or the opposite, to provide propaganda in favor of emigration. The attitude generally reflects the attitude toward emigration of the newspaper in question, in some instances to such a degree that one suspects the "emigrant letter" may be a piece of editorial work. Cf. also Frederic Hale, *Danes in North America*, Seattle 1984, and a review by N.P. Stilling in *Historisk Tidsskrift*, vol. 86, 1986, pp. 210-211. Eighty-nine of the 125 "letters" reproduced in Hale's book were letters to the editor which had appeared in Danish newspapers and magazines.
15. The psychological aspects of emigration have been dealt with primarily in German research, most significantly in Gert Raeithel, *"Go West," Ein psychohistorischer Versuch über die Amerikaner*. Frankfurt a.M., 1981. Cf. also Kai Detlev Sievers, ed., *Die deutsche und skandinavische Amerika-auswanderung im 19. und 10. Jahrhundert*, Neumünster, 1981.
16. Cf. Charlotte Erikson. *Invisible Immigrants*, London, 1972, pp. 5-7.

17. Andreas Frederiksen's letters are published in Anne Lisbeth Olsen and Niels Peter Stilling, *op.cit.* The original letters are privately owned.
18. For information about Rasmus Sørensen and his books about America see, for example, Erik Helmer Pedersen, *Drømmen om Amerika* (The Dream of America), Copenhagen, 1985, pp. 62-63 and Anne Lisbeth Olsen and Niels Peter Stilling, *op.cit.*, p. 21.
19. Government land. According to the so-called *Preemption Act* of 1841 it was possible to preempt up to 160 acres of uncultivated, unoccupied land for $1.25 per acre. 160 acres was the magic number in almost all American land legislation.
20. The letters of Peter Nielsen (and his brother Wilhelm) are published in Anne Lisbeth Olsen and Niels Peter Stilling, *op.cit.*, The original letters are in Køge Byhistoriske Arkiv, Køge, Denmark.
21. The letters of Lars Pedersen (and his brother Hans) are published in Anne Lisbeth Olsen and Niels Peter Stilling, *op.cit.* The original letters are in Stevns Lokalhistoriske Arkiv, St. Heddinge, Denmark.
22. Maren Lorensen's letters are published in Anne Lisbeth Olsen and Niels Peter Stilling, *op.cit.* The original letters are the property of the Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.
23. Hans Madsen's (Kokjes) letters are published in Anne Lisbeth Olsen and Niels Peter Stilling, *op.cit.*The original letters are privately owned.
24. Hans Jacobsen's letters are published in Anne Lisbeth Olsen and Niels Peter Stilling, *op.cit.* The original letters are privately owned.
25. Hans Jørgensen's letters are published in Anne Lisbeth Olsen and Niels Peter Stilling, *op.cit.* The original letters are privately owned.
26. Frederik Andersen's letters are published in Anne Lisbeth Olsen and Niels Peter Stilling, *op.cit.* The original letters are in Byhistorisk Arkiv for Søllerød kommune. See also N.P. Stilling. "Søllerød in world history or a case-study on the emigration from Søllerød Parish, North Zealand, c. 1860-1900," In: S.E. Jørgensen, L. Scheving and N.P. Stilling, eds., *From Scandinavia to America*, Odense, Denmark, 1987, p. 81 ff.
27. Kristian Hvidt, *op.cit.*, pp. 340-343.
28. Kristian Hvidt, *op.cit.*, p. 343.

Danish-American Literature

by Stig Pilgaard Olsen

Title page of the 2nd edition of the first book by a Danish-American author. The first edition was printed in 1870.

Introduction

In the three-quarters of a century before the United States, after World War I, introduced immigration quotas, the country was populated by people from nearly every nation in the world. Some groups, such as the Italians and Chinese, settled primarily in national enclaves, often in the larger cities. This lack of integration and consequent lack of social recognition by the remainder of American society created problems. Other groups, among these the Danes, were more thinly distributed, and, therefore, had problems of a different kind. The process of integration was not particularly painful for the Danes. English was in some respects similar to Danish, and most first generation Danes, and virtually all of the second generation, learned to speak English, often at the expense of the Danish language. Nonetheless, the Danes felt very patriotic toward their homeland, and this patriotism gave rise to a special Danish-American body of literature based on "the Danish-American experience."

The earliest Danish-American literature

It is difficult to say exactly when the first work of fiction was written by a Danish-American. It is likely that the first Danish and Danish-Norwegian newspapers in America published poems as early as around 1850. As witnessed by the following, however, the historians who have treated this topic agree that true Danish-American literature appeared much later.

> Prior to 1870 Danish-American literature is little more than pamphlets about life in the Danish settlements. The most important weeklies, and many writers, began in the seventies and eighties.[1]

Danish-American minister and author, Enok Mortensen, sets a later date for the appearance of Danish-American literature: "...no Danish-American literature, in the restricted sense of that term, was published earlier than the eighties."[2]

From the eighties, more precisely 1886, we have the following statement by Kristian Østergaard, who later became one of the most important Danish-American authors:

> There is, of course, no question of there being any Danish-American literature, as Danish immigration to America is a relatively recent phenomenon, and most of the immigrants are common workers.[3]

Østergaard was probably being a bit too modest; he himself had by this time published a small collection of short stories entitled *Fra Skov og Prærie* (From Forest and Prairie). But, regardless of whether Østergaard was

being modest or not, his opinion of the literary situation of the mid-1880s is probably representative of that held by most Danish-Americans.

A few books had, however, been published prior to that time. The first title guaranteed to have been written by a Danish-American author was J. Valdemar Borchsenius' collection of poems *Ved Øresund og Mississippi* (By Sound and Mississippi) which first appeared around 1870 and was printed in a new, enlarged edition in 1884. The theme of the entire volume, love of the homeland, is apparent the collection's first poem "Til den nordiske Emigrant" (To the Nordic Emigrant), and Borchsenius shares this priority with almost all the Danish-American poets. The first part of the book is comprised of poems written in and about America. In a series of poems with such titles as "Afreisen" (The Departure), "Paa Atlanterhavet" (On the Atlantic) and "I New York" (In New York) we follow the poet on his journey to the United States, a place he does not seem particularly fond of. There are, however, glimmers of hope for the fulfillment of the American dream in the following lines:

> Vi er paa Broadway, Hvilken Hurlumhei,
> Og hvilke store, straalende Butikker!
> I hvert et Vindue et Lager ligger,
> Og gyldne Skilter ses den hele Vei.[4]
>
> (We are on Broadway, What a hubbub,
> And what huge, shining stores!
> In every window lies a pile,
> and golden signs are everywhere)

But all this is little more than tinsel, or, to quote Borchsenius: "I Form hvor stort, i Karakter hvor smaat!" (How large in form, how small in character).[5] American city life is not for him:

> 'Nordvestens Dronning' blev Chicago døbt,
> Dog Flodens Dunst og Brolægningens Vælling
> Er Attributer muligt for en Kjælling,
> Men knap for En i Høiheds Purpur svøbt.[6]
>
> ('Queen of the Northwest' Chicago has been called,
> but the smell of the river and the mud of the streets
> are attributes more fitting for a hag,
> hardly for one wrapped in royal purple).

While Borchsenius does not particularly care for American civilization, the natural beauty of the land delights him. He demonstrates his awe of the

magnificence of nature in poems like "Niagara." Even though impressed by the beauty of America, however, he turns again and again to Denmark and to the Sound (that part of the Baltic Sea separating the Danish island of Zealand from the southern tip of Sweden), in particular. His many references to this body of water suggest that it must have had special significance for him: "Smuk Hudson er, men ei som Øresundet!"[7] (Beautiful is the Hudson, but not like the Sound!) and "Det lave Krat blir høit som Danmarks Skov,/Og Wingra's Vande blir til Øresundet"[8] (The low bushes grow as high as Denmark's forest/And Wingra's waters become the Sound).

Borchsenius was the first Dane to use the English language poetically in, for example, "The 5th of June 1874" and "Wisconsin Republican Campaign Song 1875." The following verses are from the latter:

> Republicans! Hear ye the sound
> Of noisy scratching all around?
> What means it? Why, the Democrats
> – A host of office-hungry rats –
> Are pawing at the Union's shield,
> Pshaw! that's of gold, and will not yield.[9]

His use of English was as masterful as his use of Danish. The poems have a natural rhythm and make proper use of both metric foot and rhyme, which certainly was not always the case in Danish-American poems. *Ved Øresund og Mississippi* is a confidently written, excellent little volume of poetry and is a fine introductory volume of Danish-American literature.

In addition to newspaper articles, Danish-American literature is comprised of about 300 books and smaller publications by more than 100 authors. Space does not permit a detailed description of each, but the most important authors and their main works deserve mention.

Adam Dan

Ten years passed after the publication of J. Valdemar Borchsenius' collection of poems before another Danish-American author appeared on the scene. His name was Niels Pedersen, but as a young man he had taken the name, Adam Dan. Born in Odense, Denmark, in 1848, he spent his youth as a missionary in Africa and a teacher at the Syrian orphanage in Jerusalem before emigrating to the United States in 1871. In that same year, he became an ordained minister, one of the first five Danes ordained in the United States. For more than fifty years he served a number of Danish congregatons as their pastor before retiring in 1928. He died in 1931, and his funeral service was conducted by the Danish-American minister and author, Enok Mortensen.

Adam Dan (1848-1931).

Adam Dan had published several collections of poems before he left Denmark, and his first work of fiction in America was the novel, *Sejrende Kræfter* (Victorious Powers) (1882). The novel is a rather trivial, cops and robbers affair, has nothing to do with the Danish-American situation, and is probably best forgotten. Later, Dan did write novels and short stories

with Danish-American themes, but he should be remembered for his poems. He chose the same topics as many other Danish-American poets and wrote religious poetry, patriotic hymns to his native country, and poems to America, but his fine treatment of these subjects puts him in a class by himself.

Frederik Lange Grundtvig

N.F.S. Grundtvig's youngest son, Frederik Lange Grundtvig, another minister, was also one of the early Danish-American authors. He was born in Denmark in 1854 and completed his education in political science there in 1881. He then departed for the United States where he became an ordained minister in 1883. He served as the pastor of the congregation in Clinton, Iowa, for the next seventeen years and, at the same time, demonstrated a keen interest in Danish-American conditions both on a national level and within the church. He was one of the founders of Grand View College in Des Moines and of the organization known as Dansk Folkesamfund (Danish Folk Society). He collected folklore and was recognized as an ornithological expert. In 1900 he returned to Denmark where he died in 1903 after a long period of illness.

Grundtvig was a prolific writer, and his first work was published in 1865. While living in the United States, he published a number of controversial pamphlets, as well as several ornithological works and books of folklore. The rhymed letter *Til danske Kristne* (To Danish Christians) (1882) was the only work of fiction from his hand published in America. The message of this open letter, in which he appears to be trying to define "freedom" for himself, is that the Danes should join together in support of the Lutheran church, rather than risk its division.

Grundtvig edited the very popular *Sangbog for det danske Folk i Amerika* (Songbook for the Danish People in America) which was printed in seven different editions from 1888 to 1949. While this book was of great importance for Danish-American society, Grundtvig's principal work was a collection of poems, *Kirke og Folk* (Church and People) published by August Faber in Cedar Falls, Iowa, in 1909. The collection contains almost 100 poems, some of which have a religious and some a national theme. Many of the poems are quite argumentative, and he returns again and again to the same topic: the need to retain a distinctive Danish national character and the Danish language in America. At one point it is suggested that if the day should come when Danish is no longer used: "... then we sin against Him, the great Master."[10] Grundtvig was, of course, fighting a losing battle when it came to both language and church, and his later poems seem to reflect his realization and, perhaps somewhat grudging, acceptance of this.

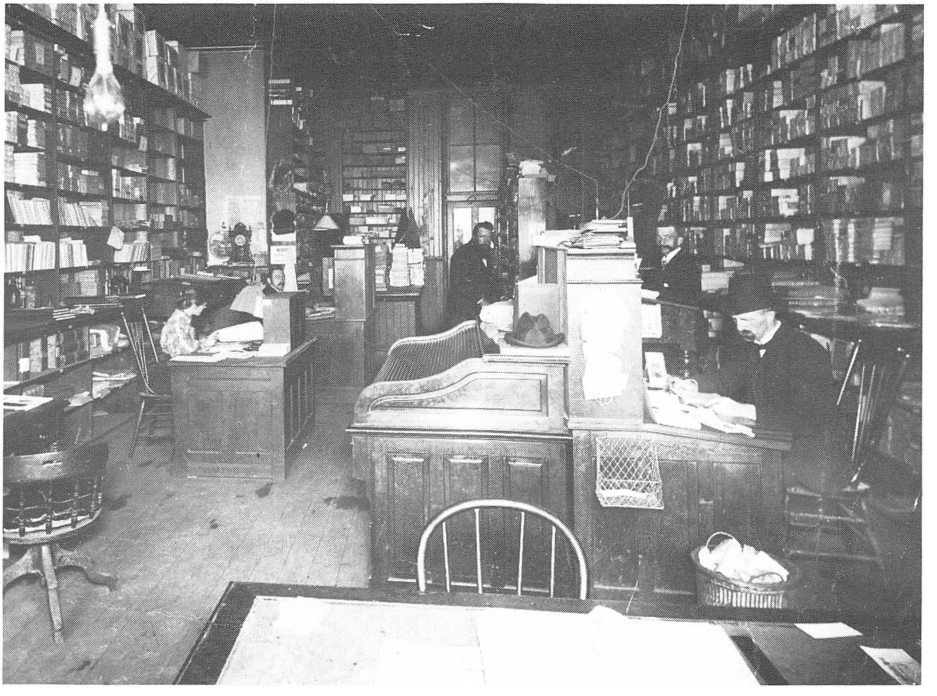
F.L. Grundtvig (1854-1903), his wife Christina and daughter Marie Margrete.

Kristian Østergaard

Born in 1855 near Holstebro, Denmark, and also a man of the cloth, Kristian Østergaard was the emigrants' first significant writer of prose. He grew up on a farm in Denmark, and, like most other farm children of that time, was hired out at an early age and then, later, attended Askov Folk High School. He taught school for a time on the islands of Fyn and Langeland before emigrating to the United States in 1878. His first job there was as a teacher at the Danish folk high school in Elk Horn, Iowa. In 1881 he married and moved to Ashland, Michigan, where he helped start another Danish folk high school. Several years later, he returned to Denmark where he founded a folk high school in the town of Støvring which was closed for financial reasons in 1892. Østergaard's wife died at this time, and he decided to return to America where he was ordained in 1893. He served as the pastor of several different Danish congregations until 1916 when he settled in Tyler, Minnesota, where he continued to write until his death in 1931.

Østergaard was an outstanding and prolific author of novels and short stories. His detailed depiction of the Danish-American environment of the eighties and nineties brings this period to life. One of his themes involves the "sinner" from Denmark whose hard work and moral strength make him a respected man in America – the realization of the American dream on an ethical level. This is the main theme of his novel *Danby Folk* (People of Danby) (c. 1925), and it is central to several other of his novels and short stories. At the same time, he has no sympathy for so-called "fine folk" from Denmark who come to America unwilling to make any real effort. In the story "Vind" from the book, *Vesterlide*, (1889) he describes how the wealthy, but incompetent, merchant's son, Julius Vind, goes to the dogs in America. What one may have accomplished in Denmark has no significance, the important thing is how you do when given a second chance.

In making use of the opportunities available in the United States, however, man runs the risk of destroying nature, and this conflict is also one of Østergaard's principal themes. *Nybyggere* (Pioneers) (1891) is the story of how three men make a home for themselves in a hole in the ground on the prairie and how, over the years, their pioneering efforts result in acres of cultivated land, a town, a railroad, etc. The three main characters represent three different types of immigrant, and their actions and mutual conflicts illustrate those problems frequently debated in the Danish colonies during the pioneering period. The question of integration, the retention of Danish cultural and religious traditions, the influence of various religious denominations, and the school issue are all presented from various standpoints. Although Østergaard's sympathies lie with the Grundtvigian, Simon



C. Rasmussen Publishing Company, Minneapolis, Minnesota. Kristian Østergaard in the background. 1901.

Aagaard, he loyally presents the opinions held by Peder Tomsen, who is eager for integration, and the Baptist, Jens Rise.

Østergaard's most successful work, the novel *Anton Arden og Møllerens Johanne* (Anton Arden and the Miller's Johanne) appeared in 1897. More than 25,000 copies of the two editions of this book were printed. This adventure story has a full complement of murders, shoot-outs and lynchings, but, amidst all the drama, there are excellent descriptions of life on the prairie, work in a New York factory and the conditions under which invalids, the poor, and the crazed inmates of a poorhouse in Iowa live. Østergaard covers more territory in this book than was his wont, but he remains true to his theme, and not until Anton and Johanne take up farming among other Danes do they finally feel at home in America.

The last three America novels from Østergaard's hand take place in the latter half of the 19th century and were written between 1909 and 1925. *Et Købmandshus* (A Merchant's House) (1909), *Dalboerne* (The People of the Valley) (1913), and *Danby Folk* (People of Danby) (c. 1925) are a loosely connected trilogy which paint a likely picture of the progress of a Danish colony over a period of perhaps 15 years.

The strength of these novels lies in their description of the environments in which they take place. Once again, they treat the problems faced by Danish-Americans, including, for example, the church issue, and here Østergaard lets his characters favor reconciliation. Hard work is held up as one of the essential pioneer values, drinking is attacked (at one point in his life Østergaard's father was an alcoholic), and he argues that materialism and foolishness can be eliminated by education and the proper information.

Like Adam Dan and F.L. Grundtvig before him, Østergaard spoke out for the retention of Danish culture in America, but he was not against the slow and harmonious integration of the Danes in American society. In the long run, Østergaard realized, integration was inevitable. He simply felt it was necessary for the Danish-American to maintain his cultural identity during the process of assimilation.

Enok Mortensen

While Østergaard was unquestionably the best author among that generation of Danes who emigrated in the 1880s and '90s, Enok Mortensen was the most important representative of the new generation – those who emigrated just before and after the First World War.

Born in 1902, Enok Mortensen emigrated with his family in 1919. After completing his education at Grand View College and the University of Minnesota, he taught at a folk high school in the United States for several years before becoming an ordained minister in 1929. He served as a pastor for several Danish congregations and, for a while, was also the principal of Danebod Folk High School in Tyler, Minnesota, and a teacher at Askov Folk High School in Denmark. Following his retirement, he moved to Solvang, California, where he died in 1984.

In addition to his fictional writings, Enok Mortensen wrote a number of books and articles about Danish-American history. His *Danish-American Life and Letters* (1945) is the most comprehensive published bibliography of Danish-American fiction and non-fiction. He also compiled the extensive church history, *The Danish Lutheran Church in America* (1967) and the, likewise historical, *Stories from Our Church* (1952), as well as *75 Years at Danebod* (1961) and *Schools for Life* (1977) about the Danish-American folk high schools.

Mortensen's works of fiction include approximately 35 short stories, nine of which were collected in *Mit Folk* (My People) (1932), while the remainder were printed in various Danish-American magazines and yearbooks. His play, *Livets Lykke* (Joy of Life) was published in 1933, and he also wrote three novels. The first two novels, *Saaledes Blev Jeg Hjemløs* (Thus I

Became Homeless) (1934) and *Jeg vælger et Land* (I Choose a Country) (1936) tell the story of Niels Nord's life in Chicago.

These novels take place from 1912 to 1930, and Niels Nord's story is told on a backdrop of the economic advances made following the First World War, as well as the crash of '29. We hear of Niels Nord's struggle to become an American – a fight he fights not only with American society but also – and most significantly – within himself.

Niels Nord is surrounded by an interesting cast of characters, each of whom contributes to the interpretation of America's complexity: The Danish-Polish, working-class Litmisky family, ruined by forces over which it has no influence; the radical, socialist agitator, Hans Felsen, who, with some bitterness, is forced to give up his ideals; uncle Niels Gram and his friends from the Danish colony, a collection of overfed, greedy, middle-class Philistines; the two writers, Dige Hansen and Marløv, and many others.

The Niels Nord novels, as well as Mortensen's other works, stress the fact that a person's actions and opinions are controlled by forces – largely economic – stronger than the person's own free will. Although much space is taken up by discussions of social justice, the central issue in these novels is neither political nor economic but, rather, the primary issue of much of Danish-American literature: the rootlessness of the emigrant.

Niels Nord's dilemma is presented in the titles of these novels, and not until the conclusion of the second volume does he, in fact, "choose a country," i.e. choose America. He becomes an American citizen and withdraws as far as possible from Danish activities, giving as his reason that for an immigrant there are only two possibilities: either you attempt in vain to regain that which is lost, or you break off all ties to the homeland. Such a conclusion is not easily arrived at, but the fact that it can be reached at all in Mortensen's writings demonstrates how much the attitude toward assimilation had progressed since the 1880s and '90s. Formerly, at least in certain Danish-American circles, the very thought of renouncing one's Danish background would have been considered a kind of treason.

Enok Mortensen's last novel, *Den lange Plovfure* (The Long Furrow) was written about 1940. Mortensen wrote first in Danish, but he felt his language was "antiquated and Americanized" and rewrote the novel in English. The manuscript lay in a drawer for many years, and not until the early 1980s did Mortensen rework it in Danish, taking into consideration the changes suggested by the other great Danish-American author of the thirties, Sophus K. Winther. The book was published in Denmark in 1984. *Den Lange Plovfure* describes the fate of a Danish minister among immigrants in America and is, in part, based on real incidents and people.

Enok Mortensen's work deals both with the traditional emigrant themes, homesickness and being Danish in the United States, and more unusual topics for emigrant literature, such as the great importance of money in a person's daily life. His works are of a significantly higher quality than most within this genre. His realistic descriptions of the cultural setting and conditions of Danes in the United States, especially in Chicago in the twenties and thirties, are outstanding.

Other Danish-American authors

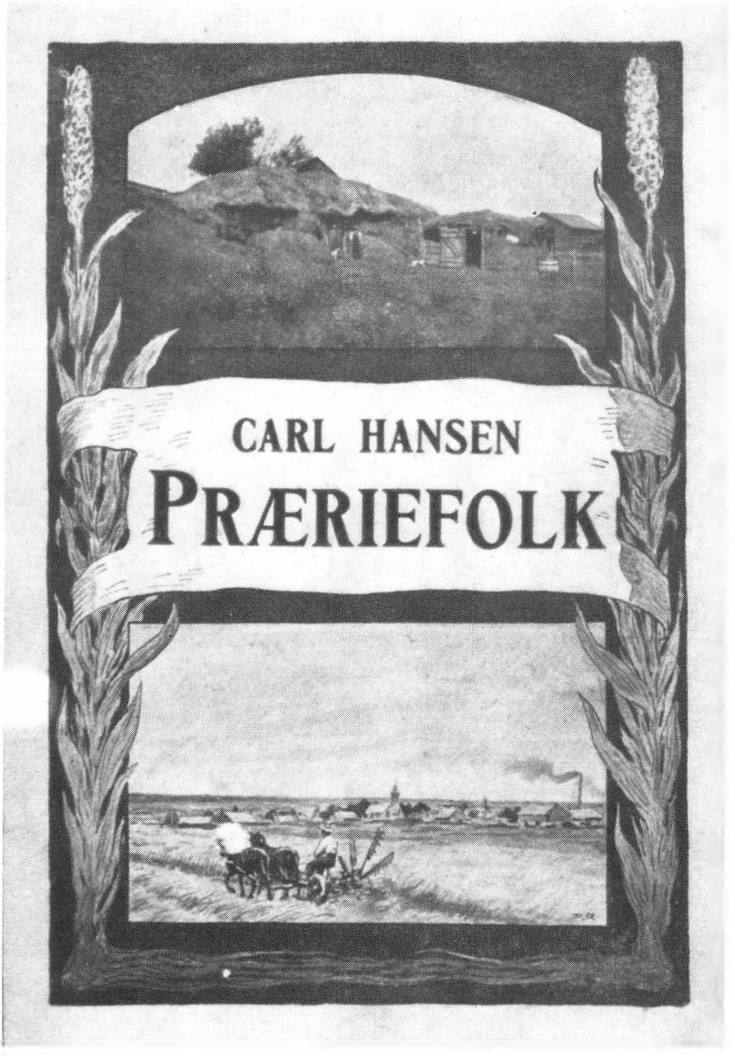
While some of the more important authors are discussed in the foregoing, there were many other authors of interest and, for the sake of completeness, a few of these will be presented in the following.

Around the turn of the century, there were a number of quite talented Danish writers of prose in America in addition to Kristian Østergaard. These included Carl Hansen, O.C. Molbech, E.F. Madsen and Mikkel Sørensen. The least well-known of these was probably Mikkel Sørensen (1863-1949). He published two collections of short stories and sketches, *Trækfugle* (Birds of Passage) (1903) and *Udvandrerfolk* (The Emigrant People) (1904), as well as one novel *Hinsides Atlanten* (On the Other Side of the Atlantic) (1906). His work is reminiscent of both Østergaard and Carl Hansen in subject and milieu.

Carl Hansen (1860-1916) lived in the Midwest where he worked as a teacher, a postmaster and a druggist before moving to the west coast in 1910. His midwestern experiences were given literary form in the novel *Præriefolk* (Prairie People) (1907) – certainly on a par with Østergaard's work – and in five collections of short stories, sketches, etc.

Oluf Christian Molbech (1860-1927), who lived in the United States from 1888 to 1899, differed from most other Danish-American writers in that his work was not based primarily on the condition of Danes in America. Novels like *Skoven hævner* (The Revenge of the Forest) (1904) and *Høg over Høg* (He Met His Match) (1908) take place in Virginia, far from the Danish colonies in the Midwest. *Den gule By* (The Yellow City) (1905) is set in Ohio, and, while this was nearer the Danish settlements, Molbech continues in this book to ignore his own countrymen. In addition to his novels, Molbech published a number of historical and other non-fictional books, as well as several collections of poetry, only one of which, *Emigrantens Sange* (Songs of the Emigrant) (1910), deals with America.

Emil Ferdinand Madsen (1861-1932) emigrated in 1878 and earned his living as a teacher, a gardener, a postmaster, a justice of the peace and an artist, among other things. Although he was not nearly so prolific an author as Adam Dan or Kristian Østergaard, what he did write was of an excep-



Cover of Carl Hansen's *Præriefolk*. 1907.

tionally high quality. His principal works were the novel *Fra de stille Skove* (From the Silent Woods) (1896) and the play *En Guldkur eller en Tur til Alaska* (A Gold Cure or a Trip to Alaska) (1900). Madsen went on tour with the play in 1898 and 1899.

C.M. Norman-Hansen's (1861-1947) two collections of *Chicago-Noveller* (Chicago Short Stories) (1892 and 1893) also take place around the turn of the century. Previous presentations of the history of Danish-American literature have undeservedly overlooked the work of this particular author.

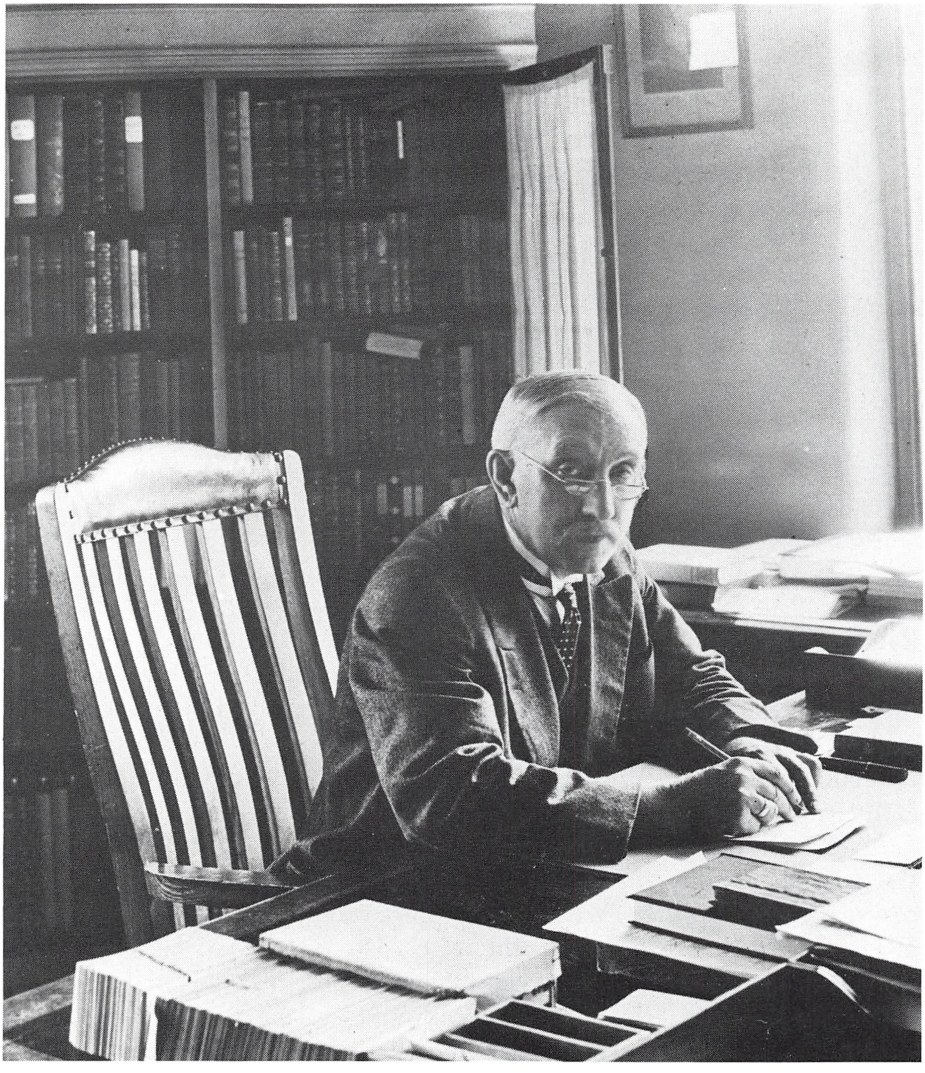
While Norman-Hansen includes the odd rich man in his treatment of life in Chicago, most of his characters are from the working or lower middle classes, and some are anarchists. His sympathy for the dregs of big city society is presented in fine character sketches and settings. The bitter tone of most of his short stories suits the environment described, and he also deals with some of the problems of the Danish colonies, pettiness, for example, a subject taken up again forty years later by Enok Mortensen.

One of the less interesting authors, P.M. Hannibal, wrote the 600-page temperance novel *Uncle Sam's Cabin* (1910). He wrote in English, and in dealing with purely American questions, he was one of the first Danish-American authors to attempt to appeal to other than his own countrymen. Unfortunately, his ambitions were greater than his talent, and today his tendency to moralize is rather boring.

The work of Jens Christian Bay (1871-1962), on the other hand, continues to have appeal. As a young man, Bay studied bacteriology in Copenhagen before emigrating to the United States where, in 1905, he became a librarian at and later head of the John Crerar Library in Chicago. Most of Bay's large body of work is non-fictional and is comprised of books and essays on librarianship, botany and many other topics. His first book of fiction was the novel, *Hvad Gud har Sammenføjet* (What God Has Joined) (1898). The literary quality of a later story, *The Chalice of the Chipped Ruby* (1922), is far above the level of much of the work of Danish-American authors. Some of his later short stories and poems, including *Adam Dan* (1931) and *En Tidselblomst fra Prærien* (A Thistle Flower from the Prairie) (1953), were published in pamphlet form, and a number of them were reprinted in 1954 and 1955 in the two collections *Fortællinger og Oplevelser* (Tales and Experiences). In many respects, Bay was one of the most interesting Danish-American personalities, and his life and work deserve more thorough treatment.

Nobleman Joost Dahlerup (1874-1944) made his debut in 1905 with the story *Hvad ingen ser* – (What No One Sees –). His partially biographical novel, *For Vind og Vove* (Adrift), appeared three years later, and, finally, in 1924 he published *Vi Udvandrere* (We Emigrants), a work of both truth and fiction, in which he deals with the emigrant's loyalty to two countries. Together with his sister-in-law, Karin Michaëlis, he wrote the book, *Danske Foregangsmænd in Amerika* (Danish Pioneers in America) (1911). Dahlerup also contributed to various newspapers and magazines, and, although he was not a prolific author, his work has a certain appeal.

Evald Kristensen's (1883-1958) one fictional contribution, *Smaafortællinger* (Sketches), although rather insignificant, appeared in four editions from 1915 to 1957. The author was a clergyman, and in most of his stories God is responsible for a happy ending, often near Christmas time. While



Jens Christian Bay (1871-1962).

Kristensen's fiction is of little interest, his biographies, *J. Christian Bay* and *Kristian Østergaard*, (both 1955) are of some significance. Kristensen lived in the United States from 1915 to 1931, and from 1947 to 1953 he was a member of the Danish parliament, representing a party known as the Single-Tax Party (Retsforbundet).

Danish writers of prose were active again in the 1930s. As previously mentioned, Enok Mortensen was one of the most talented authors of this period, and Sophus K. Winther (1893-1983) was equally important.

Winther emigrated with his parents at the age of two and must, therefore, be thought of as a second-generation American. A professor of English, he wrote books and articles of literary criticism, but became best known as a Danish-American for his so-called Nebraska trilogy, *Take All to Nebraska* (1936), *Mortgage Your Heart* (1937) and *This Passion Never Dies* (1938), one of the major works of Danish emigrant literature. Winther displays his literary genius in the unromantic, strong realism of this tale of the fate of a Danish emigrant family.

Clergyman Elias Marius Favrholdt (1895-1938) was another talented author who, in less than ten years in the United States and Canada, wrote three collections of short stories, *Emigranter* (Emigrants) volumes 1-3 (1930-34). Many of the stories are based on real incidents, and Favrholdt describes these with keen appreciation for details of milieu and character. Many of the short stories take place in Canada, a country with very little Danish literature.

Meta Moe (1880-1962) was one of few women writers among the Danes in America. She lived in the United States from 1910 to 1937 and again from 1949 to 1959, and her religious novels, *Fru Lene Bang* (Mrs. Lene Bang) (1939) and *Regine* (1941) are set in America. Her several other books have no Danish-American connection.

Teacher and journalist, Kristian Baun, (1863-1943) published only one work of fiction, *Blodets Baand* (The Bonds of Blood) (1938). This book is a collection of both new and previously printed short stories in which typical emigrant themes are well treated.

Arne Hall Jensen (1903-1978) was also a journalist. He lived in the United States from 1926 to 1931 and served a period as editor of the newspaper, *Den Danske Pioneer*. He wrote several books about the situation of Danish-Americans as well as the novel, *Markus, Min Søn* (Markus, My Son) (1940) which follows two generations of an emigrant family.

Little Danish-American prose has appeared in the last decades. In the 1950s, Agnes Ringsborg published a booklet of religious stories, *Fortællinger fra Hverdagslivet* (Tales from Everyday Life) (1955) and the novel *Gaa væk Skygge, Lad Solen Skinne* (Sunshine Beyond Shadows) (1956). Neither has great literary value, nor do they provide valuable descriptions of cultural setting. Nathaniel Peter Christensen's novel *Thomas* (1959) is also from this period.

The poets, J.V. Borchsenius, Adam Dan and F.L. Grundtvig, have already been mentioned. Other poets included John Volk (1843-1904) who founded the newspaper, *Nordlyset*. He had spent some time in the United States prior to his emigration in 1866. Shortly before his death he published *Sange og Digte* (Songs and Poems) (1903). The book is half Danish, half English and contains Volk's poems together with translations and new

versions of the work of other poets. A new edition of the book appeared in 1938.

A volume of poems by Eckardt V. Eskesen (1868-1943), *Mod Lyset* (Towards the Light) (1904) appeared at about the same time as Volk's collection. Having worked as a shepherd in Denmark, Eskesen emigrated to the United States in 1891 and worked his way to the top position in a terra-cotta factory.

Ivar Kirkegaard (1869-1929) emigrated to the United States in 1889 and worked, among other things, as an editor and a steamship agent. His first book, *Halvkloden Rundt* (Half the Globe Around) (1905) is a well-written collection of sketches and poems. Later he also published two collections of poetry, *Danske Dage* (Danish Days) (1916) and *Hjemkomsten* (Homecoming) (1920). He also made many contributions to various Danish-American publications.

The "Grand Old Man" of Danish-American poetry was Anton Kvist (1878-1965). A bricklayer by profession, he emigrated in 1902. His first collection of poems, *Fyr og Flamme* (Enthusiasm) appeared in 1910 and was later followed by several other collections, *Fred og Fejde* (Peace and Controversy) (1917), *Danske Strenge* (Danish Chords) (1925), *Lurerne kalder* (The Lurs Are Calling) (1927) and *Sange fra Vejen* (Songs Along the Way) (1948) as well as several pamphlets. In addition, he contributed many poems to Danish-American publications and also wrote some non-fictional books. Kvist dealt with such topics as his homeland, nature and even politics, in so far as he spoke out against oppression of any kind, whether capitalist, nazi or communist. The poems are of a high quality.

The cement magnate, Thor Schack (1880-1961), published only one collection of poetry, *Normannernes Sidste Gæstebud, samt andre digte* (The Norsemen's Last Banquet and Other Poems), (1925) but also wrote for the newspaper, *Dansk Tidende,* in Chicago.

Bror Enebo was the pseudonym of engineer C.L. Christensen (1878-1943) who published a series of excellent, small collections of poetry from 1916 to 1931.

Carlo Christensen (1903-) is probably best known for his historical work, *De Første Danske i New York* (The First Danes in New York) (1953), but he also wrote two collections of poetry, one of which, *Æventyret Kaldte* (Adventure Called) (1932), is from his period in the United States. Christensen was, among other things, a gardener and a journalist and for a number of years was also an employee of the Danish embassy in Washington, D.C. where he served a period as cultural attaché. During the occupation of Denmark from 1941 to 1945, he was sentenced to death by the Germans for his participation in the resistance movement.

Oscar Olafsson (1883-1937) was, in fact, an Icelander, but his up-bring-

ing and education were Danish. His only, very talented, collection of poetry, *Flora Danica*, was published in 1933.

August L. Bang (1887-1959) held many jobs after he emigrated in 1913, but finished his career as editor and owner of the newspaper *Dannevirke*, as well as the owner of a travel bureau and a Danish book store. His first collection of poetry was published before he left Denmark. After that he made many contributions to newpapers in both Denmark and the United States before publishing a new volume of poetry, *Livet i Vold* (In the Throes of Life). Bang was a prolific and talented writer.

The last writer to be mentioned here, Emanuel Nielsen (1902-), emigrated in 1923 and worked for many years as a dentist in Chicago. His first volume of poetry, *Toner fra det Fjerne* (Distant Echoes), appeared in 1938, after which time he published four more collections of poetry, one of which appeared in both Danish and English. This last collection, *The Eagle and the Man*, was published in 1962. This author's interesting progression from the use of Danish to the use of English is rare in Danish-American literature. Nielsen's work has high literary value in both languages.

Conclusion

It is hardly surprising that the great bulk of Danish-American literature pays special attention to the Danish-American situation. Only on rare occasions, for example in the work of P.M. Hannibal, O.C. Molbech and in Jens Christian Bay's *The Chalice of the Chipped Ruby*, is any attempt made to treat the human condition, or American problems in general, without placing the Danish immigrant at center stage. There are a number of reasons for this, among them the fact that the authors were so anchored in a Danish-American cultural setting that they rarely had the ability or desire to look beyond this to American society as a whole. Kristian Østergaard provides a good example of this. In spite of his literary ability, his novels and short stories focus on the situation of the Danish emigrant, and not until very late in the day, in *Arimans Tjener* (Ariman's Servant) (1930), does he achieve a broader understanding of American society and allow the Danish element to fade into the background. Another example is F.L. Grundtvig who struggles to retain his "Danishness" in the United States as something independent of his surroundings. His attitude naturally led him to treat Danish-American topics rather than purely American conditions.

It is characteristic for several of these very Danish-oriented authors that American customs and phenomena are depicted negatively. I have already noted J.V. Borchsenius' enmity to American big city life; C.M. Norman-Hansen held a similar view, as did Kristian Østergaard, although the latter did feel that the Danish population should eventually be integrated and become good American citizens, at the same time maintaining their Danish

Emanuel Nielsen (1902-).

roots. Enok Mortensen's work reflects a wide spectrum of attitudes toward life in America: the United States is a cold, capitalistic society where there

is no sympathy for weakness and, at the same time, a land of milk and honey where anything is possible. Mortensen's protagonist, Niels Nord, swings between these two poles in his view of the United States and finally accepts American society for better or worse. Most of the heroes of Danish-American prose, including Teodor Sand and other of Østergaard's main characters, arrive at the same conclusion. But none of them can ever completely break the tie to their homeland: they become not Americans, but Danish-Americans.

The literature deals primarily with first generation immigrants. The cultural setting is often depicted so precisely that (with a few exceptions) this literature, with its true picture of immigrant life, can be thought of as historical writing. We can thank Dorothy Skårdal Burton for having described this so well in her book about Scandinavian emigrant literature, *The Divided Heart* (1974). Further documentation is given in the comparisons of fiction, biography and historical works made by Danish-American historians such as P.S. Vig and Thomas P. Christensen. They describe how the immigrants become integrated into American society, a process either already experienced or about to be experienced by their readers. This literature was, in fact, a detailed representation of the life of the reader, an interpretation of his emotions, and, perhaps, as the reader saw that his problems were not unique, such reading made easier the transplantation from Denmark to the United States.

All the subjects of interest to the Danish-American public were discussed: assimilation and integration, the retention of Danishness, the question of language, the Danish schools, institutional and religious life (including all the disputes – and there were many), the longing for Denmark, the role of culture in Danish America, etc.

Of all of these themes, longing was perhaps the most important. It is the main theme of Enok Mortensen's novels about Niels Nord and appears throughout Danish-American literature in prose, poetry and drama. It is characteristic that a satisfactory "cure" for this particular problem is rarely or never achieved, whereas discussions about school and church life do often end in what for the author (and probably also the reader) is an acceptable solution. The difference is that schools, churches, etc. are based on an ideology which can be actively practiced, while longing is a psychological and, therefore, much more complicated problem. There is no exact measure for longing, thus making it difficult to deal with efficiently.

As emphasized in a number of works, returning to Denmark is no real solution: the very fact of emigration places one between two worlds, and it will never be possible to be wholely satisfied in either of them. Of course, this problem was most difficult for first generation immigrants with their personal knowledge of Denmark; their children were more hesitant about,

or even unsympathetic to, the "old" homeland. The question of whether the second generation is Danish or American is an important issue in many novels and short stories. At one point, for example, Niels Nord is prepared to give up his Danishness for the sake of his children. Other examples of this conflict appear in Kristian Østergaard's discussions about attending a Danish or an American school, Danish education being seen as a means of preparing the children of Danish immigrants for lives as Danish-Americans in America.

In Arne Hall Jensen's *Markus, min Søn* – we follow two generations of a Danish-American family in which the children grow up and become Americanized. Having taken part in American life, the children lose their ties to Denmark. This was what happened to most of the children of Danish immigrants, and it worried many authors, especially the Grundtvigians who had the retention of Danish culture in America as one of their goals.

Not all Danish-American literature served as a link between that which was Danish and that which was American. Much of the poetry, in particular, dealt with nature, religious holidays and other religious topics which could have been treated in exactly the same manner at home in Denmark. This is, of course, not true of poems written about the disputes within the Danish congregations, about religious denominations in the United States or the relationship to various sects where, of course, specifically American conditions are touched upon.

The importance of literature for the integration of the immigrants has already been mentioned, but does Danish-American literature also contain a message for the reader of today? The answer to this must be a qualified, Yes. That part of the literature with true literary value (the work of such authors as Sophus K. Winther, Enok Mortensen, Oscar Olafsson and others) is, of course, worth reading for that reason alone. Added to this is the fact that emigrant literature provides outstanding source material for the understanding of the conditions under which first generation Danes in America lived. It will, therefore, continue to be of interest for historians and sociologists as well as for now Americanized descendants of the emigrants who, in reading this literature, can gain an understanding and appreciation of their own background.

While researchers can make genuine use of this material, the value of the literature of their forefathers for the ordinary American reader of Danish descent is debatable. One important obstacle to the dissemination of Danish-American literature is the language, not to mention the lack of awareness of the very existence of a genre which has received little press coverage for many years. Does Danish emigrant literature then have a message for the reader of today? The answer to the question is more properly, Perhaps. The genre is dying out; the most recent work published is Enok Morten-

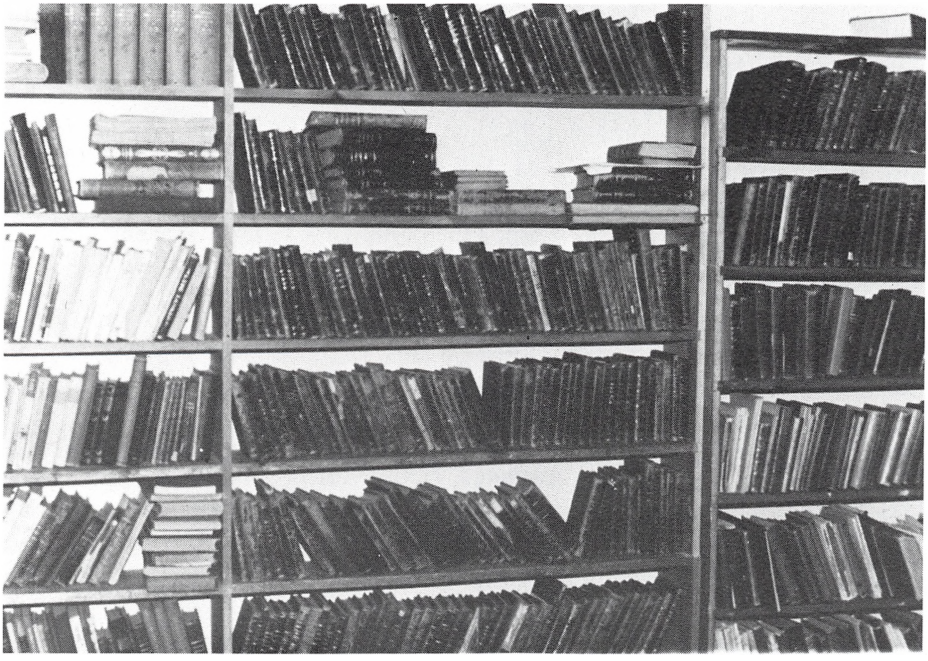
sen's *Den Lange Plovfure*. Written about 1940, it was not published until 1984 which says something of the conditions of this type of literature in our day. Naturally enough, emigrant literature could only be a temporary phenomenon. Danish-Americans became Americans and lost interest in it. During the period of transition, the literature served a purpose – it provided an identity and eased assimilation – and when this goal had been reached, there was no longer any need for it.

Notes

1. Thomas P. Christensen, *Dansk-Amerikansk Historie*, Cedar Falls, Iowa, 1927, p. 159.
2. Enok Mortensen and Johannes Knudsen, *The Danish-American Immigrant*, Des Moines, Iowa, 1950, p. 27.
3. Kristian Østergaard, *Danske Arbejdere i Amerika* (Danish Workers in America), Copenhagen, 1886, p. 22.
4. Valdemar J. Borchsenius, *Ved Øresund og Mississippi*, Chicago, 1884, p.9.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
10. August Faber, ed., *Kirke og Folk. Digte af Frederik Lange Grundtvig* (Church and People. Poems by Frederik Lange Grundtvig), Cedar Falls, Iowa: Dansk Boghandels Forlag, 1909, p. 108.

The Books and Libraries of the Danish Immigrants

by Mette Hald



Danish books in Kimballton Public Library. 1991. (Photo: Mette Hald.)

"Each Tuesday afternoon at 2:30 p.m. you will find six ladies sitting down to coffee, sandwiches and dessert. Often the food is of Danish origin, as *aeblekage* or layer cake, both embellished with whipped cream, coffee cake and other Danish pastries. After the interesting conversation session, they retire to comfortable chairs in the living room, each finding the chair most suitable for them. Soon all are settled comfortably with handwork, to read and hear the next chapters of the Danish book now being read.

The Danish Reading Club has been meeting for at least seventy years. No record was kept of the organization's beginning. Throughout the years many interesting books have been read and discussed. The four volume series *Priergaard Slaegten* [The Priergaard Family] probably was the most interesting story of a family through several generations. Each member would read a chapter as most were first generation immigrants. As time went on, fewer wished to read but did enjoy listening."

The above description of the Danish Reading Club, taken from Kimballton's 100th anniversary book,[1] is accompanied by two photographs of members of the club taken at an interval of 70 or 80 years.

The Club still existed in the spring of 1990 when, in perfect keeping with the above description, I was invited to join four ladies: Hilda Christoffersen, Alice Vitten, Dagmar Sørensen and Herdis Nielsen, for a cup of coffee. Of the four, only Herdis was born in Denmark; the others were born in the United States of Danish parents. All are (or were) married to Danes and spoke Danish in their homes until their children married Americans. We spoke a mixture of Danish and English together.

Kimballton has become familiar in Danish-American history as one of two neighboring villages in Iowa: Elk Horn and Kimballton. The villages took opposing sides when, in the 1890s, the Danish Church in the United States split into two factions – Elk Horn choosing to follow Inner Mission doctrine and Kimballton the teachings of the educator, writer and minister, N.F.S. Grundtvig. The towns have continued their friendly competition ever since.[2]

It was interesting to hear Dagmar Sørensen, hostess of the Reading Club meeting I attended in May 1990, tell of her days as a student at Grundtvigian Grand View College in the 1920s. One of her teachers there was the legendary Danish-American minister, Enok Mortensen.

I visited Kimballton while traveling around the United States in an attempt to discover how books and libraries provided support for Danish immigrants and their attempts to maintain their cultural roots. Although today these books and libraries are in little evidence, there is little doubt that they did, at one point, offer support. A number of people told me they remembered collections of books in Danish, as well as libraries and reading

The Danish Reading Club in Kimballton in the early 1900s. Left to right: Mrs. Bolt, Gudrun Vest, Mrs. Soren Sorensen, Mrs. Nissager, Mrs. Sorensen from Solvang (guest), Mrs. Etta Soe, Dagmar Bertelsen. (From *Kimballton Centennial 1883-1983.*)

clubs in the Danish settlements. Later on, the books were probably combined with other collections or simply discarded. Dagmar Sørensen from Kimballton explained that there had been a Danish library at Grand View College. Perhaps this is the library described by Thorvald Hansen, the now-retired Grand View College historian and archivist, in his book about Grand View College. He writes:

> A large collection of books was made available to the library by the Danish People's Society [Danish Folk Society]. This collection, numbering some three thousand volumes, was loaned for an indefinite period.[3]

In his invitation to the meeting at which the Danish Folk Society (Dansk Folkesamfund) was founded in 1887, F.L. Grundtvig mentions the collecting and publication of Danish books as possible tasks to be taken up by the Society.[4]

An unpublished manuscript, *Kirsten's Saga*, describes the life of a Danish immigrant woman in Wisconsin toward the end of the last century.

After Kirsten's arrival in Waupaca we learn that

> ...as she became better acquainted, Kirsten enjoyed an active social life, much of it revolving around the Danes Home Society. ... Members paid a 50-cent enrollment fee, and donated books in Danish and English so a library and reading room could be established... So successful was the organization that a $1,300 debt was retired in 1887, and there were nearly 1,000 volumes in the library...[5]

Thorvald Hansen did a commendable piece of work in listing all the locations of the records of Danish immigrants in America. A study of this guide to source material provides some insight as to what might have happened to some of the books in the Danish collections. But not even the detailed index to Thorvald Hansen's listing includes the words "library" or "reading." The existence of the books was accepted as a matter of course, making it unnecessary to describe them or their history in any detail.

This was another reason for my interest in meeting the four women in Kimballton – they represented a little piece of fast-disappearing, Danish-American cultural history.

The ladies told me that before the present public library was built, there had been a Danish library. In one corner of the library I found a catalog of books owned by the Danish Reading Club dated 1911 together with the rules of the club and a handwritten circulation list. The circulation list, with the date of each loan carefully noted, covers the period from December 1911 to 1916. The years 1911 to 1916 are interesting because the list enables us to see what each borrower read during this period, when interest in the library was greatest.

The acquisition of new Danish books ceased at some point in the 1930s, and the two newest books listed were printed in 1936. One was *Det Moderne Menneske* (Modern Man) by Arne Sørensen (borrowed once) and the other, *Møllen og Andre Fortællinger* (The Mill and Other Stories) by Marie Bregendahl (borrowed 9 times).

It isn't possible today to compile accurate library statistics for the period. A number of the books no longer exist, and there is no date slip in some of those that do exist. I counted 440 volumes which had been borrowed a total of 8,215 times. That doesn't sound like much until you stop to realize that there were only 382 persons living in the town in 1920. In the first years, the handwritten circulation records didn't include the year (it was, after all, obvious what year it was!), but around 1922 a date stamp was introduced. It is therefore possible to determine that about 5,662 loans were made prior to 1922. After 1922 the books were borrowed only about 2,553 times. The Reading Club continued to exist because the members read their own books. The library stopped buying new Danish books, and the interest in

The Danish Reading Club in Kimballton in 1982. Left to right: Dagmar Sorensen, Esther Jacobsen, Amanda Boelth, Hilda Christoffersen, Herdis Nielsen, Amanda Herskind. (From *Kimballton Centennial 1883-1983.*)

older books naturally declined. I did note, however, that books by Thomas Olesen Løkken had been borrowed as recently as 1989.

Based on the previously mentioned religious parting-of-the-ways of Elk Horn and Kimballton, I attempted to classify the old books in Kimballton on the basis of religious ideology. For each book I determined whether the author (or possibly the publisher) could be thought of as a supporter of Inner Mission or as a follower of Grundtvig and proponent of the folk high school. As this aspect was of most interest to me, I attached greater importance to books in both these groups than to other books in the collection. A total of 78 titles could be attributed to writers who favored the folk high school or other of Grundtvig's ideas, while 45 books were written by authors whose sympathies lay with Inner Mission or were published by Inner Mission publishing houses. 13 titles classified under the heading "Religious works" could be placed in neither group.

In addition, I classified a number of other titles in various smaller groups, including "Danish classics," "Foreign classics," "Poems" and "Plays." Another large group, comprising 75 titles, was designated "History, historic novels, folk songs, memoirs, biographies and travel." In spite of

all my attempts to classify them in some other way, I had to conclude that most of the books fell into a category that could only be described as "Entertainment with no special ideology." This large group contained a total of 147 titles, and, admittedly, even many of the novels by Grundtvigian authors, as well as the historical novels, were undoubtedly primarily read for their entertainment value. Naturally, I have no way of knowing whether former readers in Kimballton were aware, as I am, that, for example, Thyra Jensen, represented in Kimballton by her book *En lille Pige Danser: en Ungdommelig Historie* (A Little Girl Dances: a Youthful Story), was connected with the folk high school movement and moved in "Grundtvigian" circles. In any case, although the citizens of Kimballton were followers of Grundtvig, they also purchased and read Inner Mission authors, however limited their interest in these books may have been. Grundtvigian books were borrowed about 1,551 times, while Inner Mission books were borrowed only 116 times.

The next step was to see whether the records might reveal something about the interests of the individual borrower. Did the interests of certain borrowers, for example, lie within only one or two categories? The answer is a definite, No. The few Inner Mission books, (including those by Olfert Ricard or books published by *Lohse*, *Bethesda* or *De Unges Forlag* (which the reader must have known were of Inner Mission persuasion) were borrowed as regularly as other books.

Glancing over the available titles, it would appear that they merely provided simple, popular entertainment. The citizens of Kimballton were farmers, and a large part of the collection would have been of interest to that group. Naturally, there were also books by some of the Danish-American authors and ministers. (Works by the latter continue to be of interest to members of the Danish Reading Club according to the four women I spoke with.) The Club's rules (undated, but probably from 1911) state that the Club's purpose is "to encourage good, healthy Danish reading," and the ideas which inspired the founding of the Club were probably similar to those prevalent in Denmark at the time. This is expressed in an article by Johannes Grønborg written in 1895 and entitled "Om Læseforeninger paa Landet" (Reading Clubs in the Country). Here he writes:

> In selecting books for a Reading Club, due consideration must be given to local conditions, the spiritual views of the population and other things. Where no Reading Club has previously existed, it would be best in the first years to choose easily understood, entertaining literature, mainly short stories and historical and other novels by well-known authors, but not plays or collections of poetry. ...I will list some of the authors whose work, in my opinion, are especially appropriate for Reading Clubs. Older literature should be represented in

the Reading Clubs with books by Ingemann, Blicher, Hauch, Andersen, Hostrup, Etlar, Ewald, Bergsøe and all the so-called schoolteacher authors, in addition to Magdalene Thoresen, Budde, Bauditz, P.R. Møller, Malling and others. There are many titles by the realistic authors which are not appropriate for Reading Clubs; but it will be possible to find good things for the Reading Clubs by authors such as Drachmann (stories of the sea), Schandorph and Pontoppidan, while melancholy Jacobsen and high-class Gjellerup would probably not be popular with the members of a Reading Club. ... It would be a good thing if Reading Clubs throughout the country could be strengthened and grow more quickly than in the past. Those who work to promote the progress of the common man in the areas of education and culture should not hesitate to arouse his love of poetry and the art of writing by supporting Reading Clubs. Now, in the autumn, is the time to get to work to find good, healthy reading for the long winter evenings.[7]

Of all the authors recommended by Johannes Grønborg, the Reading Club in Kimballton lacked only Magdalene Thoresen and Schandorph. *No* books by J.P. Jacobsen or Gjellerup had been purchased!

Reading Clubs in the U.S.

"Years ago, in 1928, a group of Danish Americans got together to form a 'Laesekreds' [Reading Club] here in Minneapolis. The members were mostly immigrants who liked to keep up with current Danish literature but could not easily get books from Denmark. So by joining together we could order 20 or more books at a time, and then pass them around in our circle. When all had been around we would have an auction and buy our favorite books, and order more. For a few years we had three circles of ten books going around."

The above description of the Reading Club in Minneapolis was given by a former member, Arensa Thomsen. The Reading Club met once a month and also organized lectures, discussions and Danish song fests. During the Second World War, it wasn't possible to obtain Danish books. English books were read instead, and in the following years, interest in the Reading Club diminished.

Reading Clubs organized in much the same way as the one in Minneapolis were no doubt established in other Danish settlements in the United States. This would appear to be so in the case of the Reading Club about which we know the most, "Tylvten" (The Dozen) in Chicago. Tylvten was founded on November 26, 1897, and existed as late as 1977. In

Arensa Thomsen, member of the Library Committee of the Danish-American Center in Minneapolis 1991. (Photo: Mette Hald.)

1982 the minutes of the club and other effects were turned over to the Danes Worldwide Archives in Aalborg, Denmark. The name, Tylvten, refers to the fact that the number of members was never to exceed twelve. Each member was required to make an initial contribution of $1 and to pay a membership fee of 15 cents a month. This money was used to buy books to be circulated among the members. A book could be kept for only two weeks, and when it had been borrowed by everyone, it was auctioned off among the members. The money brought in by the auction was used for buying new books.

Tylvten was started in the metropolis of Chicago far from the religious conflicts of the prairie farmer. One member did cancel his membership in protest in 1899, however, when it proved impossible to reconcile the "spirit" and "tone" of modern literature with his own religious views. One or two of the members are described as Grundtvigians, but, on the whole, the group was more in sympathy with the workers' movement and the intellectual left. Johan Skjoldborg (a Danish author known for his depiction of the life of the working man) was invited to a meeting of Tylvten when he visited the United States in 1911. He later described the club in his book

Gennem De forenede Stater i Amerika (Through the United States of America):

> ...as regards reading and keeping up to date with Danish literature, the most outstanding place I encountered in all of America was definitely Tylvten in Chicago. – What and who is Tylvten? – Because of the quiet existence of this little club, very few people know anything about it. – It is a Danish society of 12 members, no more, no less, whose purpose is to keep abreast of new Danish literature of all kinds. ... Because they are never more than 12 members, a dozen, they enjoy an intimacy and jovial unpretentiousness that I found typically Danish. – These Twelve are well-acquainted with Danish literature (and, of course, also American literature), and as a Danish writer, I delighted in their company. For someone with an interest in the culture of the common man, it was especially enjoyable to see that these Twelve in Chicago were not the children of wealthy people, nor had they been well-educated in their homeland; they were the sons of smallholders, of shepherds, of people of humble means from outlying cottages ... and they now sat together and spoke knowledgeably about the most recent Danish literature. ... Of course I had a place in this circle of Twelve. Speeches, readings and humorous remarks filled the air. Tylvten naturally wished to praise someone who represented the writing that had given them so many pleasurable hours, and I accepted their praise as one who knows that it was not meant for me alone, but for my generation and my brood...[8]

From short biographical descriptions of Tylvten's members it is apparent that most were craftsmen, and many were probably workers in Chicago. One of Tylvten's founders and its chairman for many years, Christian M. Madsen, was an active member of the painters' union in Chicago, and from 1912 to 1916 he represented the Socialist Party in the Illinois legislature.

Perhaps the best-known member of the club was the Danish-American author, Anton Kvist. One who was *not* a member was the well-known scientist, author and head librarian of the John Crerar Library in Chicago, Jens Christian Bay. This is somewhat surprising in light of the fact that at various times it was thought to be an honor to be a member of Tylvten. There were waiting lists of people signed up to become members as soon as a place was vacant!

The most important event in Tylvten's history was unquestionably the memorial celebration held in honor of Georg Brandes in Lincoln Park on June 12, 1927. The decision to honor Brandes in this way is best explained in the speech made by chairman Christian M. Madsen in which he said:

> ... Tylvten is an organization here in Chicago whose purpose is to

maintain the love and knowledge of the best of Danish literature in our new homeland. And I can certainly say that, of the nine-hundred to one-thousand Danish books we have read over the past years, there has not been one that was not influenced by the renewal, the breakthrough, initiated by Brandes in the 1890s and continued in the years which followed. ... The thoughts and ideals which Georg Brandes stood for and which inspired Jacobsen, Drachmann, Schandorf and many other men of the Seventies in Denmark have enjoyed success throughout the world, and here in America we have seen their influence in the work of our modern men of breakthrough, men like Upton Sinclair, Frank Norris and Theodore Dreiser almost sixty years later...[9]

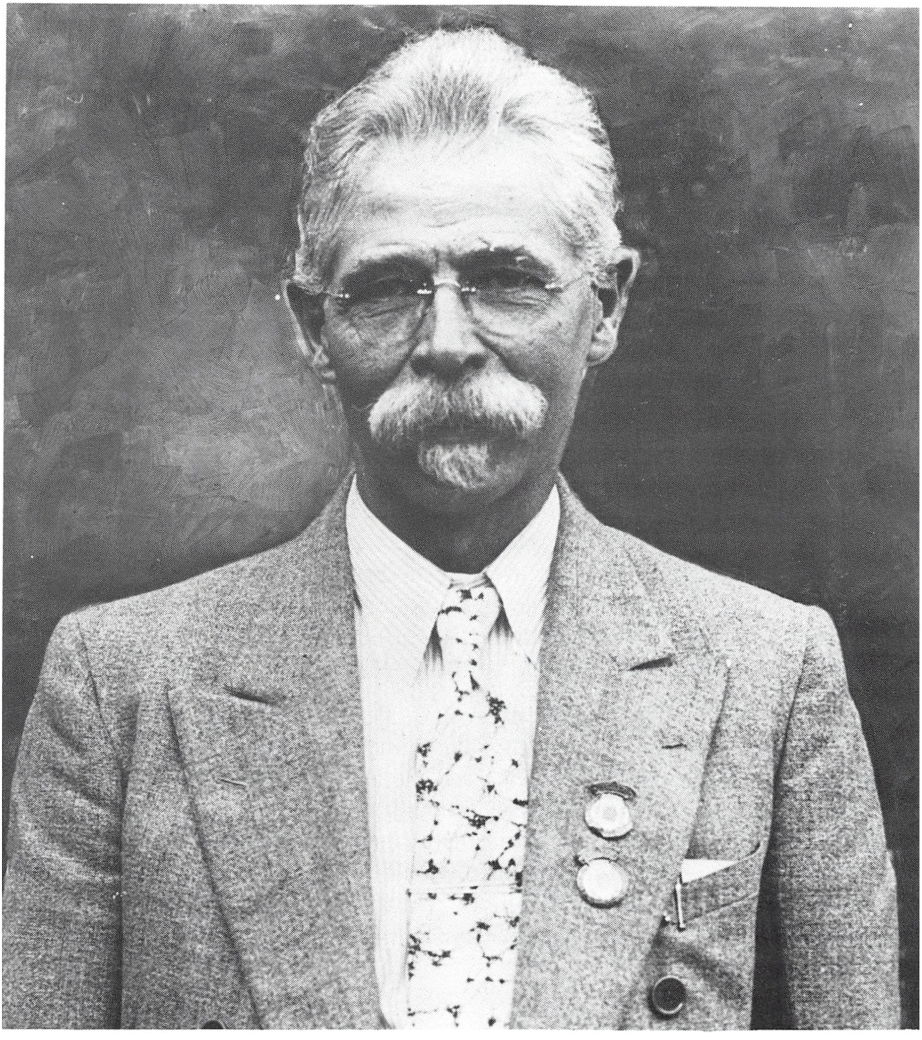
There is no record of the number of books circulated among club members, but in 1947 the number 1,390 was assigned. Neither is there a complete list of titles, but the price each book brought at auction was noted in the club records. Among the titles that earned the largest amounts were *Arbejdets Glæde* (The Joy of Work) by Jeppe Aakjær (95 cents), *Markens Grøde* (Growth of the Soil) by Knut Hamsun ($3), *Nye Mænd* (New Men) by Johan Skjoldborg ($1), *Alexandersen* by Harald Bergstedt ($1.75), *Kristin Lavransdatter* by Sigrid Undset ($4), *De Vises Sten* (The Philosphers' Stone) by Anker Larsen ($2.25), *Hemmeligheden* (The Secret) by Karin Michaëlis ($2.20) and *Af Blod Er Du Kommet* (Blood to Blood) by Thit Jensen ($1).

The minutes of the meetings, written in Danish until 1972 and in English until the club was dissolved in 1977, indicate that Tylvten's meetings were often quite lively affairs. Carl Jacobsen served as club secretary for 42 years, and his well-written minutes provide an excellent impression not only of literary discussions, but also of squabbles, tittering, teasing and general good humor. This was a group of people who were both self-important and very explicit about their taste in literature. There was no question of "good, healthy" reading here!

The following excerpts are taken from the club minutes:

March 28, 1910: "After a brief discussion, the suggestion that the name of the person who recommends a new book shall be recorded not only in the minutes, but also in the respective books – to the eternal shame or honor of that member, as the case may be – was accepted. It was then agreed that we should purchase *Kønsmoral og Livslykke* (Sexual Morals and the Joy of Life) by J.P. Møller – and although the secretary does not wish to record anything that might damage anyone's good name and reputation, he is forced to note that it was Martine Kristensen who suggested this book."

January 27, 1913: "...at which point honored brother P. Kristensen presented a book entitled *Den Danske Amerikaner* (The Danish American) given



Christian M. Madsen, one of the founders of "Tylvten" and its chairman from 1900 to 1911.

to Tylvten by Dr. Max Henius, and the secretary was given the task of extending thanks for the book. It was agreed that the book should be bound, and Søren Nielsen took it upon himself to see to it that this was done as he was familiar with a book binder who would do it both cheaply and durably. Particular emphasis was put on durability, even though it was agreed that no one would ever read the book."

March 10, 1929: "The discussion was opened after justice was done Mrs. Bang's delicious luncheon table. Axel Andersen opened discussion with an excellent presentation of Krarup Nielsen's *Naar Dragen Vågner* (When the

Dragon Wakes). He called attention to various interesting episodes from the book and explained its significance for recent history. The ensuing discussion, which was held within a strictly scientific framework, was extremely interesting and informative. It covered the entire civilized world and several hundred thousand years of history. Many scientific theories, previously thought to have a firm foundation, were set aside. It was established that the cradle of culture and enlightenment lay not, as was previously thought, with the Babylonians and Phoenicians, but in Vendsyssel [the northernmost part of Denmark] from whence enlightenment had spread southward until, finally, it reached the Mediterranean peoples. The Garden of Eden must be assumed to have been somewhere in the vicinity of Store Vildmose [a large bog in northern Denmark], where mankind would have lived in peace and understanding until the present day had it not been for a snake that tempted Eve to eat blueberries."

November 9, 1930: "...C.W. Sørensen gave a comprehensive, not too lengthy introduction to *Midt i en Jerntid* (In God's Land) by Martin Andersen-Nexø. Many of the following comments emphasized that, although it provides a talented description of the modern farmer in Denmark during the War and presents a believable picture of modern man and his situation, this book is not of the same calibre as *Pelle Erobreren* (Pelle the Conquerer) and *Ditte Menneskebarn* (Ditte, Daughter of Man)."

March 31, 1932: "After the meal, P.C. Pedersen introduced the book *Den Sidste Aften* (The Last Evening). He found this book to be well written and interesting and felt that it described life as it was often lived, especially in towns. Others pointed out that the book did not provide a satisfactory description of humanity as it described virtually nothing but the erotic side of life and, therefore, in the long run, would not keep the interest of the reader who was looking for an all-round, realistic description of people, relationships and conditions. A lively debate followed in which most of the members participated."

The minutes also describe the annual picnic, indicating that club members saw each other socially for other than literary discussions.

Obtaining Books from Denmark

The minutes of the meeting held on February 12, 1917, contain an interesting comment:

> There was a lengthy discussion of the disadvantages of ordering the books in Copenhagen, especially due to the currently very irregular connections between America and Europe. It was decided that, on a trial basis, a number of books would be purchased from Scandinavian booksellers here in town.

Carl Jacobsen, long-time member of "Tylvten." 1929.

The above comment brings to mind the fact that Danish-American books were published and distributed by Danish publishers and book sellers in the United States. The history and significance of these is not well documented. Among the books I found listed in Kimballton, a few had been published by *Skandinaviens Boghandel* in Chicago as well as by *C. Rasmussen's Forlag* in Minneapolis, *Kirken og Hjemmets Forlag* in Oxfordville Rock, Wisconsin, *N. Fr. Hansens Boghandel* in Cedar Rapids, etc. It doesn't speak well for the respect in which these publishers were held that both Tylvten and the Reading Club in Kimballton preferred to buy books directly from Copenhagen. This lack of respect is also apparent in an article by Kristian Østergaard which appeared in *Højskolebladet* in 1895:[10]

> If I should ever find the time and energy to complete additional work for publication, I shall certainly not risk the piracy of having my work reprinted, as I can be protected by the American Copyright Law. But how long will authors and publishers back home put up with having dozens of their books reprinted over here year after year with no compensation whatsoever being paid for this?

Have Danish publishers no intention of doing anything to protect their right of ownership over here and to gain a market here rather than allowing themselves to be crowded out by American reprints? ...

It is difficult for Danish booksellers to estimate how many books are sold to readers over here every year, as many over here write to friends in Denmark and ask them to send the books they want; but it probably represents no little part of the business.

And it could be a much greater share if our import of books was better organized.

When we want books from Denmark, we can do one of two things: we can either turn to one of the booksellers here or we can write home.

Our Danish-American booksellers haven't much of any significance in stock, except for the American reprints of Danish and Norwegian books. If you want a book, it is sometimes necessary to wait several months before it is available; the booksellers don't write home to request only a single copy. Occasionally you don't even get the book you ordered. A man here in town reported the other day that he had ordered Pontoppidan's *De forenede Staters Historie* (A History of the United States) a year ago and that he hadn't received it yet.

And if you do finally get the book you ordered, it is too expensive. The many small booksellers over here, who must each have small boxes of books sent from home, *cannot* sell cheaply.

And what happens when you yourself write directly to a bookseller in Denmark? Then it is sometimes possible to get the books in six to twelve weeks, sent as book-post or express. ...

The difficulty involved and the large extra cost of obtaining books from Denmark are explanation enough for why it is good business to reprint Danish books over here in tasteless, cheap editions.

At least they are available. But they are not especially cheap, considering the mediocre or just plain second-rate way they are made. It is annoying to see cheap American editions of one's books crowding the handsome Danish originals out of the market. ...

But it is possible to sell these reprints because they are available. You can get them at any time. If the handsome Danish original editions were available, then of course one would be willing to pay a few cents more for them! ...

The difficulty in obtaining Danish books also leads many to buy books in English, even though they would rather have had them in Danish to give, for example, as birthday gifts or at other times, as one cannot think to make such a purchase many months in advance, and neither is it possible to use the crude-looking reprints. Of course, that

C. Rasmussen Publishing Co. and Skandinavisk Boghandel. 1900.

wouldn't be so bad except that the buyer is completely lost when it comes to choosing English-American literature. But I mention this simply to emphasize that there *is* a market here for the Danish bookseller, if only he can find that market, in other words: find a practical means of importing books and selling them here.

Of course I could just leave this to those most directly concerned and who have a greater knowledge of business than I. But this issue is of more than just pecuniary interest.

It could perhaps have a very significant influence on the development of intellectual life over here if it were possible to open the way for everyone to all of Danish literature and not simply that relatively small part which is reprinted here. We can rest assured that as long as the publishers make no attempt to stop it, the business of reprinting important works of fiction and a large number of other books will continue to prosper. But that is, however, only one kind of literature. When it comes to the development of the intellect, it is important to make *many* other works available.

I wish, therefore, to present my views on what the Danish publishers can and should do.

Briefly, *all Danish publishers should join together* to establish a Danish(Norwegian)-American Book Shop with their main center of distribution here in the middle of the country. ...

Such a central depository for all imported Danish-Norwegian literature could receive such large shipments of books as to reduce the cost of shipment to a fraction of what is paid today. Branch stores and smaller, independent booksellers in Minneapolis, San Francisco and other towns could be supplied from this main depository. In addition, single books could be ordered from the depository by individual buyers.

Such a central distribution center must make available anything people might want to buy and must also have the most recent publications just as quickly as they are reviewed in the newspapers at home.

Placing the Danish bookseller right in the middle of us will soon take the nap off the crude reprints. ...

There is no small number of us over here who love our native language and country and who, here in a foreign land, wish to keep abreast of cultural developments in the Nordic countries. We wish to maintain as close and strong a connection to our own people as can be combined with our position as American citizens. We sing the songs of our homeland and listen with delight to speakers from home. Let us also have our share of the Danish literary treasure. We wish it for ourselves and we wish also that authors back home should have the opportunity to find readers among the quarter of a million Danes and twice as many Norwegians on this side of the Atlantic.

We hope that the Danish publishers will do their best to fulfill our wishes.

There is no evidence to show whether or not Kristian Østergaard's article had any effect on the Danish-American book trade. There is a fine job of research to be done here. At the very least, a bibliography should be prepared as no proper bibliographic listing of these much-scorned reprints has ever been made. Neither is there any record of the original Danish publications printed by these publishing houses (Johannes V. Jensen's *Kirken i Farsö* (The Church in Farsö) is the best-known, but far from the only example).[11] It is my impression that the works put on the market by these publishers represent not only a little-known part of Danish-American history, but also a "missing link" in the *Danish National Bibliography*.

Today

There is some degree of interest today in a number of the old Danish books, especially those which can be used for historical study, and the study of biographical history, in particular. The great interest in discovering ones roots in the United States, that country to which so many emigrated, means that libraries are experiencing a renewed interest in this type of book. A small committee has been formed at the Danish-American Center in Minneapolis with the express purpose of collecting genealogical literature because, as one committee member put it, the library "is mostly used by a genealogy group that meets regularly and studies family histories."

Today the largest collection of Danish literature in the United States is located in an old immigrant area in the Midwest, at the Memorial Library in Madison, Wisconsin. During my visit there in May 1990, I spoke with Scandinavian humanities bibliographer, John Dillon. He told me that the library has over 5,000 Danish titles dating from 1945 to the present day. Memorial Library is the University of Wisconsin – Madison library, and the Danish collection was established in connection with the endowment of a chair in Danish at the university. In discussing the history of the library and the university, John Dillon said, among other things,

> ...the state of Wisconsin was one of the favored goals of Scandinavians who emigrated to the United States. In fact, it is still possible to find communities in Wisconsin which show the influence of the Scandinavian countries, including Iceland and Finland. And in appreciation of the obligation to the citizens of this state, chairs in the Scandinavian languages and literature were soon endowed here, and we began teaching these subjects as early as the end of the last century.

I also had an opportunity to meet some of the current and previous students and to talk with them about their reasons for studying Danish and their views on Danish culture. The purely historical and genealogical areas are of particular interest for those who have chosen to study Danish, as they are of Danish descent. I was much impressed by those few people who had the perserverance and energy to learn the Danish language in order to use this tool to help them find what they felt to be the essence of Danish culture.

Notes

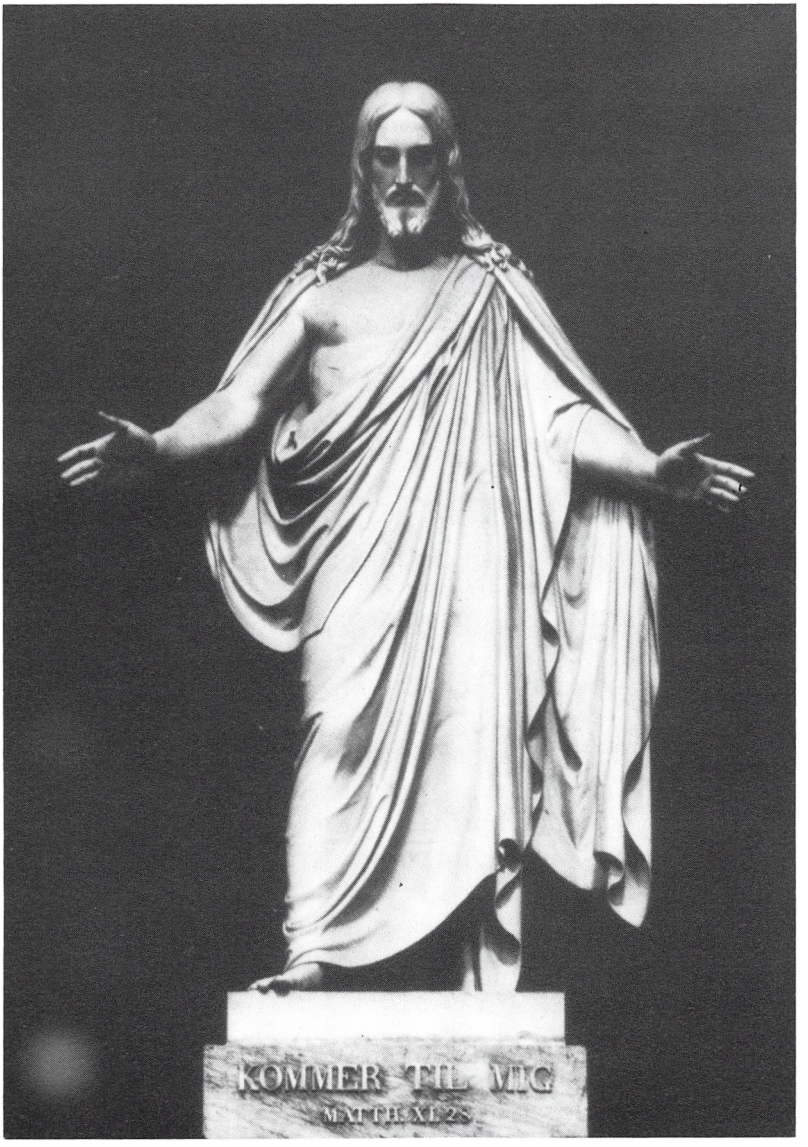
1. *Kimballton Centennial 1883-1983.* Kimballton, Iowa, 1983, p. 9.
2. Jette Mackintosh, "'Little Denmark' on the prairie: a study of the towns Elk Horn and Kimballton in Iowa," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, vol. 7, 1988, pp. 46-68.
3. Thorvald Hansen, *We Laid Foundation Here... The Early History of Grand View College*, Des Moines, Iowa: Grand View College, 1972, p. 52.

4. F.L. Grundtvig, "Indbydelse til at indtræde i 'Dansk Folkesamfund'" (An invitation to join the Danish Folk Society), *Dannevirke*, 18 April, 1887.
5. Phyllis Anderson, "Kirstens saga" (manuscript in The State Historical Society of Wisconsin), Madison, Wisconsin, c. 1988. (Stevens Point sc 42).
6. Thorvald Hansen, *Danish Immigrant Archival Listing: A Guide to Source Material Related to the Danish Immigrant in America*, Des Moines, Iowa: Grand View College, 1988.
7. Johannes Grønborg, "Om Læseforeninger paa Landet" (On Reading Clubs in the Countryside), *Højskolebladet*, 1895, pp. 1293-1298.
8. Johan Skjoldborg, *Gennem De forenede Stater i Amerika* (Through the United States of America), Copenhagen: De Tusind Hjems Forlag, 1911, pp. 64-65.
9. "Brandes Minde-Festen i Lincoln Park" (Brandes Memorial Celebration in Lincoln Park), *Dansk Tidende*, 17 June, 1927.
10. Kristian Østergaard, "Den dansk-amerikanske Boghandel" (The Danish-American Book Trade), *Højskolebladet*, 1885, pp. 683-690.
11. Johannes V. Jensen, *Kirken i Farsö* (The Church in Farsö), Minneapolis, Minnesota: C. Rasmussen, 1903.

The Importance of Images

Thorvaldsen, Dorph and Other Artists in Danish-American Churches

by Aase Bak



Bertel Thorvaldsen's "Christ" (1839). The Church of Our Lady, Copenhagen, Denmark.

Standing in the middle of nowhere, in a cemetery in Nebraska's flat prairie land, it is difficult for a Dane not to be moved upon discovering that the names on the tombstones are Olsen, Pedersen and Nielsen. St. John's Lutheran Church in Kronborg in Hamilton County, Nebraska, has served Danish Americans ever since 1888 and is one of the innumerable Danish-American churches erected during the peak years of Danish immigration to the U.S.A. (c. 1880-1910). It has been part of the institutional network that helped to keep the Danes from becoming totally alienated from their past in a foreign environment.

Upon entering St. John's, one is immediately struck by the fact that although the building itself is American, the accessories are distinctly Danish. There, on the altar, stands Bertel Thorvaldsen's[1] "Christ," and there, under the ceiling, hangs a hand-carved ship's model. First one wonders how those things got there; then the possible significance of these images as symbols becomes apparent.

This article is a preliminary enquiry into the subject of Danish immigrant groups and their use of pictures and other works of art as ethnic markers. It is based primarily on unpublished material in several church archives. The conclusions are, thus far, largely tentative.

How to acquire an altar piece

Some of the early Danish-American churches were very simple structures, and they functioned for years with little more than the most elementary utensils: a plain table, some candles, and an oleographed copy of "The Last Supper" behind the altar. The physical undertaking of the church service had, after all, first priority. An altar piece was, however, thought of as a finishing touch that perfected the edifice, and its procurement was by no means taken lightly.

Original church minutes, numerous anniversary booklets, and many personal recollections are eloquent reminders of the lengthy deliberations about embellishment of the churches carried out by the congregations. The discussions, at least as reported in written form, never touched upon matters of quality, doctrine or ethnicity. The main questions were always of a practical nature. Firstly, how to secure funds for the acquisition of altar pieces, pulpits and baptismal fonts; secondly, where and how to order these objects.

In some instances, especially in the early years, members of the congregation simply undertook to produce the necessary furnishings themselves. Such was the case when, in 1873, church board member A.I. Vetter built an altar rail and pulpit for Trinity Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chicago, Illinois, and Christian Christiansen used his scant spare time to

make a baptismal font.[2] A proper altar piece for Trinity Church was not installed until 1882, when a painting was bought for $100 from a Danish congregation in Indianapolis which had been dissolved. This painting by P. Raadsig, showing Christ in Gethsemane, was completed in Copenhagen in 1872 and was then sent to the Chicago Danish-Americans who had commissioned it.[3] In other instances, the board of trustees would decide to purchase art objects with money left over from the building fund after church construction had been paid for. As reported in the minutes of the annual meeting, Gethsemane Danish Lutheran Church in Oyens, Iowa, decided on March 19, 1904 (six years after the erection of the church) to do something about the altar piece:

> It was decided to appoint a committee to find out how big an altar piece will be needed in the church and on what conditions a fitting altar piece can be had, and to report to the board and trustees before April 20...[4]

In Menominee, Michigan, the board of The Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church had to repeatedly remind the appointed decoration committee to finish its task. On February 18, 1894, the committee finally brought in three bids on a total decoration scheme for the church. One bid stood at $400, another at $119.30, and a third at $115. Without quite taking the decision in its own hands, the board decided to second a motion from Rasmus P. Sørensen and Lars Nielsen,

> ...to give the decoration committee the full right to work for the decoration of the church as well as they could but not go beyond $115, and if possible to get another row of benches into the bargain. The chairman, H.P. Schmidt, offered to lend the money for the equipment temporarily.[5]

Subsequently, on April 22, 1894, the minutes state that:

> ...today a man [Mr. Schmidt] was present who can paint an altar piece, and after a short negotiation it was decided to have one such painted, which, however, could not cost more than $25, and it is left to the decoration committee to choose a picture and to negotiate with Mr. Schmidt on this matter.[6]

The most common procedure, however, was to leave the matter of the altar piece and other decoration to the Ladies' Aid. Such women's committees were organized almost simultaneously with the congregations, often under the supervision of the pastor's wife. Since women could not be elected to the governing bodies of the congregations, their energies and creativity were channeled into other projects. Often the committees concentrated on

collecting funds for some worthy cause, be it embellishment of the church, or social work. The money was collected in manifold ways: there were 10 cent coffee parties, bazaars and auctions of homemade handicrafts, and, later, large dinner parties. Although the committees worked diligently, the funds they were able to collect were rarely enough to cover costs, and they would then have to rely upon the good will of artists and others in reaching an agreement on payment procedure. On February 7, 1907, the Ladies' Aid of Zion Lutheran Church in Kenmare, North Dakota, reported as follows:

> ...it was moved and carried that the Ladies' Aid would give an altar piece to the church, it was then decided that pastor Nelson should direct inquiries to some of these artists...[7]

On April 18, 1907, it turned out that the women did not have enough funds, and the minutes note that it will be necessary to borrow money for the down payment on the altar piece. On May 2, 1907, Mrs. Nelson (the pastor's wife, and chairman of the committee) could report that it would be possible to borrow the money from Jens Rosendahl. The finished painting was received at the church on August 1, 1907, and payment to the artist was remitted on August 15, 1907.[8]

The Ladies' Aid of Our Savior's Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jewell Junction, Iowa, also had to pay their outstanding debt in installments:

> ...On [October] 21 [1900] the treasurer paid $10 toward the altar piece; its price is $75, the rest may be left for several years and paid whenever the Ladies' Aid is able to...[9]

At Emmaus Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in Racine, Wisconsin, pastor Martinus Lyngby had a very strong say in the procedure for obtaining an altar piece:

> He set the young women to work to provide for a new altar painting for the church. The completion of this project was delayed until 1887 on account of the death of the artist in Denmark before the picture was finished. Rev. Lyngby and several of the church officers then went to Chicago to arrange for another painting. They engaged Mr. Wm. Jensen to paint a copy of Dorph's "The Journey to Emmaus"...The cost of the painting was 130 dollars...[10]

It is not known who was originally commissioned to do this painting. But William Jensen of Chicago was a very accomplished copyist who could make a version that would not do discredit to the original artist. This would account for the relatively high cost of his work.[11]

In Hutchinson, Minnesota, the chairman of Nazareth Danish Evangeli-

Ashland Folk High School and Church painted and later photographed by Lorentz Henningsen. The original glass plate is the property of the Archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Chicago.

cal Lutheran congregation reported on April 9, 1911, that the Ladies' Aid had given $75, and Martin Hansen $15 toward an altar piece, after which time:

> ...pastor [Lorentz] Henningsen briefly described the altar pieces that he [Henningsen] had painted so far, and after some discussion it was moved and carried to leave the job to pastor Henningsen; it was left to the board to have the frame made.[12]

Henningsen was also involved in a plan to acquire an altar piece for the church in Lake Benton, Minnesota. This time, however, things did not go smoothly, as seen in an undated letter to Henningsen from Niels Brus:

"Dear Friend,
The first time I came into Ashland church I was strongly moved at the sight of the altar painting [also by Henningsen]. I got the impression of something holy and solemn, and that is the reason that I very much want us to have a painting in our church, but now the plan is temporarily stranded. The board of the Ladies' Aid, which had asked me to write to you, was strongly for it. They called a meeting; but since they had approximately $30 – and some members were afraid that the frame for the painting would be

costly, they decided to wait with the picture until it could become a cause for the whole congregation, and they then used the money for the children's home and such...I then turned to the board of the congregation, but some members preferred to wait until the debt on the new parsonage had been paid. – We liked your idea and hope that we will some day have a painting for our church."[13]

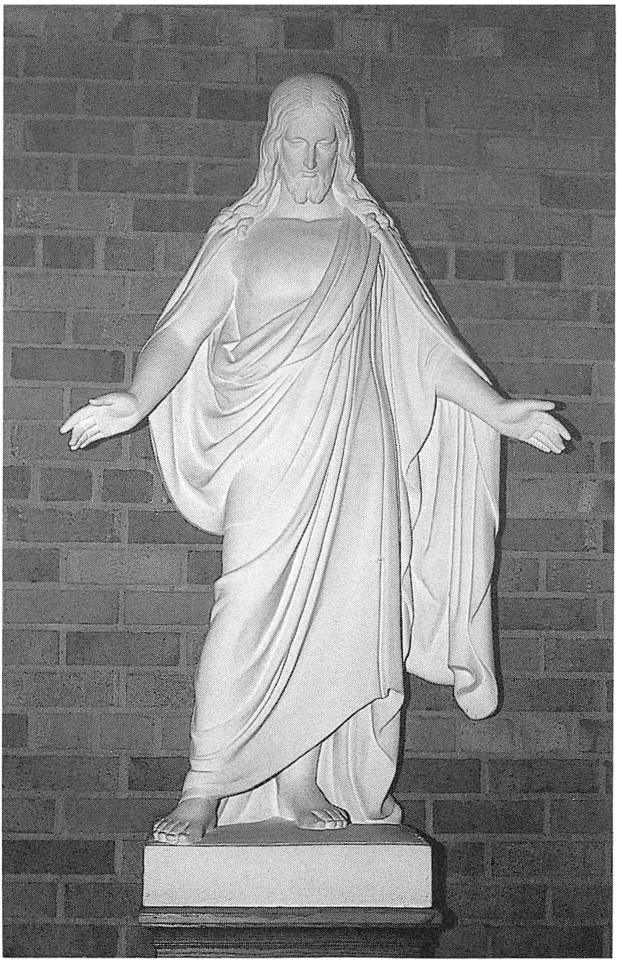
After 1900, probably as a result of a general improvement in the economic situation of Danish immigrants, it became increasingly common for individuals to donate altar pieces or baptismal fonts, sometimes in commemoration of a deceased family member (as in Luverne, North Dakota and Davenport, Iowa). At other times, a private benefactor would join ranks with the Young People's Society to secure both an altar painting and a frame (Nazareth Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cedar Falls, Iowa).

Copycats. Dorphs and Thorvaldsens by the hundreds

Although one source credits the above-mentioned pastor Lyngby as having "appreciation of the aesthetic,"[14] the bulk of evidence suggests that the matter of aesthetic or artistic quality was not a subject of discussion. The actual physical evidence, the altar pieces themselves, supports this impression. The mere fact that most altar pieces were copies of copies tells us that latter-day criteria such as "uniqueness" or "originality" had no validity.

One of the most popular subjects for altar pieces was Anton Dorph's "One Thing Is Needful" (also called "Christ with Martha and Mary").[15] Dorph originally painted the altar piece for Tyrstrup church in Zealand, Denmark, in 1863. However, when *Det Hoffenbergske Etablissement*, a publishing company, began to mass produce an oleographed version (37½" x 28½") in 1880, it struck an immediate chord with the public. The print was bought and hung in homes all over Denmark, especially in homes of Inner Mission persuasion. It was also brought to America and hung on Danish-American walls.[16] In all probability the many Danish-American altar pieces with this subject were copied in oil from such oleographs. Although the motto of Inner Mission was precisely "One Thing Is Needful," the Dorph interpretation does not hang only in United Evangelical Lutheran churches. Two copies were done by Jes P. Smidt, who was a confirmed Grundtvigian, and the paintings were placed at St. Peder's Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in Nysted, Nebraska, and The Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in West Denmark, Wisconsin.[17]

By far the most common altar decorations in Danish-American churches were copies of Thorvaldsen's "Christ," which also seem to have been distributed equally among both synods. Bertel Thorvaldsen executed the origi-



A copy of Bertel Thorvaldsen's "Angel of Baptism" in Elk Horn Lutheran Church. 1991. (Photo: Aase Bak).

nal plaster model for the statue in 1821, while still living in Rome, and in 1839 had it sculpted in marble for its placement in Vor Frue Kirke (The Church of Our Lady) in Copenhagen. Thorvaldsen was at this time an international celebrity and the pride of Denmark, and the statue, characteristic in its placid, mild demeanor, appealed to pietistic sentiments and quickly became hugely popular.

The nineteenth century did not take matters of uniqueness, artistic authenticity and copyright very seriously, and copies of the "Christ" were soon to be found all over Denmark in various versions. Shortly after the artist's death in 1844, the two Danish porcelain factories, *Den Kongelige*

Porcelainsfabrik (Royal Copenhagen) and *Bing & Grøndahl*, contracted with Thorvaldsen's Museum in Copenhagen (in 1846 and 1853, respectively) to reproduce the artist's work in biscuit (a type of unglazed porcelain).[18] In 1868, the sculptor L. Vieth applied to the museum on behalf of *Den Kongelige Porcelainsfabrik* for permission to make a version of the "Christ" for mass reproduction. From his application, it appears that the unauthorized copies in circulation were considered a nuisance, and it was hoped that the copycats would now be curbed. He wanted permission to "...copy the 'Christ,' 4 feet tall, with the intention of gradually replacing the bad plaster casts from a copy of the same size which have been placed in a great many of our village churches."[19]

In 1887, under the artistic direction of Pietro Krohn, the *Bing & Grøndahl* factory experimented with coloring the Thorvaldsen biscuits. This was completely against the artistic intentions of the artist, and the critics were not pleased.[20] But the practice may explain the origin of the ivory-painted "Christ" now at the Danish Immigrant Museum in Elk Horn, Iowa. It was bought in Copenhagen and brought to the United States where it was placed in a private home. It is unlikely, however, that many statues would have been imported, considering the cost and hazards of transportation and the fact that custom duties for statuary were at times as high as 50-60% of the original cost.[21] The *Bing & Grøndahl* experiment with painted biscuits may have removed a kind of taboo and encouraged other producers to do likewise. At any rate, a great number of the "Christ" statues in Danish-American churches are painted with a pale, flesh color on face, hands and feet and have brown hair and blue eyes.

All told, almost half of the altar pieces identified for this article (28 of 61) consist of some version of Thorvaldsen's "Christ," placed in a carved, and sometimes painted, wooden frame of the most diverse historical styles. The frame would have been ordered "on the side" from a woodcarver (the prolific Jes P. Smidt, for example) or a local cabinetmaker or from a factory which mass produced such décor. The origin of the many "Christ" figures in the U.S. (and not only in Danish-American churches) has not yet been sorted out. It is obvious that they did not all come from the same source, since the quality is very uneven.

A one-page ad in the magazine *Norden* in 1904 gives a clue as to where some of the statuary may have come from and how it was distributed. *Norden* suggests that the congregations and the magazine make a deal to their mutual advantage. Times are bad, the ad says, and no one can afford to buy art. *Norden*, on the other hand, needs subscribers. If the congregations secure subscribers for *Norden*, the magazine will reward them with reproductions of well-known art pieces. Thorvaldsen's "Christ" (two feet

tall) can be had for 75 subscriptions. If the largest reproduction (five feet six inches) is desired, 225 subscriptions will be needed.[22]

This get-something-in-return policy may not seem so foreign nowadays, but at a time when the advertising business was still in its infancy, some found this mingling of spiritual and pecuniary matters repulsive.[23] Whether or not *Norden*'s scheme was successful is not known. There is a strong possibility that the magazine worked as a kind of agent for the Danish-American artist A.H. Andersen, as the ad also warmly advocated his painted altar pieces.

Around the same time, the said A.H. Andersen, who lived in Greenville, Michigan, but worked in Chicago, Illinois, published a promotional pamphlet for distribution among Danish-American congregations. In it he explains that although it is not well looked upon for artists to promote themselves, this is a necessary practice in America. With such great distances you have to let people know you exist. Then follows a description of some of the altar paintings he has done for Danish-American churches with specifications:

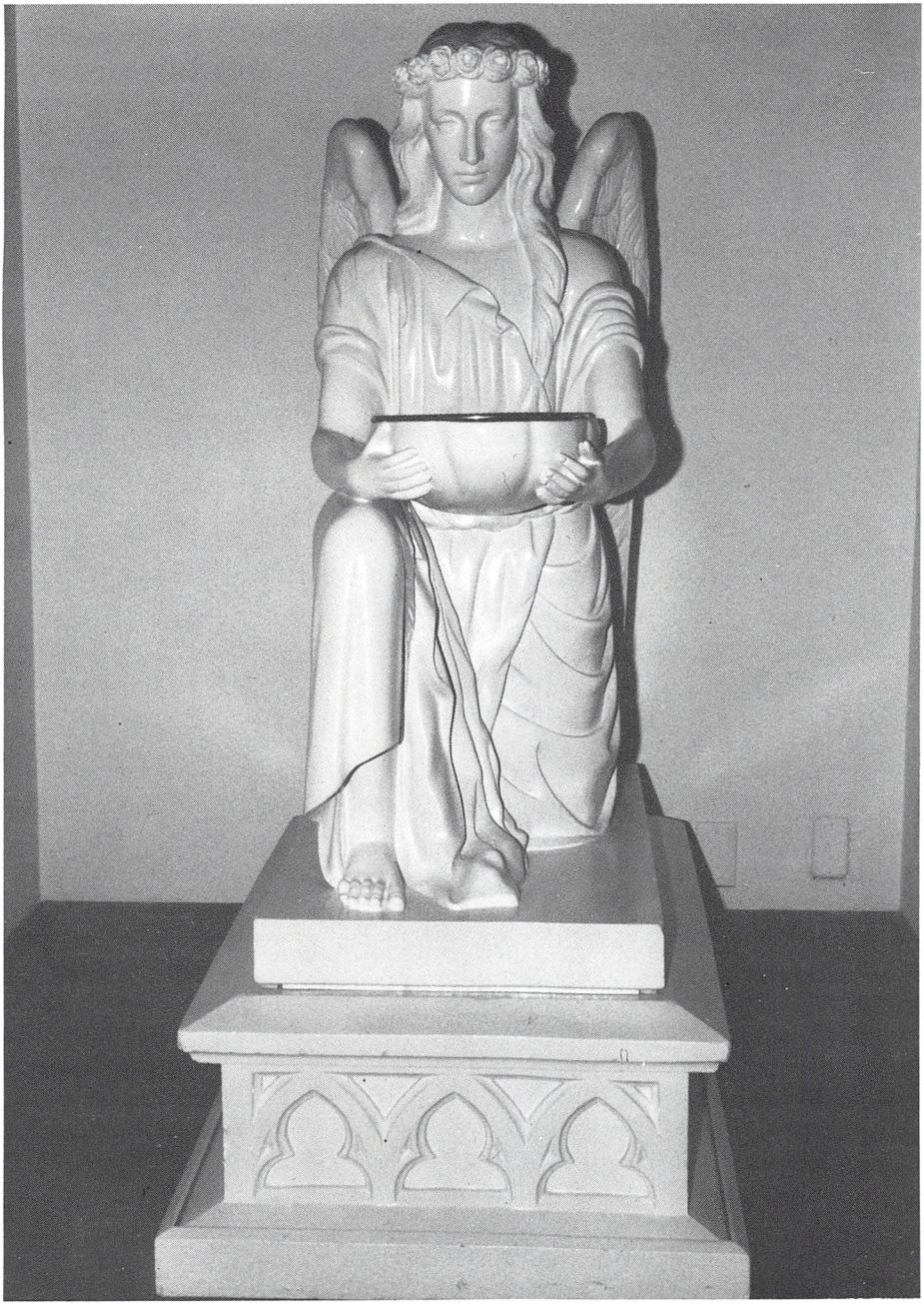
> ...I have no altar paintings in stock. They must be ordered in reasonably good time, from six weeks to two months before they are needed. – Congregations that want a painting may choose their own subject if they have a special desire. Otherwise, I refer to the pictures I have painted for other churches... In the case of Thorvaldsen's "The Angel of Baptism," I have tried to introduce a baptismal font into our churches, which is loved by everyone. I have modeled it at the art academy here in Chicago under the direction of able sculptors. The first one was sold to Gethsemane Danish Lutheran congregation in Chicago even before its completion. It can be made in plaster or alabaster, is a little less than life-size and weighs 300 pounds. I have procured the mold for Thorvaldsen's "Christ," and this figure can be supplied in a size suitable for churches – in plaster or alabaster.[24]

"That picture means a lot to us"

When Danish-Americans referred to their relationship to images in their environment, in this instance the churches, it would most often be in the realm of a personal experience, yet still within the context of the immigrant community.

Rasmus Andersen, the Danish-American pastor whose distinctive handwriting is found in archives everywhere, had a keen appreciation of the value of pictures in a close-knit community like the immigrant congregation. Time and again he would stress in his letters, and in his published work, the importance of painted and sculpted images. He, of course, refer-

Bertel Thorvaldsen's "Angel of Baptism" (1839). The Church of Our Lady, Copenhagen, Denmark.



A copy of Bertel Thorvaldsen's "Angel of Baptism" in Elk Horn Lutheran Church. 1991 (Photo: Aase Bak).

red specifically to his experiences as a pastor in Our Savior's Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in Brooklyn, New York, and in the Danish Seamen's Mission.[25]

In his history of the Brooklyn congregation *Herrens Hus ved Alfarvej* (The Lord's House on the Highway), Rasmus Andersen gives a detailed description of the various altar pieces, portraits and other decorations that have adorned his church for half a century, and in so doing have brought joy to everyone. The artists who at one time or another were involved in the decoration of Our Savior's Church included Frederik Visby, O. Bloch, C. Willumsen, F. Rambusch, Valentinus Madsen, H.P. Hansen, W. Matzen, Johannes Gelert and Oscar Mathiesen.[26] In his good-hearted, if somewhat naive, manner, Andersen relates even personal experiences in his annual reports. In the following, he refers to the altar piece painted by H.P. Hansen and unveiled in 1908:

> In 1895 the Lord gave me another good and faithful wife who shared with me everything in the development of the church. We were so happy at the beautiful celebration of the church anniversary in 1908 when the altar piece, which through and through was so dear to her and to myself, was dedicated; but even then...illness had put its heavy hand on her, and in the summer of 1909 her flower-decked casket stood in front of the altar...[27]

In 1921 Andersen reported that the well-known Danish sculptor Johannes Gelert had offered to present Our Savior's Church with a bust of Christ. The congregation decided to accept the offer if the bust could be had in marble.[28]

In the annual report for 1921 Andersen recalled what had happened:

> ...also I must mention a great embellishment to our little church which was already so beautiful. The sculptor J. Gelert, who has been a credit to Denmark as an artist, has executed an extraordinarily beautiful Christ figure, inspired by *John 17*, The High-priestly Intercession of Jesus. He has presented the model to Our Savior's Church. We did not succeed in having it hewn in marble as we had hoped. Since his [Gelert's] right arm is paralyzed, he is now living in the old people's home. We had a small get-together at the unveiling where he and others were at the Lord's table. We bring him our heartfelt thanks. So now it [the figure] stands at the altar and reminds us of the prayer of Jesus that we may all be one in love.[29]

It is obvious that Andersen was not so much taken by the artistic qualities of altar piece or statue as by their subject matter and ability to remind the

congregation of matters of faith, as well as by their function as a unifying force for family and congregation alike.[30]

As has already been suggested, Andersen was not alone in evaluating images in this way, and the following excerpt from a speech made by Christian Beck at the 95th anniversary of St. Ansgar Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in Salinas, California, indicates similar thinking:

> In 1910 somebody [Mrs. Bodil Jaeger] brought a beautiful painting from Denmark and that...tells the story of the good shepherd who left the ninety and nine and went looking for the one that was lost. He found that one and brought it to the still waters...That picture also means a lot to us. Do you know how many memories that picture brings back to all of us who are old-timers? I've seen from time to time that some of the old-timers will stand there and look at that picture and I know that if I talked to them they wouldn't have answered because they were so far back in their thought. I'll bet they had many wonderful memories...When I look at that picture...I remember that I saw my parents kneel down in communion in front of that picture. My wife and I stood in front of that picture when we were married fifty years ago. We brought our children up there at baptism and confirmation, and I walked my daughter up the aisle in front of that picture to give her away in marriage, and I've seen my grandchildren being baptized in front of that picture. How wonderful it is to have many memories and that's only four generations. I know some of the members that talk about five or six generations' memories of this church.[31]

Although the Salinas' altar piece is of exceptional quality by Danish-American standards, the artistic qualities of the painting go unmentioned in the above. It could, of course, be argued that it is precisely these qualities that enthrall the members of the congregation, but this is not what Christian Beck says. It would hardly be surprising to discover that the congregation was struck by the symbolism of the one sheep that – like an emigrant – left the flock, but was not forgotten by Christ. As in the case of Rasmus Andersen, the picture is seen as a vehicle for personal reflection, as well as a symbol that gives cohesion to family and congregational histories. The memories of individual members may have different nuances, but they are based on similar circumstances. These circumstances could be the common Danish background, the process of uprooting, the pioneering and the difficulties encountered in the acculturation process.

The quality and doctrine represented by the altar pieces were never discussed, and neither was the question of ethnicity. There was not one

mention in the source material used here that the work in question should conform to some standard of "Danishness." The interesting thing is that they all do! The "Danish" credentials of each and every one of the more than 60 altar pieces examined here were in order. Each was either copied from a Danish work, made by a Danish-American artist or craftsman or imported directly from Denmark. This would suggest that, at least among laymen in Danish-American congregations, "Danishness" or Danish culture was something so deeply ingrained in their thinking and actions as to need no formulation.[32] The observation made by pastor-writer, Kristian Østergaard, in his novel *Nybyggerne* (Pioneers) that the ordinary immigrants often did not understand what their pastors were talking about when they referred to cultural inheritance and "Danishness" is probably true.[33]

The deep need for and appreciation of well-known images and symbols in one's daily surroundings is not necessarily a function of consciousness. At least this is what the church material suggests. A comparison with Danish-American secular societies would be interesting. The lodges that had their stronghold in larger cities were undoubtedly as significant a part of the Danish social and cultural network as the churches, but it is possible that lodge members' consciousness of ethnic issues is quite different from that of church members.

Notes

Most of the information for this article was collected in the three midwestern archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), which was formed in 1988 when several Lutheran synods merged. The Region 3 Archives are located at Northwest Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. They hold material related to Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota. The Region 5 Archives at Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa, cover ELCA congregations in Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin and Upper Michigan. The new ELCA archival headquarters in Chicago, Illinois, are located with the former main archives of the Lutheran Church in American (LCA).

A grant from Dansk Amerikansk Klubs Jubilæumsfund (The Danish-American Club's Anniversary Fund) made it possible for me to undertake a study tour of these archives in October, 1991.

1. Bertel Thorvaldsen (1768-1844). This very successful Danish sculptor was a leader of the Neoclassical movement in Europe. He lived in Rome, Italy, from 1797 to 1838, and upon his return to Denmark was received as a living legend.
2. Trinity Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church. Chicago, Illinois. *Minutes 1872-1898.* ELCA Archives, Dubuque: PR 14.01 13-A (Minutes of a congregational meeting, July 6, 1873).
3. *Den danske Ev.-Luth. Trinitatis Menighed i Chicago. En Beretning om de første 25 Aar* (The Danish Evangelical-Lutheran Trinity Congregation in Chicago. A Report of the First 25 Years), Chicago: R. Egebergh, 1897, p. 38. This altar painting is now at the Danish Immigrant Museum, Elk Horn, Iowa.

4. Gethsemane Danish Lutheran Church, Oyens, Iowa. *Minutes, 1898-1955*. ELCA Archives. Dubuque: PR 15.16-B (Minutes from the annual meeting, March 19, 1904). (Translated from the Danish by the author.)
5. Den Danske Evangelisk-Lutherske Menighed i Menominee og Omegn, Mich. (The Danish Evangelical-Lutheran Congregation in Menominee and Surrounding Area), *Forhandlingsprotokol, 1892-1916*. ELCA Archives, Chicago: RG 12, Box 302 (Minutes from an extraordinary meeting of the congregation, February 18, 1894). (Translated from the Danish by the author.)
6. *Ibid.* (Minutes from the annual meeting on April 22, 1894). The painter's identity has not been established. (Translated from the Danish by the author.)
7. Zion Lutheran Church. Kenmare, North Dakota. *Sekretærens bog for Zions Kvindeforening* (The Secretary's book for Zion's Ladies' Aid), Newport, N.Dak., 1904- . Danish Immigrant Archives, Dana College, Blair, Nebraska: ZON 984, Box 1. The minutes of this committee are awkwardly written, especially when it comes to Danish spelling. (Translated from the Danish by the author.)
8. *Ibid.*
9. Vor Frelsers Danske Evang. Luth. Menighed i Jewell Junction, Iowa. *Forhandlingsprotokol for Vor Frelsers danske evangelisk lutherske Kvindeforening (I). 1898-1914* (Minutes of Our Savior's Danish Evangelical Lutheran Ladies' Aid), ELCA Archives, Dubuque [no reg. no]. The last installment was paid in October 1903. (Translated from the Danish by the author.)
10. P.S. Vig, *The First Scandinavian Evangelical Lutheran Church of Racine, Wisconsin. Review of its History Through a Period of 75 Years* [1926], unpaged. (First Scandinavian is identical to Emmaus.)
11. Next to nothing is known of William Jensen, in spite of the fact that he made another fine copy which is known to us today. "Christ Blessing a Small Child" was originally painted in 1873 by Carl Bloch for Holbæk Kirke on the Danish island of Zealand. The copy was formerly at the Chicago Children's Home, but is now part of the collection of the Danish Immigrant Museum, Elk Horn, Iowa.
12. Nazareth Dansk Ev. Lutherske Menighed, Hutchinson, Minnesota. *Forhandlingsprotokol for den danske evangelisk-lutherske Menighed i Hutchinson og Omegn* (Nazareth Danish Evangelical Lutheran Congregation, Hutchinson, Minnesota. Minutes of the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Congregation in Hutchinson and Surrounding Area). (by Adam Dan and J.M. Pagh). ELCA Archives, Chicago: PR 24.08-C. (Translated from the Danish by the author.)

    Lorentz Henningsen had taken classes at Kunstakademiet (The Royal Academy of Fine Arts) in Copenhagen (though this is not visible in his work), but gave up his artistic career after coming to the U.S.A. in 1882. Instead he became a pastor, working on the side as an art teacher, photographer and *con amore* painter. He worked together with the woodcarver Jes P. Smidt on altar pieces on several occasions.
13. Lorentz Henningsen Collection. ELCA Archives. Chicago: Group 10, PA 77. (Translated from the Danish by the author.)
14. *Emmaus Lutheran Church. Racine, Wisconsin, 1851-1976*. [1976], p. 10.
15. Anton L. J. Dorph (1831-1914). Danish painter of portraits, genre pictures and religious subjects. He was a very prolific producer of altar paintings.
16. A copy is in the Danish Immigrant Museum. Elk Horn, Iowa.

17. The Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1894 experienced a dramatic split which came about when a group of pastors and congregations (the majority) refused to underwrite a new constitution. A few years later, this splinter group, which was of Inner Mission inclination, joined the so-called Blair Church under the name, The United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church (known as the United Church). The Grundtvigians remained in The Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church (popularly called the Danish Church).

    The woodcarver Jes P. Smidt was involved in the decoration of more than 25 Danish-American churches, sometimes being in charge of the whole decoration scheme, sometimes supplying only a lectern or a frame for the altar painting. He worked for both Danish synods, and even executed a lectern and clergy chairs for the Baptist Church in Milltown, Wisconsin. See Edwin Pedersen, "Jes Smidt – Immigrant Woodcarver," In: *Church and Life* (Christmas 1988), p. 25-29.
18. Bredo Grandjean, *Biscuit efter Thorvaldsen* (Biscuit from Thorvaldsen), Copenhagen, Thorvaldsen's Museum, 1978, pp. 10,15. Thorvaldsen himself may have given verbal permission to copy his work, but nothing has been found in writing concerning his opinion on this subject. After the artist's death, the copyright became the property of Thorvaldsen's Museum.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 25. (Translated from the Danish by the author.)
20. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
21. Here cited from a promotional pamphlet for the *Ontario Dispatch* and *Scandia-Linien*, published by Laur. Madsens Bogtrykkeri [n.d.].
22. *Norden*. Ivar Kirkegaard, ed., Racine, Wisconsin. No. 9 (February 1904), p. 260.
23. The pastor Benedict Nordentoft wrote a protest entitled "Kirken og Reklamen" (The Church and Advertising), In: *Kirkelig Samler*. Harlan, Iowa, No. 8 (February 21, 1904), pp. 91-93.
24. *Katalog over Alterbilleder og Billedhuggerarbejder af A.H. Andersen*. (A Catalog of Altar Pictures and Sculptures by A.H. Andersen). Greenville, Michigan. Clinton, Iowa: D.P. Wendt Rasmussens Tryk, n.d. (Translated from the Danish by the author.)
25. Rasmus Andersen was one of three individuals sent out by "Udvalget for at fremme Evangeliets Forkyndelse blandt danske i Nordamerika" (The Commission to Further the Preaching of the Gospel Among Danes in North America) for short "Udvalget" (The Committee) in 1871 and a co-founder of the first Danish Church synod in America. He was a diligent writer and kept everything he wrote in duplicate. The complete set of his copy-books is now at the Danes Worldwide Archives in Aalborg, Denmark.
26. Rasmus Andersen, *Herrens Hus ved Alfarvej. Vor Frelsers danske Kirke gennem 50 Aar* (The Lord's House on the Highway. Our Savior's Danish Church Throughout 50 Years), Brooklyn, New York, 1929, *passim*.
27. Our Savior's Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church. Brooklyn, New York. *Minutes 1919-1927*. ELCA Archives, Chicago: PR 33.02-B Minutes from the annual meeting of the congregation. June 5, 1924. (Translated from the Danish by the author.)
28. *Ibid.* Minutes from the board meeting, January 3, 1922.
29. *Ibid.* Transcript of pastor Andersen's annual report for 1921-22. (Translated from the Danish by the author.)
30. This was a general attitude which, of course, did nothing to further the careers of the professional Danish artists who came to the U.S.A., and Johannes Gelert was a sad

example of this. He had had great success working on several public monuments, but from around 1910 his career floundered. In Gelert's last years Rasmus Andersen was his sole supporter and also had to take care of funeral arrangements when Gelert died in 1923.

31. Karma J. Nielsen, *St. Ansgar's Lutheran Church. 1880-1980*, Salinas, California: St. Ansgar's Lutheran Church, [1980], p. 20. The artist has not been identified, but his work is in the style of Niels Skovgaard.
32. There were, to be sure, examples of the opposite, especially in connection with the Grundtvigian colonization projects in Dannevang, Texas, and in Askov and Tyler in Minnesota.
33. Kristian Østergaard, *Nybyggere. Folkelivsbillede fra Amerika* (Pioneers. A Picture of Life in America), Copenhagen, 1891. Here quoted from Henrik Bredmose Simonsen, *Kampen om Danskheden* (The Struggle for Danishness), Århus, Denmark, Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 1990, p. 100.

Several immigration historians (among them Dag Blanck and Victor Greene) have argued that, while immigrant culture is implicit and unconscious in people's lives, ethnic identity, as an ideology based on notions of nationalism and history, is a construction invented by immigrant leaders (pastors, lodge presidents, writers, etc.) in an effort to enhance group visibility.

The Spoken Danish Language in the U.S.

From Interaction to Recollection

by Iver Kjær and Mogens Baumann Larsen

Introduction

A hundred years ago, tens of thousands of Danes lived in Danish rural settlements and urban colonies across the North American continent. Here the Danish language, in its many dialectal variations, was the basis of the interaction of everyday life. Today the Danish language in the United States is in the final stages of a continuous process which has reduced it to a recollected language used by individual speakers on special occasions. The interviews recorded by the authors over the past 25 years primarily elucidate these final stages, but they also convey knowledge of the early situation and, therefore, contribute to a comprehensive view of the linguistic assimilation process of the Danish-American immigrant.

Danish dialects in the U.S.

The great majority of the Danish emigrants who arrived in the United States during the period of mass emigration prior to 1914 had their roots in the Danish countryside. Consequently, their original language was a local, rural Danish dialect. As very few Danes brought with them any knowledge of English, they arrived in the United States with a Danish dialect as their only language.

In contrast, for example, to immigrants from Norway and Sweden, the Danes settled all over the American continent, and only a minority settled in urban or rural areas dominated by their own countrymen. Unnoticed by participants in the heated debate about the future of the Danish language in the U.S., the many scattered and isolated Danes lost their Danish language through a remarkably fast process of assimilation.

The few Danes who settled among their countrymen had access to Danish churches and institutions. It was via such institutions that they became involved in the dispute over the Danish language, or rather, they became

the objects of this dispute. For obvious reasons, the authors of the current article were forced to limit their study of American-Danish to the study of the language patterns of those Danes who settled in Danish enclaves and their descendants.

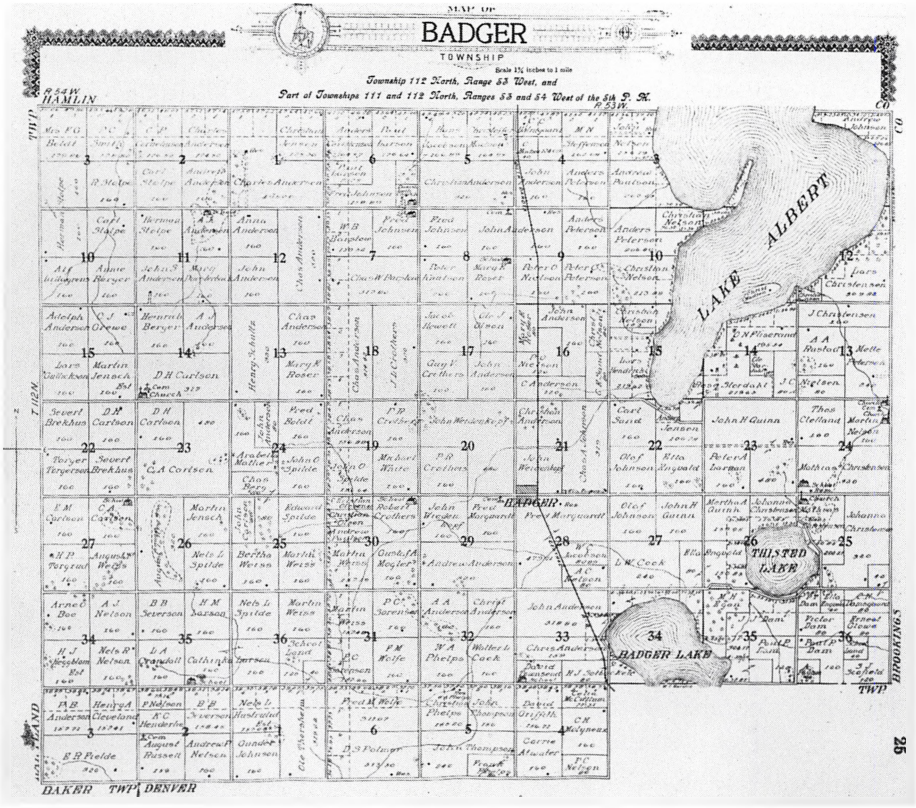
When speakers of local Danish dialects from many different areas in Denmark settled together, differences in the dialects spoken, for example, in western Jutland and on the island of Bornholm, often made communication difficult. A natural first consequence of this was the gradual demise of the most distinctive individual features of the various dialects. This led to an American-Danish variant of the Danish language not too different from "standard" Danish. Later on, dialectal differences motivated the gradual inclusion of elements of American English, resulting finally in the almost total abandonment of Danish.

The tendency to purge spoken Danish of the more divergent dialectal features also had to do with the ridicule to which those who spoke the more pronounced dialects were subjected. They were said to "talk plat Dane." The adjective "plat," meaning dialectal, is a derogatory word in both standard Danish and in Danish dialects. The following comment on the position of Danish dialects in Minnesota prior to World War I was made in 1966 by a minister born in 1886 in Bøstrup on the Danish island of Langeland who emigrated to the U.S. in 1911.

> The Danes in the area felt that it was rustic to speak the dialect, so they tried to get away from it, and instead they spoke a mixed language, and most continued to do this, so in the end they spoke neither Danish nor English, and that's the way they still speak (translated from the Danish).

Only rarely did a larger group of Danes who spoke the same local Danish dialect settle together in the United States. When such settlements were isolated from other Danish settlements, the original dialect had a chance of surviving beyond the Danish born generation. Two neighboring townships in South Dakota, Badger in Kingsbury County and Norden in Hamlin County managed to fulfill this criterion.

Two young families from Thy in northern Jutland settled in Badger in 1877, and over the next few decades they attracted some hundred settlers from Thy. In this community, the dialect of Thy remained the natural means of communication within the townships for two generations, and it is still used by a few members of the second American-born generation. Few new settlers from Thy have arrived in the 20th century, and the Thy dialect of this South Dakota community has remained that of the 19th century, preserving dialectal features which have disappeared in Thy. In 1976, a settler who had arrived in Badger in 1916 gave the following account in



Map of Badger Township. (From *Standard Atlas of Kingsbury County, South Dakota, including a Plat Book of the Villages, Cities and Townships of the County*. Geo. A. Ogle & Co., Chicago, 1909.

Danish with a strong Thy dialect with a bit of American English thrown in:

> *Informant*: Ja, det var meget rigtig gammel thybomål.
>
> *Interviewer*: Skete det ikke der kom danskere fra andre dele af Danmark? (Didn't you sometimes get settlers from other parts of Denmark?)
>
> *Informant*: Der var måske to-tre familier fra andre pladser, men ellers var det mestly, ellers var det most, mest oppe fra Thy af.
>
> *Interviewer*: Kunne I forstå dem der kom fra andre pladser? (Could you understand those who came from other places?)
>
> Informant: Åh ja, jo, det var jo itte dengang. Det eneste der kneb var jo at forstå – det var dem københavnere. De var itte lette at forstå.

The informant's use of "thybomål" in referring to the Thy dialect represents the normal usage of the Danish language. However, some of our informants who spoke a dialect used "thybo" to denote the dialect. In standard Danish "thybo" means "a person from Thy." The use of the term

A sod house in Nebraska. c. 1880.

to denote the dialect, rather than the person, is rather widespread among Danish-Americans and corresponds to the term "fynbo" to describe the dialect of the island of Fyn and "Dane" to mean Danish.[1] The informant in the following text (recorded in 1973) was a carpenter from Assens, Fyn. Born in 1881 he emigrated in 1906, and in our interview used the term "fynbo" to describe his own and his wife's dialect:

> *Interviewer*: Talte I så dansk sammen? (Did you speak Danish together?)
> *Informant*: Ja. Ja.
> *Interviewer*: Og det blev I ved med i alle årene? (And you continued to do that throughout the years?)
> *Informant*: Åh ja – ja – men det – det er a little bit – you know – fynbo, you know, vi taler en little bit difference, you know – ude fra landet, you know. Men we get along all right.

The use of Danish dialects in Danish-American communities was always a question of communication, never one of ideology. One informant, who was born in 1890 on the Danish island of Mors and emigrated in 1910, told us that he still knew the old dialect from Mors. When we encouraged him to speak the dialect he was unresponsive:

> Hvad forskel gør det? (What difference does it make?).

The same unsentimental attitude to Danish dialects is apparent in the

following comment made by the above-mentioned informant from Badger, South Dakota:

> Men det barnemad der, det har ingen betydning mere. For mig anyway. (That kid's stuff doesn't mean anything anymore. At least not for me.)

Standard Danish in the U.S.

Speakers of standard Danish were rare in 19th and early 20th century Denmark and most of those who did speak so-called standard Danish were civil servants. It was unusual for persons from that group to emigrate. Even Danish ministers who served congregations in the United States were largely recruited from among the immigrants themselves, and, consequently, spoke a dialect. Some of the ministers had, however, studied at the University of Copenhagen, and did speak standard Danish.

Among our informants there were a few speakers of standard Danish, and they represented a socially privileged group in Denmark. In 1982 we recorded a unique example of old-fashioned, upper-class Danish. The speaker was a lady born into a wealthy Danish family in the United States in 1899. As a young girl she had been sent to Copenhagen in order to have her spoken Danish groomed by the leading authority on eloquence, the famous Royal Theater actor, Karl Mantzius. This particular variant of spoken Danish was just as prestigious in a Danish context as it was odd and unfunctional in a Danish-American context.

Mixing and switching

Danish immigrants included certain elements of American English in their spoken language right from the beginning. These necessary "loan words" included, for example, the terms to describe their new physical and social environment, but they were given Danish noun suffixes. The creek became "kriken," the fence "fencen," the county "countiet," the caretaker "caretakeren," the graveyard "graveyarden," etc. Gradually and continually, the number of English words in the vocabulary of the Danish immigrants increased.

The majority of the Danes learned some English rather quickly and were able to keep the two languages separate from each other. Still other Danes, however, absorbed not only vocabulary, but elements of English syntax and linguistic morphology. Danish intonation, however, survived in the speech of even those most heavily influenced by American English.

The "heavy mixers" among our informants were all members of the Danish-born generation. They had all left Denmark as young adults with no knowledge of English, little formal schooling and limited linguistic

consciousness. Such informants are rarely found in the United States any longer, but we have several examples among our early recordings. The following informant was born in Kastrup, Denmark, in 1884 and emigrated with her Danish-born husband in 1912. She had lived on farms in several different states and had never been back to Denmark when our recording was made in 1966 at a Danish-American institution. She described her American-born son's knowledge of Danish as follows:

> *Informant*: Ja, he kan tale det, and he forstår alt, hvad jeg siger. And even my datter-law, she er born engelsk, you know, men she sitter og listener til os, så sagde: Ja, I kan ikke tale om mig anyhow, for jeg kan guesse mig til, hvad det er I siger.

It is hardly surprising that the American daughter-in-law could understand this variant of spoken Danish.

A mixture of elements from the Thy dialect and English are probably characteristic of the early days of the Badger/Norden settlement as heard in the following recording (made in 1973). The informant was a woman born in the settlement in 1898.

> *Interviewer*: Findes der nogen foreninger herude? (Are there any associations here?)
> *Informant*: Ja, der er jo da nogen foreninger, ja, der –
> *Interviewer*: Er I medlemmer af nogen af dem? (Are you members of any of them?)
> *Informant*: I æ kirke, der er der jo en circle. I belong til en af dem.

Another sort of mixing, where passages of one language alternate with passages of the other language, so-called code-switching, can be heard in a number of the recordings. We recorded the following in 1973. The informant, formerly an Iowa farmer, was born in Birkerød, Denmark, in 1887 and emigrated in 1907:

> *Informant*: And then – I had a girl-friend in Denmark, you know. Den skomager – skomager Carlsen datter fra Farum. So we went together in Denmark. And after I got started a farm, I wrote over to her to come over here. And she come over and we got married, and we were married for over sixty years. Ja. Ja, skomager Carlsen fra Farum.
> *Interviewer*: Hvor længe havde du været her, da din kone kom? (How long had you been here when your wife came?)
> *Informant*: Jeg had been over here seven years.
> *Interviewer*: Kunne du kende hende igen? (Did you recognize her?)
> *Informant*: Ja, she wrote to me – hun skrev til mig engang imellem og sendte et picture over til mig. Ja. For – for then I var going og møde hende ved stationen. Så jeg var – jeg stod på sidewalket der, og hun kom ud af stationen. Hun gik lige forbi mig. Ja, hun kendte mig ikke. Så jeg siger: Hallo, Frieda. Åh, er det dig, Oluf, siger hun så. Hun blev så lykkelig, at hun traf mig der, for she don't know anything over here, you know. So I said to her – jeg sagde til hende: Du er vel sulten? Ja, så vi went over på restauranten og fik dinner. And then vi went home to my farm.

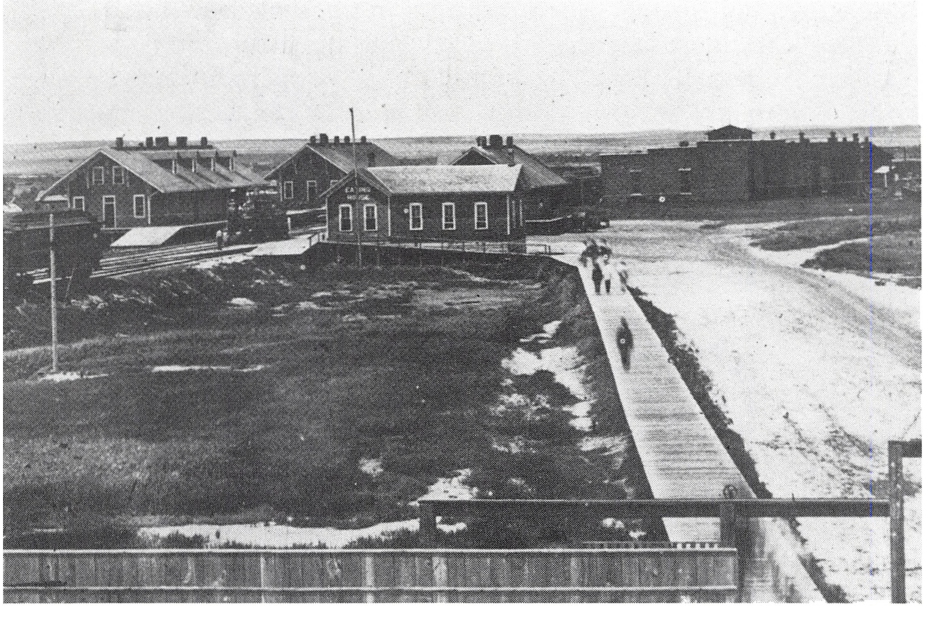
This story, told about a crucial event in the informant's life, seems gradually to have taken on an almost mythical quality.

The acquisition of English

The great majority of Danish immigrants to the United States, who had no knowledge of the English language when they arrived there, received no systematic training in the new language upon arrival. Most were, however, highly motivated to seek that most attractive goal: becoming linguistically qualified to function in American society. The means of attaining this goal were individual.

A bricklayer born in Aarhus, Denmark, in 1884 emigrated in 1910. We recorded his solution to the problem in 1973:

> *Informant*: Du skal tale engelsk. Jamen, det kan jeg jo ikke, siger jeg. Ja, men det er med at lære det og begynde og listen, listen to it og prøve på selv. Så det kom. Og så var der egentlig en anden ting, og det er at læse aviserne. Særlig – hvad kalder man det? – annoncerne. Da lærer du en hel del ved det, fordi du kan tænke dig til det, det er gerne illustreret, forstår du, du kan tænke dig til en hel del. Så jeg lærte meget fra, fra aviserne.



Burlington Railroad station and the Eating House. c. 1890. (Property of the Nebraska State Historical Society.)

One woman, who was born on the island of Mors in Denmark in 1885 and emigrated in 1912 had worked as a housekeeper. We interviewed her in 1973 and discovered that she had used a rather unorthodox, but effective, language textbook (a cookbook in English):

> *Interviewer*: Hvordan klarede du det med engelsk i begyndelsen? (How did you manage with English in the beginning?)
> *Informant*: Jeg havde ikke – jeg havde ikke meget – ubehageligheder. Da jeg først kom her over, så – jeg studerede kogebogen, for der kunne jeg. Jeg vidste, hvordan jeg skulle koge, så jeg kunne på den måde lære så mange forskellige ord, som jeg – Det var rigtig min største hjælp.
> *Interviewer*: Det var da en genvej. Hvordan når du gik i butikker og ellers havde noget med amerikanerne at gøre? (That [the cookbook] was a short cut. What about when you did the shopping and had other contact with the Americans?)
> *Informant*: Oh well, det var jo ikke så let til at begynde med, men jeg havde min bror, så det hjalp mig.

A number of women among the first generation Danes didn't feel the need to speak English strongly enough to overcome the language barrier. This group had already died some years before our study was made. We did, however, interview the sons of two such women, both born in the Badger/ Norden area (in 1901 and 1903, respectively) in 1976. They gave a convincing description of the situation faced by their mothers who were afraid to speak English for fear of being laughed at:

> *Informant 1*: Min far og Alfreds far de kunne snakke engelsk godt, men min mor og hans mor, de ville aldrig snakke engelsk.
> *Informant 2*: De kunne, men de ville itte.
> *Informant 1*: De var rædde for, til folk ville grine af dem, om de snakkede engelsk.

Among groups of Danish women in urban areas, the pressure of external communication helped to break down the language barrier. A woman born in 1892 in Spørring, Denmark, and who emigrated in 1913, described her change of attitude as follows when interviewed in 1973:

> *Informant*: Så fik vi en job i Minneapolis School of Music her i Minneapolis. Han var caretaker der i den skole. Vi var der i fem år. Og der begyndte jeg så at tale engelsk og lære sproget bedre. Jeg havde ikke taget nogen interesse i det, because jeg brød mig ikke om Amerika.
> *Interviewer*: Hvordan var det muligt at leve her uden at kunne engelsk i begyndelsen? (How was it possible to live here without English in the beginning?)
> *Informant*: Ja, jeg talte aldrig engelsk. Der var så mange danske emigranter her. Og mit hus var fuldt af danskere altid, så vi talte dansk altid. Vi talte næsten aldrig... Vi var så oppe der i Minneapolis i den her Minneapolis School of Music, og det var det bedste job, min mand nogen sinde har haft her i Amerika. Og jeg lidde det godt. Og jeg kom til at lære at tale engelsk up der. Vi talte engelsk.

Another woman who told us of her difficulty in learning English was born

in 1884 in Holløse, Denmark, and emigrated in 1923. The interview, in which she aggressively claimed that she was not the only one with difficulties, took place in 1976.

> *Informant*: Og det er pretty hard at lære at speake English perfect. Pretty hard. Lige så hard som det er for dem herovre. De cannot speak Danish. De cannot speak Danish!

Language death and recollected Danish

Census reports indicate that from 1940 to 1960, Danish suffered the sharpest loss of claimants (65.1%) of 23 mother tongues spoken in the United States during that period.[2]

Even though the gradual abandonment of Danish as a spoken language in Danish-American homes is a statistical fact, the Danish language continued to survive in the memories of some of the original users. Thus, Danish became a "recollected" language, revived for use on special occasions. Many of our interviews were themselves such occasions.

We conducted two interviews with one informant, who lived in a Danish-American institution surrounded by people of Danish background, with an interval of three years. At the second interview she told us that she had not used her Danish at all since speaking with us at the first interview.

For most Danish immigrants in the United States, the process leading either to the definitive death of their mother tongue or to its becoming a passive, recollected language was undramatic and often unconscious. However, some of the Danish church leaders in the United States, those who adhered to the principles of the Grundtvigian branch of the Lutheran church, were extremely concerned about this "loss" of language.

The rather relaxed attitude toward the inevitable process resulting in the loss of Danish is illustrated in the following passage. In 1973, we interviewed an 89-year-old plumber who had left Lindeballe, Denmark, at the age of three:

> *Interviewer*: Var hun også dansk din kone? (Was your wife also Danish?)
> *Informant*: Ja, hun var. Hun var født oppe i Wisconsin.
> *Interviewer*: Talte I så dansk sammen? (Did you speak Danish to each other?)
> *Informant*: Ja, vi gjorde certainly. De gamle – de her svigerforældre de levede hos os indtil den gamle bedstemor hun døde i fire og tredive. Men så talte vi måske for det meste engeisk efter det. De kunne jo ikke tale godt andet end dansk. Ja.
> *Interviewer*: Vil det sige, at du ikke har talt så meget dansk de senere år? (Does that mean you haven't spoken much Danish in later years?)
> *Informant*: Åh, vi taler, vi taler dansk iblandt. Ja, det går såmænd hip som hap med at...

The use of the word "måske" (perhaps) in referring to whether or not the

family spoke English or Danish indicates that this man did not attach special significance to the choice of language.

In 1973, a carpenter who was born in Vejle, Denmark, in 1885 and emigrated in 1907 gave the following matter-of-fact description of the situation:

> *Interviewer*: Talte du og din kone så dansk sammen? (Did you and your wife speak Danish to each other?)
>
> *Informant*: No. Vi talte mest engelsk. Og børnene vi havde, jeg havde to, to drenge og en pige, de lærte ikke rigtigt dansk. De kunne sige nogle få ord her og der, men vi talte altid engelsk hjemme.

When both parents were Danish, the old language was usually spoken at home until the eldest child started school. In the following case, however, (recorded in 1973) Danish was abandoned as soon as the children of the family began playing outside the home. The informant was born in 1899 in Nørre Nissum, Denmark, and emigrated in 1926.

> *Interviewer*: Hvilket sprog talte I med børnene? (What language did you speak with the children?)
>
> *Informant*: Ja, det, vi talte dansk med dem, da de var helt – altså i huset, men så snart de var store nok til at lege på gaden, så måtte vi forandre det, fordi at de kunne ikke tale dansk med os og engelsk med børnene ude på gaden. Så vi var nødt til at opgive det, og så talte vi engelsk efter det. Så var vi næsten nødt til det. ...Det er meget lettere at holde sig til en – et sprog, for ellers ens tankegang kan ikke holdes – sådan rigtig i orden, som den skulle, hvis man, hvis man blander de to for meget.

In this case the change into English seems to have been the result of a carefully made decision. The expression "næsten nødt til det" (almost forced to do it) suggests, however, the possibility that this was a later rationalization.

Outside the somewhat artificial situations of our interviews, recollected Danish has had – and to some extent still has – a more natural function as a medium for joking among old Danes and people of Danish background. The following interview of a woman born in 1894 in Hinnerup, Denmark, who emigrated in 1927 (recorded at a Danish institution in the United States in 1976) illustrates the use of Danish for joking:

> *Interviewer*: Din første mand snakkede du dansk med ham herovre? (What about your first husband; did you speak Danish with him over here?)
>
> *Informant*: Nej. Han havde altid – begge to vi lidte det sprog i det land vi lever. Og her på hjemmet taler vi også engelsk. Andet hvis vi joker lidt med hinanden, så bliver det dansk.

In some Danish families, the language survived in jokes told by Danish-speaking parents to English-speaking children who had only a passive and fragmentary knowledge of Danish. The following account (recorded in

1976) given by a woman born in 1889 in Brabrand, Denmark, who emigrated in 1910 illustrates this point:

> *Interviewer*: Talte I dansk sammen? (Did you speak Danish to each other?)
> *Informant*: Ja, hvem?
> *Interviewer*: Din mand og du? (You and your husband?)
> *Informant*: Åh ja, well, no det vil jeg ikke sige, vi gjorde. Men vi havde børn, og når først børnene, de begynder at gro op og gå i skole, så taler man ikke dansk mere. Men vi talte en hel del dansk. Jeg kunne da aldrig glemme det danske.
> *Interviewer*: Fik børnene lært at tale dansk? (Did the children learn to speak Danish?)
> *Informant*: Min ældste søn, han kan tale dansk, men det er fordi han er præst, og han gik – han var oppe på Dana – han tog – han tog dansk oppe der et år også. Så han kunne tale dansk. Men de to andre, de lærte aldrig rigtigt det danske sprog. Vi kunne da ikke tale, uden at de forstod det. De vidste, hvad vi talte om. Men de har aldrig talt dansk til os, uden for fun.

An inevitable consequence of the fast and relatively uncomplicated assimilation of the Danish immigrants was the almost total disappearance of actively spoken Danish in the United States. The survival of recollected Danish in the form of a few phrases used for joking in small, closed circles can only be thought of as marginal use.

Spoken Danish in a database – storage and analysis

The above samples of spoken Danish were extracted from our database of Danish-American interviews. We recorded specimens of spoken American-Danish from 1966 to 1982, and our material consists of 230 taped interviews which are currently being transcribed and organized in a textbase. About half of the texts (well over 10,000 lines of dialogue) are already in the database.

The recorded samples represent the language found in most of the larger Danish settlements in the United States with particular emphasis on the midwestern states of Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota, Minnesota and Illinois. Most of the informants represented the Danish-born generation, and the oldest of them were born in the early 1870s. It also proved possible to locate and record the speech of some Danish-speaking people of the first American-born generation, as well as a few persons in the second American-born generation; the youngest of the latter group was born in 1939.

Use of the computer for linguistic analysis makes exhaustive descriptions of the texts possible. The existence of a database makes it possible to produce concordances of selected phenomena in the text corpus as a whole, or in specific parts of it.

In the following concordance, all occurrences in the database of the words: "vej," "way" and "måde" were selected for semantic analysis.

vej, noun. The American-Danish word "vej" has the same meaning as the Danish word "vej." The concordance shows that the American-Danish "vej" is sometimes also given the English meaning of "way." The Danish word "måde" covers this latter meaning. ...*altid set på det den vej, at hvis du køber ting*... (informant 86c, interview 1, line 126).

The American influence on American-Danish is also seen in the following direct translations of American idioms: "no vej" (informant 86c, interview 1, line 127) ← "no way," and "vej ud" ← "way out" (informant 99b, interview 1, line 120).

Such examples of Danish words used with American meanings are numerous among speakers of American-Danish. When the same constructions occur in the language of several different informants, they can be considered established elements of American-Danish usage. A few examples will be analyzed in the following:

præsident, noun. In 20th century standard Danish the term "præsident" is used only to refer to the primary political leader of a republic or a few high-ranking officials. In American-Danish "præsident" is also used to indicate the head of a company or a club, etc. who would be called "the president" in American English. In the following segment from the database: "en telefonopringning fra vores præsident" (a telephone call from our president), the context does not suggest that the call is from the White House, as would be expected by a speaker of standard Danish.

kalder, verb. The American-Danish sentence: "Vi har folk, der kalder her" is in all formal respects correct Danish. Nevertheless, it has no meaning to speakers of standard Danish unless they also have some knowledge of English. From the context it is evident that in this sentence "kalder" means "to pay a call," a meaning the word "kalder" does not have in standard Danish.

rendte, verb (past tense). In the American-Danish sentence: "Den mand i Lake Norden der rendte den bitte – small – bitte butik" the Danish verb "rendte" is given a meaning corresponding to the English verb "ran" in the idiom: "he ran a store."

rejste, verb (past tense). In the sentence: "...efter hendes mama døde, så kom hun til Danmark, og onkel Jens rejste hende," "rejste hende" is modeled on the American English "raised her." This meaning of "rejste" is unknown in standard Danish.

stikker sammen, verb + adverb. In the subordinate clause: "at de altid stikker sammen i kolonien," the combination "stikker sammen" is modeled on the American English "stick together." This meaning of "stikker sammen" is unknown in standard Danish.

nykommer, noun. This American-Danish word is modeled on the English "newcomer." The word in standard Danish is "nyankommen."

Data-linguistic computer programs also make several other types of linguistic analysis possible. We have, for example, also studied the regular co-occurrences of elements of American English and Danish in our American-Danish texts.

```
output from CLOC mark 2L run on  3-MAR-92 at 14:47:15
------------------------------------------------------
concordance of 1 nodes
======================
node  vej  occurs 39 times
77a     1  20                      der. Det var en fin vej. Og vi havde ingen expences
80a     1 475                   jeg skal kikke ned den vej - og så ville jeg -. Jeg
80a     1 682                  vi arbejdede jo ved den vej der. 80a: Ja det er
85b     1 102      og well, forskellige foreninger den vej. Og havde altid en office
86c     1 111         for somebody somewhere else, den vej hvor de ville. Enten de
86c     1 126                     altid set på det den vej, at hvis du køber ting
86c     1 127                     kan betale og ser no vej til at betale, så kan
86c     1 129                     på nøgent på det den vej i min tid, men --
87b92b 1  14      Frederiksberg Alle og Henrik Ibsens Vej, der var en bicycle-factory
87b92b 1 241        hersens diesel-motors, det eneste vej du kunne komme den vej
87b92b 1 242                  vej du kunne komme den vej, det var, når du flapped
87b92b 1 336                   så - vi gik et stykke vej, da var der en japanesisk
92d     3  30                 got stuck in half, halv vej ud af vinduet, and jeg
93d     1 311                gik jo temmelig godt den vej. 93d: Ja, vi sang danske
93d     1 485                var lidt imellem dem den vej der. De indre-missions, de
93d     1 487                     have en god tid den vej. 93d: Næh, de havde ikke
96b     1  59                      så gået rundt om æ vej for at tage politiet en
96b     1  76                      og så gik de deres vej. Men de snakkede slet ikke
96b     1  93                 han skulle gå den anden vej med æ tog til Danmark
96i04e 1  82           jernbanen gik igennem. Og samme vej med Norden. Det var begyndelsen
98a     1  58                jeg var kommet et stykke vej, så rejste de dem op
98a     1  61                   i, det var det eneste vej for mig, det var at
98a     1 103                var nu temmelig slem den vej, at han holdt vældigt på
99a     1   6                 om vi kunne finde vores vej ud af det. Og jeg
99b     1 120               ville blive en anden farm vej ud, jeg fik a kurv
99b     1 345                    eng var en halv mils vej fra a gård. Jeg var
99b     2  76                   er linier langs med a vej. Det går helt ned til
01a03a 1  56                    gik de hen den halve vej og så mødte de der
01a03a 2   8                  byggede han den op den vej, og så hvor der var
01a03a 3  28                    bror. Se det var den vej det had travelled, så a
06d     1  39                 jeg kører ikke den samme vej, som jeg plejer at køre
06d     1  56                       - og der er ingen vej uden om. Så det var
10a     1  59                    andre, så det er den vej. 15a: Hetland, Syd Dakota.
15a     1  17           tog længe. Han arbejdede hans vej her. Han arbejdede i Chicago
15a     2   8          nabolag, men han arbejdede hans vej efter han kom til Amerika
15a     2  36                    det,nej, lige en kort vej fra hvor min far var
21a     1 134                  det første barn var på vej. Hun følte ikke særligt godt
30a     1   9               til Canada og arbejde vores vej igennem og sidenhen til staterne
```

Concordance of the word "vej." The first column shows: identity of the informant, number of interview and textline. (Photo: the authors.)

The tutelage that failed

In our interviews, the Danish-American immigrants themselves demonstrated how spoken Danish had in the United States been reduced to a sporadically recollected language. As mentioned previously, this process was often an undramatic and unconscious one. A few of the early immigrants, however, primarily some Lutheran ministers, wished to control the national and linguistic development of their countrymen. Although the efforts of these self-appointed guardians of national identity proved to be in vain, they stimulated a fierce debate which forms an important chapter in the history of the Danes in the United States.[3]

In the 1880s, a conflict developed between two factions of the Danish church in the United States. There was a Danish nationalist movement with close ties to the Grundtvigian Lutheran church in Denmark and a fundamentalist movement connected with the Inner Mission branch of the Lutheran church. The final schism came in 1894, when the church in the

United States split into two synods. The Danes in the nationalist synod were popularly referred to as "the happy Danes," while those in the fundamentalist synod were called "the holy Danes."

A central figure among the happy Danes was F.L. Grundtvig who served as the pastor of a church in Clinton, Iowa from 1883 to 1900. He was the youngest son of N.F.S. Grundtvig, an influential reformer of the church in Denmark. F.L. Grundtvig and his followers maintained that Danish immigrants should strive to learn English while, at the same time, preserving their Danish. In 1887 they founded the organization, Dansk Folkesamfund (Danish Folk Society) and stated their purpose as follows:

> It is our firm conviction that we can become the best American citizens by continuing to be Danish.[4]

One of the happy Danes was the leading minister and author, Kristian Østergaard (1855-1931), who fervently advocated the inseparableness of Christianity and Danish nationalism as manifested in the choice of language.

> It is one of our spiritual goals to use our mother tongue and pass it on to our children. Our mother tongue is the blood bond connecting our spiritual lives to the people from which we are descended. ...All that which is noble and good that we can provide for ourselves in this manner, as a branch of the Danish people, will also benefit America, it will enrich and in time become an integral part of American spiritual life.[5]

Østergaard's rather pompous words had held little meaning for most of the first-generation immigrants with whom we spoke – men and women who had spent their early years in the United States engaged in a daily struggle for survival. A number of those we spoke with in the Badger/Norden area remembered Østergaard's ministry there from 1906 to 1913. His total rejection of American English elements in the Danish of the immigrants was felt to be out of tune with the fundamental conditions of immigrant life and language.

Among the holy Danes, minister and historian Peter S. Vig (1854-1929) was a fervent opponent of the ideas of Grundtvig and Østergaard. In 1899 he characterized the attitude of his own group:

> We are Danes, unfortunately, and probably cannot avoid being that to a certain extent as long as we live; but it is our desire, and we shall work toward it, to be as little Danish as possible and to become as American as we can to the best of our ability; and if we do not quite succeed in this, it will be that much better for our children: what we strive for, they will achieve![6]

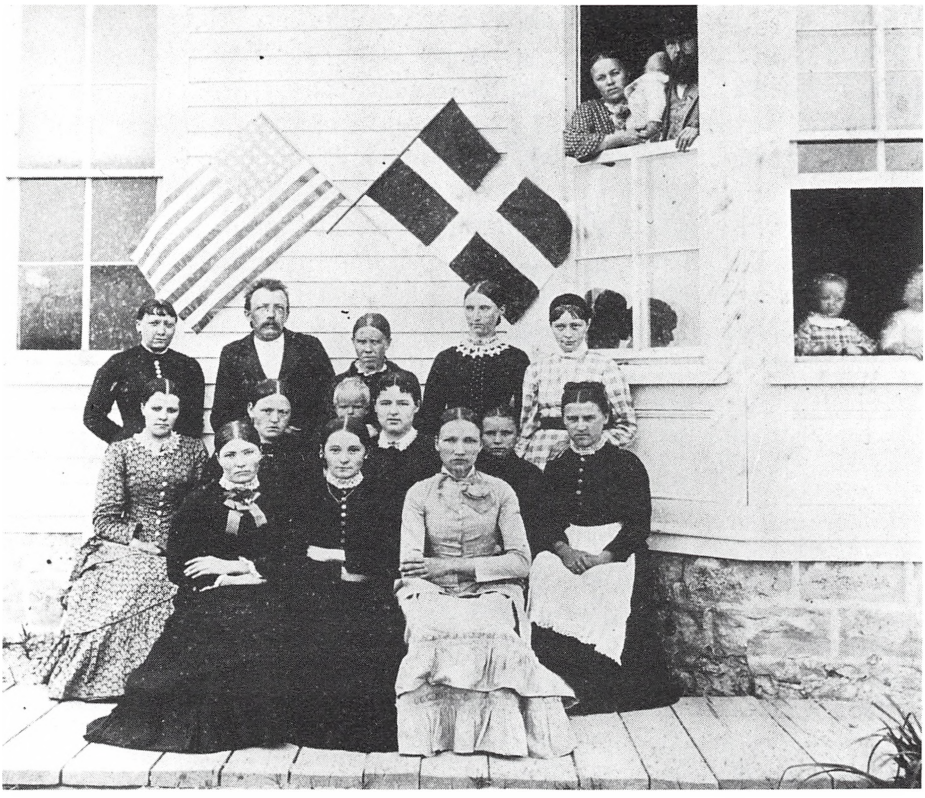
Some thirty years later, Vig looked back at the schism. His views were untempered by the years and his description of developments is characterized by his participation in them:

> But it was not only the Adventists and Baptists I had to fight, but also a party which arose within the Danish church. They were Grundtvigians, whose leader was a son of Grundtvig himself, and who, at that time, was minister in Clinton, Iowa. He organized a society called the "Danish Folk Society" and strove to establish lodges in the Danish congregations all over the United States. This society was in full harmony with the old Grundvigian doctrine, "first man, then Christian." That is, Danish folk must first be good nationalists before they can become good Christians. Opposing and abhorring this doctrine with all my heart, I wrote against it in the Danish papers. I loved the Danish language and literature dearly, but I had come to the United States to become an American, and here my children were born and brought up. How could I make Danish nationalists of them? I became the black sheep in the eyes of all the Grundtvigians, who were laying the beginning of the causes that split the Danish church. I now saw clearly that the Grundtvigians really opposed our dear Bible, the center and banner of the church, and put love of Denmark and Danish literature, old and new, in its place. A great and fierce disagreement about the Bible and the Lutheran confessions arose in the church.[7]

P.S. Vig represented the combination of fundamentalist fanatism and down-to-earth realism typical of many of the holy Danes.

In the generation after F.L. Grundtvig, Østergaard and Vig, the young, American-born, "happy Dane," C.A. Stub (1891-1974), who was later to become a minister himself, recognized and described without sentiment the decay and failure of the Grundtvigian ideology of Danish nationalism in the United States:

> We cannot live on memories; our life will die if we are to be nourished by them only. When we examine the Danish intellectual life as it is presented to us by the majority of the leading Danish men, we cannot help but discover, sooner or later, that it to a large extent consists of memories. They are good in themselves, and they were once life for our fathers; but they cannot become life for us. The intellectual and cultural life which was lived in Denmark twenty and thirty years ago has now become history. ...We may hear about it and learn from it; but to live it is doubtless impossible for us. We cannot become a part of it.[8]



Teacher Kristian Østergaard (2nd from the left in the back row) with participants in the summer course at Ashland Folk High School, Ashland, Michigan. In the top window the founder of the school, Hans Jørgen Pedersen, with his wife, Ane Marie, and their baby. c. 1884.

In 1930, a few years after Stub's categorical statement on behalf of the younger generation, there were still 178,944 persons in the U.S. who, according to Bureau of the Census statistics, considered Danish to be their mother tongue. In 1933, the editor of the *Yearbook for Danish-born Americans in USA*, Hugo Ryberg, puts this figure into perspective by stating that it is not, at the moment, necessary to fear the death of the language.[9]

The majority of the older members of Danish church congregations spoke Danish in the mid-1930s, and it was, therefore, still necessary to teach Danish at the Danish-American seminaries. One of the women we interviewed said (in a passage quoted above) that her American-born son, a Lutheran minister, spoke Danish because he had learned it at Dana College while preparing for seminary.

At this time the happy Danes belonged to what was called the Danish

Church, whereas the holy Danes belonged to the United Church. There are detailed statistics outlining the Americanization of both churches. A pattern emerges if one looks at the number of services held in Danish. While the Danish Church held 2,213 services in Danish in 1936, in 1946 this number had fallen to 1,164. In the much larger United Church, there was an even more rapid decline, from 3,192 services in Danish in 1934 to 494 services in 1948.[10] The decline was especially marked after the Second World War. The change in the language used in the churches undoubtedly reflects a comprehensive change in the status of Danish in the families – once a language of interaction, it had become a recollected language.

The idealistic endeavors of the Grundtvigian ministers to influence the linguistic development of the immigrants left no permanent impression on the linguistic practice of the immigrants and their descendants. Assimilation was inevitable.[11]

Notes

1. A similar usage has not been described in studies of Danish dialects in Denmark, but it is familiar from recordings of speakers of various Jutland dialects, e.g. "at snakke vendelbo" (speak the dialect of Vendsyssel, "vendelbomål"), "at snakke alsinger" (speak the dialect of Als, "alsisk"). Also a single example from the Danish island of Ærø has been recorded: "at snakke ærøbo" (ærøsk). For this information we thank Associate Professor Inge Lise Pedersen at the Institute for Danish Dialect Research at the University of Copenhagen.
2. Joshua A. Fishman, *Language Loyalty in the United States*, The Hague, 1966, p. 44, Table 2.4. Iver Kjær and Mogens Baumann Larsen, "Problems and Observations of American-Danish," In: *The Nordic Languages and Modern Linguistics*, vol. 3, Austin, Texas, 1978, p. 189.
3. Henrik Bredmose Simonsen, *Kampen om Danskheden. Tro og Nationalitet i de Danske Kirkesamfund i Amerika* (The Struggle for Danishness. Beliefs and Nationality in Danish Churches in America), Århus, Denmark: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 1990.
4. Quoted in Henning Høirup, *Frederik Lange Grundtvig*, Copenhagen, 1955, p. 95 (translated from the Danish).
5. Kristian Østergaard, "Vort Modersmaal" (Our mother tongue), In: *Danmark og det Danske Folk* (Denmark and the Danish People), Evald Kristensen, ed., Omaha, Nebraska, 1920, p. 20.
6. P.S. Vig, *Danske i Amerika. Nogle Blade af den Danske Udvandrings Historie, særlig den ældre* (Danes in America. Some Pages of Danish Emigrant History, Especially the Early History), Blair, Nebraska, 1899, p. 3.
7. P.S. Vig, "A brief sketch of my life as preparatory for the ministry," In: G.B. Christiansen, *Recollections of our Church Work*, Blair, Nebraska, 1930, pp. 232-233.
8. C.A. Stub, In: *Ungdom* (a magazine published by the Danish-American Young People's League, Omaha, Nebraska) April 15, 1922, p. 23. Quoted in translation from Paul C. Nyholm, *The Americanization of the Danish Lutheran Churches in America*, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1963, p. 289.

9. *Yearbook for Danish-born Americans in USA*, Hugo Ryberg, ed., Copenhagen, 1933, p. 7.
10. Paul C. Nyholm, *op.cit.*, p. 306-307, Tables 28 and 29.
11. The insistence on a stable linguistic system and a stable norm behind the usage of immigrant language does not correspond to the ever fluctuating realities in the language of our informants. Some prominent scholars try to use their descriptions to support the preservation of their minority languages. Behind the scholarly efforts lies the futile tutelage of a new generation.

    Iver Kjær and M. Baumann Larsen, "De messy ting. Om kodeskift i dansk-amerikansk," (The messy things. About a change of codes in Danish-American), In: *Festskrift til Kristian Hald*, Copenhagen 1974, pp. 421-430.

    Iver Kjær and M. Baumann Larsen, "A study of the vocabulary in an American-Danish community," In: *From Scandinavia to America*. (Odense University Studies in History and Social Sciences, vol. 103) Odense, Denmark 1987, pp. 265-266.

    The field work in the United States and Canada resulting in the establishment of the American-Danish database was supported by grants from the Carlsberg Foundation.

Peter Sørensen Vig – Danish-American Historian

by Peter L. Petersen and John Mark Nielsen

Peter Sørensen Vig (1854-1919).

Anyone who studies the history of Danes in America soon encounters the writings of Peter Sørensen Vig. Between 1899 and 1921, Vig published six books on various aspects of the Danish immigrant experience in the United States, wrote or co-authored more than 400 pages of text for the first volume of *Danske i Amerika* (Danes in America), published in 1908 and 1909, and authored several smaller works, including one of the first histories in English of the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Later generations of historians have been quick to acknowledge Vig's pioneering role. In 1963 Paul Nyholm described Vig as "the most important writer of Danish American history..." Two decades later, Erik Helmer Pedersen asserted that Vig did "more than any other person to preserve the historical inheritance of Danish immigrants."[1]

Preparation for the ministry

Peter Sørensen Vig was born November 7, 1854, near Egtved, Jutland, the first child in a poor farm family. Influenced by his pious mother, Vig had decided while still a lad that he wanted to be a minister, and thus during many of the lonely days he spent on the heath of Jutland herding livestock, he practiced for his career by preaching sermons to the cows. "I never had a better audience...," he once recalled.[2] In 1872 Vig took a first step toward fulfilling his dream when, aided by a small stipend, he enrolled at nearby Askov Folk High School. He studied intermittently at Askov for the next five years before serving a 16 month tour of duty with the Danish Army in a garrison at Fredericia. At the age of twenty-five, he could see that his limited formal education and lack of money were imposing obstacles in his path toward a university education and the ministry. "This discouraged as well as somewhat angered me, and I decided to go to America and see if I could not get into the ministry in a quicker and better way."[3]

Traveling on money borrowed from a friend, Vig departed Denmark on September 24, 1879. He arrived in Chicago some three weeks later and shortly found a job teaching religion to children whose parents were members of a Danish church. Because this did not pay well, he soon sought different employment. For a time he worked as a tailor's assistant pressing vests, but when that business slowed, he tried other occupations, including a stint as a construction laborer in the Chicago sewer system. Eventually he found a position as a packer for a large wholesale hardware firm. Vig lived frugally, saving much of his salary and sending it to a minister in Denmark for safekeeping.

Although Vig never wavered from his goal of eventually returning to Denmark for a theological education, sometime during his stay in Chicago he decided that his future ministry would be among the Danes who had

emigrated to the United States. Consequently, he used every opportunity to learn and practice English. "I always had my English book along," Vig remembered, "and when I found a word I could not pronounce, I marked it and asked one of my American co-workers to pronounce it for me." And as if to confirm his intentions to reside in the United States, Vig became engaged in the spring of 1882 to the daughter of the tailor for whom he had worked.[4]

A few weeks later, he left for Denmark. There he applied to the directors of the "Commission to Further the Preaching of the Gospel Among Danes in North America" for admission to their program at Askov. After two years of study, including work at Uldum and Copenhagen, Vig passed the Commission's theological examinations. Although obviously pleased to have successfully completed the Commission's program of study, Vig's inability to secure a theological degree from the University of Copenhagen was not easily forgotten, and throughout the remainder of his life he harbored, to use the words of Enok Mortensen, a "subconscious resentment toward university-trained pastors..."[5] The circumstances surrounding Vig's education also reinforced his decision to cast his lot with his countrymen outside of Denmark. Having secured free return passage to the United States by agreeing to serve as a ship's chaplain, Vig set sail from Denmark on the emigrant vessel *Hekla* of the Thingvalla Line on May 14, 1884. Except for a brief visit in 1901, he would never return to the land of his birth.

After stopping in Chicago to marry Karen Marie Christensen, the tailor's daughter, Vig journeyed on to Elk Horn, Iowa, where he had secured a teaching position at the first Danish folk high school in the United States. The following year he was officially ordained in the Danish Lutheran Church in America and began his formal ministry as pastor of a small congregation at Bowman's Grove [now Bethlehem Lutheran Church at Jacksonville] some eight miles to the northwest of Elk Horn.[6] During the next three years Vig engaged in a series of lively debates with representatives of Baptist and Seventh Day Adventist churches which were gaining adherents among the Danish settlers in the area. This war of words, in which Vig gave no quarter, helped shape his image as a staunch defender of orthodox Lutheranism, and eventually projected him into the middle of theological dispute which eventually rent asunder the Danish Lutheran Church in America.[7]

A church divided

The conflict between Danish church people in the United States was largely an outgrowth of divisions within the Church of Denmark. During the

middle part of the 19th century, followers of N. F. S. Grundtvig and a more pietistic group called the Inner Mission often clashed over a variety of doctrinal issues, especially the question of whether the Bible was the Word of God. Not surprisingly, Danish emigrants brought this controversy with them and it soon spread into their church in America. With pastors of Grundtvigian and Inner Mission persuasion holding membership, the relative freedom of the American religious environment made schism a real and disturbing possibility. In part, then, concerns about widening, already existing, disputes explain the reluctance of the Danish Church in America to open its own theological seminary. Not until 1886 did it finally act, and then only after encouragement from the Commission in Denmark.[8]

The Seminary opened early in 1887 in a former folk school building at West Denmark, near Luck, Wisconsin. The seminary's president and only professor was Pastor Thorvald Helveg, a graduate of the University of Copenhagen. If the school was to grow, it would need additional faculty and Helveg, with the goal of maintaining a theological balance within the church body, urged the appointment of a professor sympathetic to the Inner Mission. The call went to Vig and he moved to West Denmark to teach at the Seminary and to serve as pastor of St. Peter Lutheran Church at nearby North Luck. In a letter to a friend written soon after he arrived, Vig described his duties "at our little seminary up here in the quiet, peaceful Wisconsin woods." The work, he said, "makes heavy demands on my limited abilities and I do not know if I will be able to give satisfaction in the long run. But in the case of necessity, we do the best we can."[9] No matter how peaceful Vig initially found life at this "school in the woods," troubles were brewing in the church body at large.

Although many issues were debated, frequently in the pages of church or independent newspapers, as Enok Mortensen observes, "...inevitably nearly all polemics converged on differing views of the Bible as the Word of God, and since the views in this area were sharply divergent, there was little hope of unity."[10] It soon became impossible for strong personalities like Helveg and Vig to remain silent, and strife spread into the seminary. Some students sided with Helveg, others rallied behind Vig. Despite repeated and often complicated attempts at compromise, harmony could not be restored to the Church or its Seminary. During the Church's 1891 convention, Vig read from a short prepared statement. "Since I cannot remain in my position at the Seminary without giving approval to teachings that I view as neither Lutheran nor Christian," he told the assembled delegates, "I hereby resign my position."[11] Shortly thereafter Helveg likewise resigned. Additional efforts at compromise eventually failed, and the Seminary closed its doors at the end of the 1891-92 school year.

In his carefully balanced history of the ill-fated school, Thorvald Hansen

correctly concludes "that any attempt to attribute the demise of the Seminary to a personality conflict between these two men is as fallacious as it is simplistic."[12] Nevertheless, Vig seemingly went out of his way to point out that his differences with Helveg involved more than theological matters. "He [Helveg] was a minister's son from Denmark, a graduate of the University of Copenhagen. I was a farmer's son who had merely sniffed at the phial of learning in the authorized pharmacy. He was a Grundtvigian; I, half Inner Mission. He was a Danish Dane; I was a Danish-American."[13]

Trinity Seminary

The schism with the Danish Church was complete by 1894. That year Vig returned to Elk Horn where he opened a theological department for the newly formed Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America, the so called "North" church. Two years later the North Church merged with the "Blair" church, a group of like-minded immigrants who had founded their own church in 1884, to form the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church (UDELC).[14] The Blair church had been operating Trinity Seminary at Blair, Nebraska, since 1884 and it was decided that Vig would become the school's president and major professor. Thus in the fall of 1887 Vig, his wife, and their six sons (a daughter had died in infancy) moved to Blair.

Vig's first months at Trinity Seminary were scarred by the deaths from diphtheria of two of his sons and the subsequent death of their mother. "We were all strong and well when we moved," he wrote years later about his early days at Trinity, "but before the month of November came to an end, two of our little boys were in their grave and their mother was marked by death. That was the beginning of the darkest and heaviest period of my life; my beard and hair turned gray, as they have been ever since.[15]

With his wife terminally ill, Vig was now almost totally responsible for four young children and his elderly father who had recently emigrated from Denmark. Fearing his family obligations would not allow him to handle all the duties associated with his position at Trinity, he secured a leave of absence in 1899 and returned to the parish ministry at Elk Horn. On May 11, 1900 his wife died. In August of the following year, the forty-six year old Vig married Karen Oline Olsen, a woman twenty years his junior who had helped him and his children through their recent tragedy. To this union were born seven additional sons and a daughter.[16]

In 1902 Vig and his family once more moved to Blair where he resumed his position as Professor of Theology and President of Trinity Seminary. In July 1905, after charging a majority within the United Church with leading the synod "in a fanatical methodistic and un-Lutheran direction," Vig re-

signed both posts.[17] A few months later he accepted a call to his old congregation, St. Peter Lutheran Church at North Luck, Wisconsin, where he remained for nearly four years. But in the summer of 1909, members of the educational boards of the church unanimously elected Vig Professor of Theology and President of Trinity Seminary. Vig consented to their wishes, and for the third and final time he moved to Blair where he taught at Trinity until his retirement at the age of 71 in early 1927.

By one count, 132 students at Trinity got all or a part of their theological education under Vig. Eighty-six of them graduated and most were ordained in the ministry of the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church.[18] Vig set high standards for himself and his students. Upon entering the classroom he would immediately begin to lecture while writing the same material on the blackboard. According to William Christensen, who in the 1950s interviewed several of Vig's former pupils, "the students were required to copy the writings in their notebooks – a difficult task, for Vig wrote rapidly, and the only relief came when the chalk broke."[19] Quite stern in class, Vig did not encourage questions or discussion. "Thus it is" and no one dared challenge his presentation. As John M. Jensen has observed, Vig and his colleagues "did not encourage the students to think for themselves. They expected them to accept what was taught at the seminary without asking questions." But no matter how one views Vig's teaching methods, there can be little doubt that his impact on the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church was great. More than any other individual, he gave the early church a spiritual direction, and his influence lived on through his students and many religious writings long after his death.[20]

An interest in history

Vig's second important legacy developed out of his interest in the history of Danish-Americans. Just why Vig became fascinated with the story of the Danes in the New World is a matter of conjecture. Einar Vig believes that his father "embraced" history and genealogy not only as "his hobby, his sport, his pastime," but also out of a sense of "obligation" to "his fellow countrymen in America." John M. Jensen is of the opinion that Vig identified with Danish immigrants. "He was proud of their accomplishments in the New World. Many of them had come to America as poor young men. He himself had come to America as a poor young man and therefore felt a kinship with the pioneers from Denmark in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries."[21] Whatever the reason, there can be little doubt that early on Vig made a distinction between Danish and Danish-American history.

"Fathers have fought, mothers have wept, in the building of a new home in a new land," he wrote in 1890. "Their history deserves preservation. The

sweat and toil of the pioneers must not be forgotten." To this end he proposed the creation of an archives where materials relative to the history of Danes in America would be preserved until "our historian, whoever he may be," appears. Among the items to be collected, Vig suggested, were biographies, "especially of the pioneers," and information about Danish settlements, congregations, sects, societies and publications. Vig volunteered to serve as archivist and asked people to send the data to him at the West Denmark Seminary.[22] It is not known how much material Vig was able to collect before the Seminary closed, but it is clear that his idea of a central archives for Danish-American history was a casualty, albeit at the time a seemingly small one, in the religious wars which were dividing Danes in the new world.

Nevertheless Vig continued to seek out information. When O. N. Nelson published in 1897 the second volume of his *History of the Scandinavians and Successful Scandinavians in the United States*, Vig's name appeared in the list of "Contributors and Revisers."[23] Beginning in 1892, Vig periodically wrote historical articles for *Danskeren*, a newspaper published by his friend, Jens N. Jersild. In 1899 these articles were brought together and published under the title of *Danske i Amerika*. Largely biographical in nature, the 109-page book also contained information on Danish settlement patterns he had gleaned from the 1890 census. In an apologia at the end, Vig wrote: "It is actually against my will that this little book is published, for I know only too well that it is incomplete in more ways than one. But perhaps it may arouse interest for the important history in which it is a first faltering attempt, the history of our people in the United States."[24]

Vig's hopes that this book would awaken an interest in Danish-American history were soon fulfilled when a Minneapolis newspaper publisher and bookdealer, Christian Rasmussen, announced plans to publish a massive two-volume work on the Danes in America. Vig was assigned Danish-American history prior to 1860. For Vig it was a labor of love. His return to the parish ministry in Wisconsin in late 1905 gave him sufficient "leisure time" to conduct the necessary research and do the writing. Not only did he read widely in English, Danish and German language sources, but he also sent hundreds of letters seeking information about Danish immigrants. The result was 349 pages of published text beginning with the Viking discovery of the New World and concluding with a section on Danes in America 1851-1860. In addition to this contribution, which was largely biographical, Vig teamed with I.M. Hansen to write a 49 page history of the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church for part II of the first volume of *Danske i Amerika*. For a variety of reasons, including the fact that this book bore the same title as Vig's 1899 work, he has often been listed as its author or editor. In fact, he was neither. Nor did he have any direct connection

The Dana College and Trinity Seminary campus from the southeast, c. 1912. The home of P.S. Vig is in the foreground. (Photo: Dana College.)

with the second volume of this work, which was published in installments between 1916 and 1918.

More historical writing

Following his return to Blair in 1909 Vig continued his historical writings. In 1911 he published a brief history of Trinity Seminary in conjunction with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the school's founding. The next year he contributed an article on the UDELC to *Den Danskfødte Amerikaner* (The Danish-born American), edited by Max Henius and published by Gyldendal in Copenhagen. The occasion of the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco brought forth Vig's next major work. In the Foreword to *Den Danske Udvandring til Amerika* (Danish Emigration to America), Vig explained that this book, "a humble contribution," was an effort to ensure that "Danes living in America might be represented at this auspicious event..." Vig then went on to make a distinction between Danes:

> From a very early period those people who have the Danish tongue have consisted of two parts, those who stayed by the hearth, "the stay-at-homes," and those who sailed off to surrounding countries both in and outside of Europe and after that both in and outside of the Old World. From a certain perspective one could say that the latter continued the original history of the people since they took up the wanderings that first brought their forefathers to Denmark while the "stay-at-homes" put their efforts to expanding the boundaries of their homes. From another point of view one could say that the wanderers took part in the greater history while the "stay-at-homes" continued the history of the homeland. The Danish people are not alone in this; it is found among all peoples, at certain times more evident than at others.[25]

In explaining why Danes emigrated to the United States, Vig cited factors ranging from the Protestant Reformation to the founding of Danish colonies in the West Indies to the discovery of gold in California. He described the consequences of changes in Danish religious history, particularly the development of pietism and Mormonism. Other factors included the Schleswig wars of 1848-50 and 1864, and books and letters from America. In the last two chapters, Vig turned to biographical sketches, his favorite historical subject. He concluded with a list of additional subjects and topics which needed to be covered. "All this and much more will have to wait until another opportunity."[26]

A complete history?

That opportunity appeared to be forthcoming in early 1916 when Max Henius, a prominent Chicago chemist and a leader of the Danish community there, asked Vig to direct the publication of a "complete history of Danish Americans." Vig's first reaction was to decline. "I am entirely incapable and not enough of a businessman," he wrote Henius on March 23. "Furthermore, I am too isolated and taken up with church business and family considerations." But Vig did volunteer to help the project and urged Henius to use his influence to convince "those at Spidsen's [here Vig apparently refers to the circle of Danes who met at Wilken's cellar on La Salle Street in Chicago] to make a serious attempt at establishing a Society for Danish History in America with the task of collecting contributions from our fellow countrymen in the past and future and publishing an annual or semi-annual journal of a historical nature." Vig then went on to describe the status of current research. He was collecting material on Danes in America during the decade of the 1860s, "a period that is of great significance for

America in general as well as our own people over here. To my mind it was the foundation period. But I lack money and time to do with it what I should," Vig complained.[27]

After a meeting between Vig and Henius in Chicago a few weeks later, the situation changed. In a follow-up letter to their meeting, Henius told Vig that "the prospects are bright, which opinion I base upon the fact that the few men with whom I have had occasion to discuss the publication of the book were keenly interested and promised their active support." Henius suggested a title for the proposed work: "Amerikanerne af dansk-Oprindelse og deres Indsats i de Forenede Staters Udvikling" (Americans of Danish Origin and their Contributions to the Development of the United States). And in an effort to assure a prompt start on the project, he sent $300 to enable Vig to use his 1916 summer vacation to conduct research.[28]

From late June through July 21 Vig made an extensive trip to the east, stopping in Davenport, Iowa, then on to Chicago, Philadelphia and New York. Later in the summer he made trips to Viborg, South Dakota and Jacksonville and Elk Horn, Iowa. By all indications, the research went well, but in mid-September Vig wrote Henius telling him that he had decided "to give up directing the planned, great work." The reason was his wife's mental health. He told Henius that her nervous system had "so deteriorated that one of these days I will have to take her to a sanitorium." With eight children under the age of 15 in the house, the youngest still a baby, it is not surprising that Vig, who was nearing his sixty-second birthday, found it "impossible...to work to the satisfaction of myself and others." Even though he hoped to continue his historical research, Vig thought it "proper" to return the $300 Henius had sent him in May.[29]

Yet not all was lost. Vig was able to use some of the material he had gathered in two books published in 1917, one a study of Danish Lutheran mission activities in the United States before 1884 and the second an account of *Danske i Kamp i og for Amerika fra ca. 1640 til 1865* (Danes in the Fight In and For America from 1640 to 1865). In the foreword to the latter, Vig explained that he knew that a historical work in Danish published in the United States would bring its author neither financial reward nor literary fame. He wrote for another reason. "I am – to say it clearly – in debt, and I am in more than one sense of the word. Love for my people and perhaps especially for those outside of Denmark – together with the attempts I have made to find traces of where they have been in the past makes it my duty to share with my fellow countrymen who now live and tell them some of the things I have found. I wish this work," Vig said, "to be considered a poor installment on this my debt." At the same time, Vig acknowledged that it was increasingly difficult for him to find time to research and write. "That person who has to wear many hats on one head is

easily in trouble." Fortunately he had the assistance of his twenty-year-old son Bennet, who traveled for him and actually wrote portions of the book. During the course of the project, which was published after the United States entered World War I, Bennet Vig had become so fascinated with those Danish "heroes of the past" who had participated in American wars that he felt compelled to enlist under the flag of the United States. "I would have denied him the spirit of this book," his father wrote, "had I stopped him when he asked for my approval."[30]

The immigrant challenged

The rising tide of anti-foreigner sentiments which followed the entry of the United States into World War I soon challenged Vig's pride in the patriotism of past and present Danish-Americans. Although much of this intolerance was directed at German-Americans, other ethnic groups also suffered as the national mood turned increasingly ugly. In Iowa, home to nearly 19,000 individuals born in Denmark, Governor William L. Harding issued a proclamation on May 23, 1918, banning the public use of all foreign languages. When criticized for this action, Harding responded in a 4th of July speech by attacking the Danish element within his state's population. Pointing to the Danish settlements in western Iowa, Harding complained about the continued use of the Danish language in schools and churches and alleged that children in the area were being raised as Danes rather than Americans. "Now, think of a man who was brought from the filth of Denmark and placed on a farm for which he paid $3 an acre," Harding asked his audience. "Ye gods and fishes, what Iowa has done for him he never can repay."[31]

Harding's remarks set off a controversy which lasted for several weeks. Many Danes were understandably offended by the Governor's words, but perhaps none more so than P. S. Vig. In a lengthy letter which the anti-Harding *Des Moines Register* was happy to publish, Vig explained that he had become an American citizen in 1894 and ever since he had "tried to be true to the oath of allegiance to the United States, which I then swore, and I have never had the faintest idea that the use of the Danish language, in public or in private, was contrary to that oath and to true citizenship, and I do not believe so yet." Vig charged that Harding was only superficially acquainted with Iowa's Danish born inhabitants and that he had "drawn upon his imagination" during his speech. "No language in itself is either loyal or disloyal," Vig explained,

> but it is the use of such language that counts. That being the true test of the matter, I am sure that the great majority of American citizens of Danish birth are 100 percent American, although many of them can

> speak the American language but faultily. And I ought to know, having lived and worked among them for 39 years, in Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin and Nebraska and have met tens of thousands of them and have studied their history of the past in times of peace as well as times of war, and I can assure you that my beloved countrymen, although foreign-born, are not foreigners as far as love and loyalty to their adopted country are concerned.[32]

If Vig expected his spirited defense of Danish-Americans to quiet the controversy, he must have been disappointed. Shortly after his letter was published, he received a reply from a resident of Des Moines. The writer said Harding had done a "fine thing" in banning foreign languages because it had brought to light Vig's "weak, flimsy, patriotism. You should be given a passport and made to return to your own country as soon as this war is over." And any other Dane, he continued, who could not speak English after five years in the United States should also "be made to return to 'the filth of Denmark.'" The critic concluded by telling Vig that such "callow, insipid, faltering patriotism as yours needs to be stirred up so your community may know just where you stand."[33]

These words stung the old "filiopietist." After all he had done to celebrate the Danish presence in America, it hurt to find both his patriotism and that of his countrymen challenged. In an angry response to his attacker which he probably did not send, Vig said he would "certainly deplore Iowa if ignorance is going to be the mark of true citizenship, and it is made a crime to know more than one language ... And as an American," he maintained, "I feel ashamed to think that our beautiful language [English] should ever have been used to express such ideas."[34]

Yet Vig knew the war had altered the environment in which he and other immigrants had to live. At Trinity he began offering his course on dogmatics in English, "not because this was easier, at any rate not for the teacher, but in consideration of the students' future work which...more and more will be in this language." And even though he predicted that the "present unrest" would eventually calm down, he also warned delegates to the 1919 UDELC convention that their church was in a changing situation "which is felt all over and in all relations. It is a development that we ourselves began when we emigrated to America." He implied that the process of assimilation could not be successfully resisted. "We must take part in it and also try to bring the best we possess into it, for the sake of ourselves, our children, and our country."[35]

Last days

Despite these new circumstances, some of the old spark remained. He wrote brief histories of two congregations, worked on his memoirs, and helped compile a history of the UDELC for its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1921. That year brought him two of his greatest honors. On January 11 King Christian X of Denmark made Vig a Knight of Dannebrog. On May 27, Luther Theological Seminary, St Paul, Minnesota, bestowed upon Vig an honorary Doctor of Divinity Degree. One suspects that as the "Old Professor" reflected on these honors, he could not help but recall how his life had unfolded during the nearly 40 years he had lived in the United States. It had been a remarkable journey for a poor Danish farmer's son "who had merely sniffed at the phial of learning in the authorized pharmacy."

During the summer of 1921 Vig made his last major research trip. After visiting two of his sons in Georgia, he went to New York. During his return he stopped in Indianapolis and Chicago. But no large publication was forthcoming. Increasingly, his interests became more genealogical as he worked on the records of Danish immigrant families. One visitor to his home described his study: "A priceless and exquisite library covers all the walls, even under and over the windows and in the center stand the work tables arranged so that Vig can easily move from one to the other..." Vig reminded him of "a rich Jutland farmer with thick legs, strong and broad shoulders, long gray beard and heavy eyebrows over sharp eyes though he is not missing a Jutlander's humorous roguishness." On the matter of names and dates Vig could be "pitiless." If one were to mention that

> Jim Larsen left Iowa on April 2, 1881 to homestead in Nebraska and that happened on April 3 you are kindly but definitely corrected by Professor Vig that it was in the morning that Larsen moved at the same time as his brother John in Rockford was married to Anna Hansen, the eldest daughter of Mike Hansen who as a three year old came to Racine, Wisconsin with his father, Sophus, who was called "Tordensmeden" who was born in Vendsyssel in 1803 and who immigrated in 1830 following his older brother Johannes who three years earlier had settled in the same state, etc., etc., etc.[36]

Vig spent most of his last days pasting newspaper clippings about Danish-Americans in scrapbooks. By 1928 it was clear that his health was failing. He lingered on into the next year, dying March 21, 1929 at age of seventy-four. He was buried in the Blair cemetery with six of his sons serving as pallbearers.

The historical legacy

Vig had hoped to will his library to Trinity Seminary but the poverty of his estate prevented this, and instead the school was given the opportunity to buy books from it. The synod was able to raise only $400 toward that purpose; other books from the collection found their way to the Dana Library when some of Vig's sons used them during the depression to pay their college tuition.[37] Much of the rest of Vig's historical collection, including several unpublished manuscripts and most of his related correspondence, was sold in 1931 to the newly opened Dan-America Archives in Aalborg for $550.[38] Einar Vig retained some of his father's correspondence and other writings to use in the preparation of a Danish-language biography which he completed in 1932. This work and an English translation of it, done more than a decade later, were never published. Eventually, much of the material retained by Einar Vig was donated to the Nebraska State Historical Society at Lincoln.

The division of the P. S. Vig collection – 13 boxes and four bundles at Aalborg, nine boxes at Lincoln, and virtually all his published work at Dana College in Blair – has inhibited scholarly study of his contribution. It is clear that Vig was an amateur historian, a fact that he readily admitted. He employed little in the way of historical method and often accepted without critical analysis or independent verification what others told him. That this led to mistakes is obvious. For example, Vig apparently accepted without question a report from the granddaughter of Christian Guldager (or Gullager) that the Danish-born artist created the eagle used on the Great Seal of the United States. A study done in conjunction with the American bicentennial concludes that there "is no evidence whatever linking Gullager to the designing of the Great Seal."[39] All of this suggests that Vig's historical collections, both published and unpublished, merit scholarly analysis. Undoubtedly other errors will be found. But on the other hand, a review of his extensive correspondence with other Danish-Americans, especially with individuals such as Pastor Rasmus Andersen of Brooklyn, New York, who shared Vig's enthusiasm for history, might shed new light on aspects of Danish-American history.

Even if nothing comes from a systematic examination of Vig's historical efforts, his pioneering role deserves recognition. As Edward N. Saveth pointed out in his study, *American Historians and European Immigrants, 1875-1925*, the field of immigration was... "one that seldom attracted the professional historian."[40] Therefore it remained for filiopietists like Vig to do the work. When one remembers all the constraints under which he operated, including his lack of formal historical training, his respon-

sibilities to family and work, his relative isolation and limited financial resources, and the legacy of his role in the schism among Danish Lutherans in the United States, Vig's contributions to Danish-American history are truly remarkable.

Notes

The authors wish to thank Anders Flyvbjerg, Kirsten Kristensen, and Birgit Flemming Larsen for their assistance.

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10. Mortensen, *op.cit.*, p. 100.
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20. Jensen, *op.cit.*, pp. 130-131. See also the April 10, 1941, issue of *Hermes*, the student newspaper of Dana College and Trinity Seminary, and Peter L. Petersen, *A Place Called Dana: The Centennial History of Trinity Seminary and Dana College*, Blair, Nebraska: Dana College, 1984, chapters IV and V.
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25. P.S. Vig, *Den danske Udvandring til Amerika: dens Aarsager og Veje* (Danish Emigration to America: Its Causes and Means), Blair, Nebraska: Danish Lutheran Publishing House, 1915, p. 5.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
27. P.S. Vig to Max Henius, March 23, 1916, Henius Collection, the Danes Worldwide Archives, Aalborg, Denmark (L&M, Box XXXI).
28. Henius to Vig, May 22, 1916; Vig to Henius, May 23, 1916, *ibid.*
29. Vig to Henius, September 14, 1916, *ibid.*
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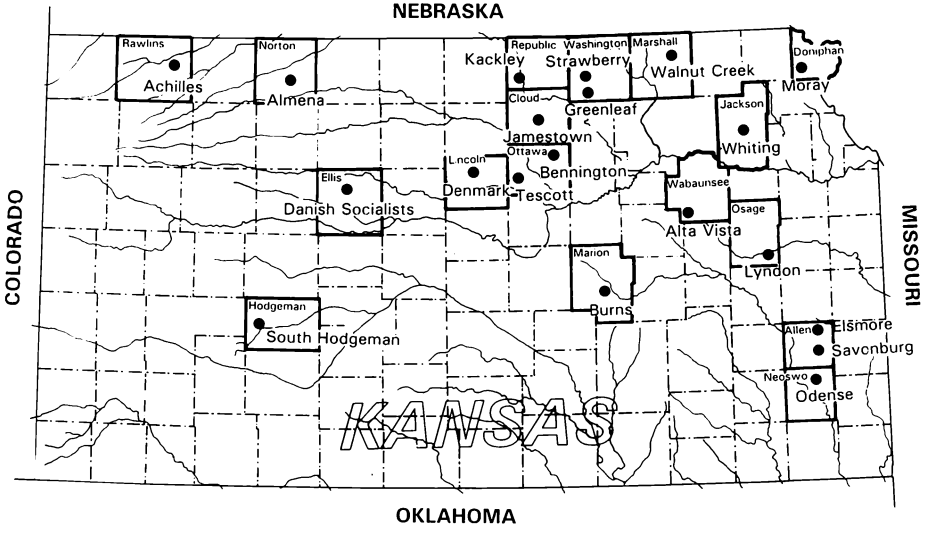
Danes in Kansas: Paradise or Disaster?

by Nancy Mitchell



Map of Kansas.

The following account of the state of Kansas appeared in *The New York Tribune* on April 20, 1870:

> Ten years ago, when Mr. [Horace] Greeley was making his overland trip through Kansas, he predicted a glorious future for this State. The Kansas of to-day is a wonder of intelligence, wealth, enterprise, comfort and culture. It is filling up faster than any state in the Union. With a climate unequaled, a soil rich beyond comparison,... it is fast taking a place in the front rank of our Federal Union... Many a pioneer has purchased his 160 acres of the railroad company at $2.50 to $3.00 per acre, erecting a building of wood or stone, and with a plow and two yoke of oxen, the prairie is broken, and the first twenty-five acres of corn raised yielded him 2,000 bushels of the golden grain; twenty-five acres of wheat 1,000 bushels, while rye, oats, barley, peas, potatoes and every garden product, have yielded in the same proportion. Soon, his orchard is planted, his farm stocked, and he has all the hay he needs without cultivation (though he need but little, for the winters are very mild here)... Young fruit appears, and peace and plenty and health to enjoy them bless him and his family.[1]

In 1910, Carl Becker, Professor of History at the University of Kansas gives this contrasting impression:

> Until 1895 the whole history of the state was a series of disasters, and always something new, extreme, bizarre, until the name of Kansas became a byword, a synonym for the impossible and the ridiculous, inviting laughter, furnishing occasion for jest and hilarity. "In God we trusted, in Kansas we busted" became a favorite motto of emigrants, worn out with the struggle, returning to more hospitable climes; and for many years it expressed well enough the popular opinion of that fated land.[2]

Kansas: Paradise or Disaster? Whatever the image, the move westward was so powerful that not even Kansas escaped the hoards of emigrants pouring out of Europe in the mid to late 1800s. Those who settled in Kansas and endured the hardships and disasters inevitably came to love their adopted homeland, and for them it became their own paradise. Danes began trickling into the area in the 1850s. The relatively few Danes who eventually settled there were prompted by the same forces that brought Danes to other

states: problems in Denmark resulting from the population explosion, industrialization and rural poverty. Others came to escape religious bias, to own land, or to avoid compulsory military service. Whatever the reasons, emigration, even to Kansas, was often preferable to their plight in Denmark.

Kansas facts

Kansas, the 34th of 50 states to join the Union, entered the Civil War and became a state in 1861 while still suffering from the great drought of 1859-60. Located in the center of the continental United States, Kansas is an almost perfect paralellogram, except for the jagged corner in the northeast, fashioned by the Missouri River. It has an area of slightly more than 82,000 square miles.[3]

The topography of the state includes the gently rolling, wooded hills of the northeast and progresses through the grassland prairies of central Kansas to the High Plains of the west where the cumulus cloud formations and vivid sunsets are often the only disturbance in the otherwise serene stretches of muted prairie landscape. In 1861, the population of the state was 107,206, and by the turn of the century, the number had increased to 1,470,495.[4] Presently, Kansas has a population of approximately 2,477,000. Often called the Sunflower State or the Wheat State, Kansas takes its name from the Kanza Indian name meaning "People of the South Wind."

Danish immigration facts and figures

Danish immigration into Kansas followed the general pattern of Danish immigration to the United States, although at a much reduced level. The following chart shows the number and percentage of Danes migrating to Kansas compared to the number migrating to the U.S. from 1850 to 1900.[5,6]

	KANSAS	UNITED STATES	PERCENT TO KANSAS
1850-60	70	3,749	2
1860-70	502	17,094	3
1870-80	1,838	31,770	6
1880-90	3,136	88,132	4
1890-1900	2,914	50,231	6
TOTAL	8,460	190,976	4

In 1890 the number of inhabitants in America who were either born in Denmark or born in America of Danish parents was 213,000, compared to 5,581, or 3%, of the total in Kansas. In descending order, the largest concentrations of Danes were in the following states:

Iowa	25,240
Wisconsin	23,882
Nebraska	22,267
Minnesota	22,182
Utah	19,736
Illinois	17,090
California	11,836
Michigan	10,180
New York	8,182
South Dakota	7,199
Kansas	5,581

The rest of the Danish population was scattered throughout the remaining states with the lowest number, 45, in North Carolina.[7]

Although many Danes came to Kansas directly from Denmark, a few had lived in other states before finally settling in Kansas. Illinois was first when it came to providing Kansas with Danes, Wisconsin was second, and a few came from Iowa, Michigan, Missouri and Ohio. Settlements in Nebraska also greatly contributed to the Danish settlements in Kansas.[8]

Mormons, gold miners and Schleswigians

In 1854, Indian Territory, then occupied by immigrant Indians and the native Kansas and Pawnee tribes, was opened for legal settlement. Prior to that time, no white people were legally permitted to settle in the area reserved for the Indian which then became known as Kansas Territory.[9]

The earliest account of Danish settlement in the area is from the 1850s when apostating Mormons, en route from Denmark to Utah, settled there.[10] From about 1850 to 1857 the Mormons departed from Westport Landing, Missouri, on their trek to Utah along the Oregon Trail, crossing through Indian Territory, or the northeast corner of what is now Kansas. Many of the newly converted left the group and settled here after losing their zeal once the realities of the difficult journey west became apparent.

The first Dane to register a homestead in the Kansas Territory was John Nielsen who came in 1855 after a stint as a gold miner in California. Nielsen settled on the upper Walnut Creek in what is now Marshall County, Kansas. Nielsen, born on the Danish island of Lolland on July 4, 1826, arrived in New York in 1847. He immediately traveled on to San Francisco and

mined the gold fields for six or seven years before coming to Kansas to homestead in 1855. He later returned to Denmark and brought back his mother, brother, sister and other relatives to settle with him. Nielsen farmed in the area until 1874 and then left for Placerville, California. His nephew, James Johnson, farmed the land until his departure to Arizona.[11]

From 1855 till 1869 was a relatively inactive period of Danish settlement in Kansas. Although relatively few Danes settled in Kansas in the period from 1855 to 1869, throughout the 1860s the stage was being set both in Kansas and in Denmark for an increase in settlement over the next two decades. During the Civil War years, (1861-65) settlement in Kansas came to a standstill as reports of the fighting in Bloody Kansas, the terrible effects of the drought and the Indian troubles discouraged the thousands of Europeans intending to emigrate.

During the second half of the century, two great events combined to create a catalyst for the settling of Kansas: the *Homestead Act* of 1862 and the building of the railroads across Kansas which began in 1863. The success of this immigration would not have been so great had one event taken place without the other. The Civil War was over in 1864, and by the end of the 1860s and early 1870s, the time was perfect for settlement in Kansas. The masses were pushing west from Europe, the land was free to those who could endure, and the railroads were ready to transport the immigrants across the state.

In Denmark, the 1860s were marked by a period of heavy emigration. The successful promotional efforts of many emigration agents, combined with Denmark's loss of Schleswig-Holstein (the southernmost part of the Jutland peninsula) to the Prussians created the catalyst for emigration to the United States and on to Kansas. "To avoid compulsory military service under the Prussians" is the most frequently mentioned reason for emigration in specific histories of Danish settlements in Kansas. Heavy emigration from North Schleswig began in 1867, which accounts for the fact that out of thirteen Danish settlements in Kansas founded from 1855 to 1885, seven were settled in 1869 as a direct result of the Schleswig incident. One such example is described by early Danish settlers of Marshall County, H. M. Johnson and J. P. Lund, who were with a group of five settlers who settled near Marysville. Johnson writes in his memoirs:

> I had the choice of joining the Prussian colors or going into exile. I chose the latter and went over into Denmark and worked on the well-regulated farms until 1868, when I came to Chicago, where Lund joined me the year after, when we went to Kansas to start the agrarian life from the grass roots with a very meager stock of knowledge to draw on.[12]

The other three original settlers were N. H. White, Charles Johnson and N. P. Christiansen.

Because of the events in Denmark in 1864, the Marysville Danes were violently anti-German. The Walnut Creek Danes, settled by the goldminer, Nielsen, were from an area of Denmark north of the provinces lost to Germany and, until the U.S. entered the First World War, were openly and ardently pro-German.[13]

Grundtvigians, Indian raids, and fires

The Grundtvigians settled two colonies in Kansas in 1869: at Lyndon in Osage County and at Denmark in Lincoln County. The Osage group never consisted of more than a few families and were not enough to organize a church; a permanent Danish settlement was, therefore, never established.[14]

Denmark, the Lincoln County Grundtvigian settlement, was more successful and because of its adherence to the Grundtvigian traditions, remained the most Danish of the Kansas settlements.[15] Located in the gently rolling area of north central Lincoln County, Denmark was settled in February of 1869 by the brothers Peter and Lorenz Christiansen, both blacksmiths by trade in Denmark. With them came their families, as well as Eskild Lauritzen and his wife and son and Otto Petersen, a bachelor. They had all emigrated from Schleswig-Holstein to avoid Prussian domination and compulsory military service. In March they were joined by George Veichelle and his wife and Fred Meigerhoff, all of whom were Swiss.

The settlement was almost obliterated by an Indian raid only a few months after its founding. The immigrants of Lincoln and the surrounding counties had been assured that the Indians had withdrawn to what is now Oklahoma. When most thought the Indian troubles had come to an end, there were delays in Washington in executing the *Medicine Lodge Treaty* of 1867. The treaty irritated the Indians and they returned to Kansas and raided the newly established settlements. *The Centennial History of the Denmark Evangelical Lutheran Community Church*[15] tells this story:

> General Philip Sheridan came to Kansas in 1868 to determine how to settle the Indians into permanent locations. During the period from 1861 to 1867, several peace treaties had been negotiated with the Cheyenne, Arapahoe, Comanche, Kiowa and Apache tribes. Gifts and "annuities" (a polite term for food, blankets, money, guns and ammunition) had been donated to the Indians during several gatherings through the state for peace treaty negotiations. The weapons had been given out in spite of the Army's strong recommendations against the practice.

In 1868 there had been concentrated raids on the Saline River. The Forsyth Scouts had been formed and the battle at Beecher Island had occurred. Most of the people believed that the Indian troubles were over. The 19th Volunteers had been mustered out at Fort Hays in April of 1869 and Sheridan had been recalled to Washington.

This premature sense of security was rudely shattered, however, as Tall Bull and his Cheyenne Dog soldiers, augmented by some Sioux, Arapahoe and others who had not been forced onto a reservation came back into Kansas in May 1869.

On Sunday, May 30th, a band of about 60 Indians led by Tall Bull invaded the Spillman Valley. Mr. and Mrs. Lauritzen, Otto Petersen, Fred Meigerhoff and George Veichelle were slain. Mrs. Maria Veichelle was carried away as a captive. (She was later rescued by the 5th United States Cavalry under the command of Brvt. Major General Eugene A. Carr at the battle known as Summit Springs, located on the South Platte River in Colorado. Mrs. Veichelle returned to the east and later remarried.)

The Christiansen's fought off the Indians with one of the newly invented repeating rifles of large caliber. In the night they fled to the Schemerhorn stockade, which was approximately five miles southeast of Lincoln. From there they went on to Fort Harker located at Kanapolis, and then went back to Junction City, Kansas.

The frontier had Indian alarms during the succeeding six or seven years, but the hostile bands and the settlers were too watchful for any serious molestations to take place.

On January 2, 1871, Lorenz Christiansen, wife and daughter, Helene Marie, and his brother, Jens Peter, with his wife and children, Helene, Chris and Hans, returned. With them came Jorgen Larsen, Niels Nielsen and A. Rasmussen, all with their families. During 1871 and '72 many settlers arrived and most of the desirable land was preempted.

In spite of the Indian raid, life continued in the growing settlement. A post office was established in 1871, a school was built in 1874, and a church was completed in 1880 after the Danes had won a majority in the vote about whether to remain within the Church of Denmark. The Swedes and Norwegians of the area who had been involved in the church plans, then withdrew their support of the church. In 1895, ten members withdrew and formed the nucleus of the Free Mission Church which functioned for many years. The two church buildings were just one mile apart.

In 1882 a cooperative creamery was organized, an idea that was not new but which spread rapidly, as the first creamery had been organized in

Hjedding, Denmark that same year. The settlers were able to supplement their income with the discovery of coal in the valley where the Spillman mine employed 25 men for a few years.[16]

The early settlers of Lincoln County and Denmark experienced all the hardships of homesteading in Kansas: the grasshopper invasion of 1874, prairie fires, the terrible blizzard of 1871, the burning summer heat, dust storms and prolonged droughts. But life was not all hardship for the inhabitants of Lincoln County; they also had many reasons to rejoice as progress came to Denmark with the Kansas Pacific in 1886, thus ending their relative isolation. In 1898 the women of the community formed a Ladies' Aid Society and in 1911 a community hall was built for social functions, plays, lectures and other community events.[17]

Baptists, Indian raids and fires

The Baptist settlement at Jamestown in Cloud County was founded in 1869 by Niels Nielsen, one of the first Baptists in Denmark.[18] Born on the Danish island of Fyn in 1809, Nielsen and his brother embraced the Baptist

Danish settlers in front of their sod house in Kansas. (Property of the Nebraska State Historical Society.)

doctrine, rather unpopular at that time in Denmark, in 1826. On April 11, 1838, Nielsen married Anna Pedersen in the town of Gimlinge on Zealand. The Nielsen brothers were two of 24 Danes who constituted the entire membership of the Baptist church in Denmark in 1824.

In 1865, Anna and Niels Nielsen, along with two sons and one daughter, arrived in New York and went directly to St. Louis where they joined their other children who had emigrated some years before. There the family remained for two years learning the English language before Anna and Niels moved to Chicago for two years of missionary work in 1867. But the desire to be settled near family drew the Nielsens to the frontier so that they might all take homesteads in the same settlement. In 1868 an agent helped them to find a quarter section of land in Cloud County, then inhabited by the buffalo and the Indian.

The Nielsen family had barely settled on their homestead in 1869 when Cloud county was raided by the same Indians who were thought to have raided Lincoln county a few days earlier. The Reverend Nielsen's son, Jens, who called himself James Nelson, survived the raid, and at the request of friends, he wrote the following account of it in 1934:[19]

> ...The neighbors told us about the Indian raids and depredations, but had not seen any Indians for some time. In the meantime, my father's sister-in-law, Christine, and her year-old boy joined us. We erected a small frame building to serve as a dwelling house.
>
> On June 2, 1869, shortly before night, Nels [brother] and I were breaking sod about forty rods from the house. The Adkins boy, about 11 years old and the son of our neighbor living to the north across the river, rode up on a pony. He talked to us for a while and then rode on a half mile to get the Adkins cows that were grazing. Just as we were at the south end of the field and I was turning around, we saw the Indians coming on their horses. When they had covered about half the distance toward us, they discovered the Adkins boy and all the Indians but one went after him. This one Indian kept coming towards us. I started to run towards the house, Nels stayed with the team for a while. An Indian undertook to cut me off from the house. He had a spear in his left hand, which he changed to his right hand while he constantly rode up closer. I carried a large revolver which I kept strapped to my belt as a part of my regular equipment. As I drew my revolver to shoot, the Indian swung to the far side of the horse and rode away to join the others.
>
> They killed the Adkins boy, taking the pony and also the mules and horses we had. Nels and I made our way to the house and told the folks what had happened. We decided to hide out as the best way to safety. My father was an old man and quite crippled. Father, Chris-

tine, and baby went first and I followed to protect them the best we could. After the Indians had rounded up the pony, mules and horses, they came to the house and circled it a number of times, shot into it a number of times as they went around to see whether or not it was occupied. Finding it empty, they went on helping themselves to what they could and wanted.

We went to the Adkins place across the river, having to wade in the water. As I was making my way across I came to Christine, with her baby in her arms, afraid to wade further. I put my guns down and waded out to her, taking the baby and leading the way across, she placing her hand on my shoulder. When we told the Adkins family their boy had been killed by the Indians, they began to cry and scream, wishing they had never come to Kansas. Not knowing the number of Indians that might be in the country, we waited until after dark to search for the boy.

Nels and Adkins' son-in-law, Jap Scrivner, made the search. It was about six miles going and coming to where they expected to find the boy. Not having any roads, they were afraid they might have trouble finding their way back, so we built a fire on the roof of the dugout to aid them in finding the way back. When they came back with the body of the boy, there was further crying and screaming. During the excitement we forgot the fire on the dugout. The fire began to burn the roof, so we had another scare, thinking the Indians might have returned again.

When we saw what the trouble was, we became more composed, and soon had the fire out. The fire did very little damage. Soon they buried the Adkins boy, they tore boards off the buildings and constructed a coffin. Some black cloth, calico and tacks were brought out from town and the coffin covered with the black cloth. When the procession started for the grave, everyone, including women, carried a gun. There was not a flower offered up, but many tears were shed.

The next day after the raid, some neighbors came along to see our house and to learn what damage had been done by the Indians. It certainly was a sorry site to see how our things had been destroyed. We had good feather ticks brought to us from our native land of Denmark. The feathers had been emptied and the ticks taken. Our clothing and the washing done that day were all gone. Corn we had paid a dollar and a half a bushel for had been emptied out of the sacks and the sacks taken. In walking over the grounds, I discovered where the Indians had emptied a handbag in which my father kept some papers and some money. Among these papers was an envelope containing one hundred and seventy-five dollars, all the money Father

had at that time. We were fortunate to find this as we were able to buy much needed clothing and provisions.

...Father and I had a chance to ride to Junction City, Kansas with a man who had a team. Junction City was the nearest railroad at that time. As we were drawing near Clay Center, we met the U.S. Cavalry from Fort Riley on the way to Lake Sibley to look after the Indians. On the third day of June, 1869, the day following the raid on us, the Indians made a raid on Scandia and killed a boy by the name of Granstead, also taking a bunch of horses. The U.S. Cavalry went to Scandia and stayed during the remainder of the summer. There were no further troubles with the Indians.

...Shortly after the Indian raid, we put in a claim for one thousand four hundred dollars for damages done by the Indians. The Government told us the name of the tribe of Indians that did the damage. We called them Cheyennes. Forty-seven years later the Government settled the claim for eight-hundred dollars without interest and the Government called them Cheyennes at that time.

In 1871, the Reverend Nielsen organized a Danish Baptist Church with eleven members who donated their money and time in quarrying the limestone to build a church. It was completed in 1877 and known as the Saron Baptist Church. Nielsen preached there from 1871 to 1886.

The Nielsen (Nelson) family remained in the area for many generations, and according to their family histories, their lives were happy and productive.

Danish Socialists in Kansas

Ellis County in western Kansas was the chosen site for a group of settlers who could not endure the hard life on the Kansas plains. A group of Danish Socialists attempted to settle there in May of 1877.[20] Louis Pio, Poul Geleff and W. A. Hansen, along with eighteen colonists, were part of a group that existed on the prairie for only six miserable weeks. In Denmark, Pio and Geleff had been leaders in the Danish Social Democratic Party. Pio was the party's first chairman. Both had spent time in prison during 1873 and 1875 for their part in the bricklayers' strike in 1872. They remained active socialists after their release from prison, especially since the Danish economy was in recession, and the plight of the Danish worker was becoming more and more oppressive. Pio's partial solution was to establish a Danish workers' colony in the United States. He maintained that, while emigration would not be the ultimate solution to the labor problems and the miseries caused by capitalism in Denmark, if successful, his colony would

inspire the founding of others. A successful settlement would demonstrate how the principles of socialism could be put into practice.

Kansas was chosen for several reasons. Western Kansas still had land available and was also fairly remote. Pio believed this was essential for success, as evidenced by the prospering, isolated Mormon settlements in Utah. Although cheap land was still available in agricultural states such as Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, and the Dakotas, Pio learned about Kansas through a contact with the Copenhagen representative of the *Kansas Pacific Railroad Land Company.* This man's name was Bjork, and his rather biased and inaccurate descriptions of Kansas led Pio to seriously consider Kansas as a very desirable site.[21]

The Socialist party was still considering several states other than Kansas in 1876 and sent Geleff to the U.S. to visit various Danish settlements in search of a suitable site. After his return to Denmark, Geleff published an account of his travels in the newspaper, *Social-Demokraten.* He also traveled to towns in Jutland to speak of his experiences and to invite workers to participate in the founding of a socialist colony in North America.

Pio wrote eight articles about Kansas for *Social-Demokraten* and had them published in an illustrated booklet, *Kansas. Efter forskellige Rejseberetninger* (Kansas. The Accounts of Various Travelers). He spoke to groups of unemployed workers about the project, and socialist workers in Norway, Sweden and Schleswig were also invited to participate. Eventually enough people were interested, and money was collected so that final plans for emigration could be made.

The project was not without scandal as Pio and Geleff surreptitiously left Denmark before the planned departure date and were accused of betraying the socialist cause and the emigration project. In reality, the Copenhagen Police Commissioner, hoping in this way to put an end to annoying socialist activities, had promised Pio and Geleff funds if they would leave Denmark. The other alternative for Pio and Geleff was to remain in Denmark and to continue their activities and probably be imprisoned again.

Although the scandal had damaged the cause, the project finally got under way in 1877 when a group of 18 colonists made up of Danes, a few Germans, Pio, Geleff, and Alfred Hansen settled on the Smoky Hill River five or ten miles from Hays, Kansas. They acquired the land under the *Homestead Act* and agreed that it was to be owned jointly by all members of the colony. A common log cabin was built in which families lived on one side and the unmarried men on the other. There seemed to be no disagreement about the distribution of the chores among the men, but constant arguing about socialist theory tended to cause major dissension, pitting Germans against Danes. Eventually the funds began to run out, and the women became especially dissatisfied with the lack of organization and

planning of the project. After six weeks the colony split up. The proceeds were divided, giving each about $30. The colonists went their own ways, and Hansen later reported that none of the colonists ever regretted they had come to America as they all did well afterwards. Pio moved to Chicago and became a printer and publisher. He later became involved in promoting a settlement in Florida which was actually a business venture for the *Florida East Coast Railway*. Pio died in Chicago in 1894, and in 1921 his ashes were returned to Denmark for the Danish Social Democratic Party's 50th anniversary celebration. Denmark's socialists chose to forget the events of 1877 and honor Pio's contributions as a pioneer of Danish socialism.

Danish names, Kansas towns

The present-day town of Elsmore in Allen County, Kansas, represents an evolution of the original Danish town name of Elsinore. N. P. Wisborg, born in Denmark in 1826, settled on Big Creek in Allen County and later became the postmaster of Odense, a Danish name he must have suggested. Wisborg probably also named the upstream town of Elsinore where a post office opened in 1866. Presumably because of the corruption of the written form, Elsinore became Elsmore, first as the name of the township and later of the village.[22]

Conclusion

The Danes who chose Kansas as their home were industrious people who assimilated easily throughout the state. By the beginning of the 20th century, Danes were to be found in almost every county of the state. A breakdown by nationality shows there were 2,914 Danes, 15,144 Swedes, 39,501 Germans and 1,477 Norwegians. However few, those Danes who settled and remained in Kansas contributed to the make-up of the Kansas character as described by historian Carl Becker:

> The confident individualism of those who achieve through endurance is a striking trait of the people of Kansas. There indeed, the trait has in it an element of exaggeration, arising from the fact that whatever has been achieved has been under great difficulties. Kansans have been subjected, not only to the ordinary hardships of the frontier, but to a succession of reverses and disasters that could be survived only by those for whom defeat is worse than death, who cannot fail because they cannot surrender.[23]

Although, as a group, the Kansas Danes were not without strife, as witnessed by the Schleswig question and the conflict within the Lutheran church,

they settled quietly and inconspicuously in Kansas. For many this was the solution to the social, economic or political problems they faced in Denmark. The Danes learned of Kansas because the state was actively promoting and welcoming Danes and other ethnic groups in order to promote economic development. It is through this interaction of events in Denmark and Kansas that the personal histories of Danish immigrants have been added to the colorful narratives making up the history of the settling of the state of Kansas.

Notes

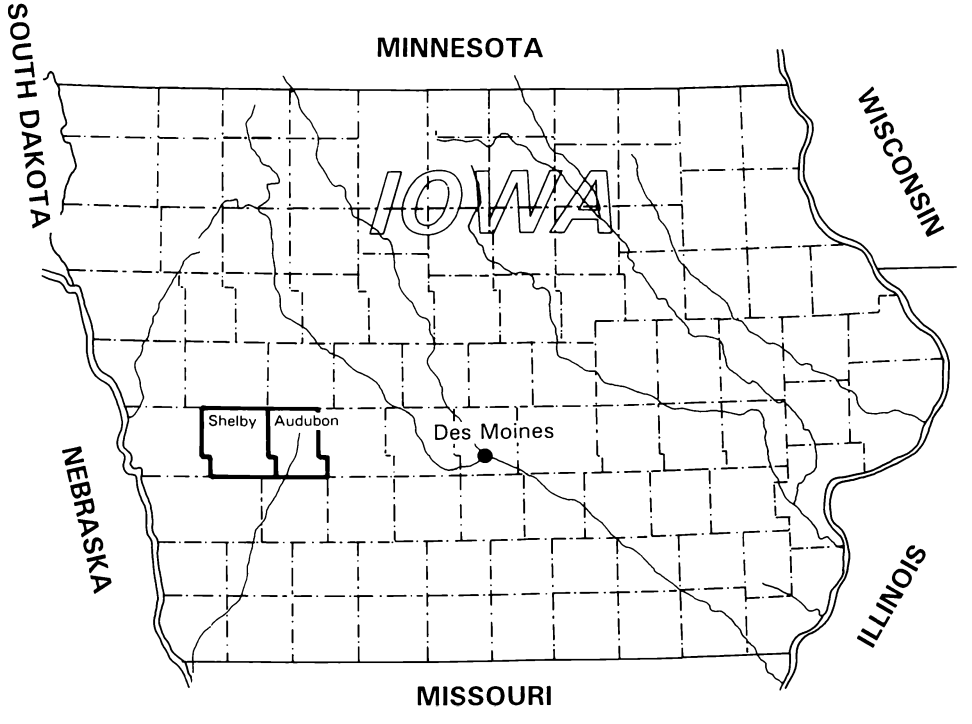
1. *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, winter, 1976, p. 425. Excerpt from the Guilford *Citizen*, April, 1870.
2. Carl Becker, "Kansas," In: *Heritage of Kansas*, Everett Rich, ed., Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1960, p. 345.
3. Emory K. Lindquist, "Kansas: A Centennial Portrait," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, vol. 27, 1961, p. 22.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
5. Wallace Eden Miller, *The Peopling of Kansas*, Columbus, Ohio: Press of Fred J. Heer, 1906, pp. 116-117.
6. George R. Nielsen, *The Danish Americans*, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981, p. 32.
7. Rasmus B. Anderson, "Coming of the Danes," *Chicago Record Herald*, 1901? In: *Immigration Clippings*, vol. 1, Topeka, Kansas: Kansas State Historical Library.
8. J. Neale Carman, *Foreign Language Units of Kansas*, vol. 2, Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1962, p. 626.
9. Nell Blythe Waldron, *Colonization in Kansas from 1861-1890*, Doctoral Dissertation at Northwestern University, Chicago, 1923, p. 12.
10. Thomas Peter Christensen, "The Danish Settlements in Kansas," In: *Kansas Historical Collections*, vol. 28, 1926-28, p. 300.
11. Emma E. Forter, *History of Marshall County Kansas*, Indianapolis: B.F. Bowen & Co., 1917, pp. 216-217.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
13. J. Neale Carman, *op.cit.*, p. 1275.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 628.
15. All information, except as noted, is from The Denmark Evangelical Lutheran Church pamphlet, *The Centennial Anniversary*, Denmark, Kansas, 1978, pp. 3-9.
16. Dorthe Tarrance Homan, *Lincoln – That County in Kansas*, Lindsborg, Kansas, 1979, p. 87.
17. According to my 1987 conversation with Mrs. Ariel Nielsen (she and her husband are descendants of the original settlers of Denmark), the present town of Denmark has a population of about 12 people, mostly widows and retired people, and only a few houses. The cooperative elevator, the old Danish church which has about 40 members from the surrounding area, and the community hall are the only remaining buildings. The bank folded a few years ago and the Free Mission Church no longer exists. The North and South schools, which were just one-room schools, were united in 1917 and

are now part of the Sylvan Grove school district. Mrs. Nielsen further reports that her ancestors came to Kansas from Schleswig/Holstein in 1875 to avoid military service. When I asked if she spoke any Danish, she replied "only a few words." She had not learned any Danish as it was not a popular thing to do, especially during the First and Second World Wars. Her parents' generation was intent on becoming Americanized and did not use the immigrant language of their own parents and thus did not pass on the Danish language to their children.

18. E.F. Hollibaugh, *Biographical History of Cloud County Kansas*, n.d., p. 786. (All of the information in this article concerning the Nielsen family is taken from Hollibaugh's account except as noted.)
19. J.P. Paulsen, *Memoir of J.P. Paulsen, 1880-1963*, California, 1963, p. 29-31. (Located in the Danes Worldwide Archives in Aalborg, Denmark.)
20. Unless otherwise noted, all information about the Kansas Socialist project is taken from K. Miller "Danish Socialism and the Kansas Prairies," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly*, vol. 38, Topeka: The Kansas State Historical Society, 1972, and K. Hvidt, *Flight to America: The Social Background of 300,000 Danish Emigrants*, New York: Academic Press, 1975, pp. 143-146.
21. Wallace Eden Miller, *op.cit.*, p. 160.
22. *History of Allen and Woodson Counties Kansas*. Compiled by L. Wallace Duncan, Iola, Kansas, 1901, pp. 478-479.
23. Carl Becker, *op.cit.*, p. 345.

Elk Horn-Kimballton – The Largest Danish Settlement in America

by Jette Mackintosh



Map of Iowa.

The first settlers

Had Christian Jensen known, when he lost his way on the prairie in the summer of 1868, that his action would decide the location of the largest Danish settlement anywhere in America, he might have taken longer to search for the right place. He could not, however, have found a better spot. He had been a butcher in Moline, Illinois, and was now on his way to Nebraska where, he had heard, land was cheap and plentiful. He traveled in a covered wagon with his wife, son and mother, and had stopped the previous day at a farm owned by a Mr. Hudson, who had tried to sell him land. He had described the fertile black prairie-soil, the clear water in the springs and in the small creek, lined by beautiful groves of timber – but the Jensens were determined to go on to Nebraska and had set off again. They must somehow have lost their way in the tall prairie grass, however, and by nightfall they found themselves again at the Hudson farm. They felt that there must be some divine guidance in this mishap, and decided to buy land and settle.

The location Christian Jensen had chosen in this way was Clay Township in Shelby County in the southwestern part of Iowa, within 50 miles of the Missouri River and Omaha. Unlike the flat prairie land of much of Iowa, the landscape in this region was very reminiscent of Denmark, with rounded hills and small streams and lakes lined by woods and groves. Jensen wrote and described the prospects to friends back in Denmark and in Moline, and two years later, as documented in the 1870 census, 17 immigrants from Denmark plus four children had already settled in Clay Township near Indian Creek, close to what was later to become Elk Horn. The large number of elk horns that gave the town its name testified to the value of the area as an Indian hunting ground, but no elks were ever seen by the settlers. They had reportedly been driven away by a very hard winter in 1856-57. There were still occasional sightings of Indians in the area, which had been within the old hunting grounds of the Omahas and Otoes, from the west, the Sioux to the northwest and the Ioway Indians, but they never gave the Danish immigrants any trouble.

Other immigrants discovered the area while working on railroad gangs. When track for the *Mississippi and Missouri Railroad* was laid from Des Moines through Atlantic to Council Bluffs in 1869, a group of young Danes from the island of Ærø were living in the railroad camp at Marne. They heard of a sale of land in Shelby County and, on the appointed day, they borrowed a pair of mules and drove up to look at this land. They liked it so much that they went straight into Harlan and bought the whole of Section 16, paying, it is believed, $1300 for it.[1] The section was divided among

seven young men from Ærø and two from Zealand, the largest of the Danish islands.

The first family to settle on this land, in 1869 in a dugout, was Ole H. Jakobsen with his wife and six children. There were severe hardships – one winter a 12-year-old boy had to ride nine miles to Harlan in a blizzard for the doctor, and there was a great deal of illness in the cramped quarters of the dugout, but the family lived there for seven years before moving to a better house further east in Sharon township, where the town of Kimballton developed.

There were other hardships. In 1874 the whole of the crop was eaten by grasshoppers. Mrs. J.P. Nielsen wrote:

> They came as a great black cloud out of the west – they swarmed over the corn, the pasture, the garden; by evening they had eaten to the plowed ground. Leaves of the trees were gone; the garden was a memory. A coat on a nearby shrub had been riddled by the gnawing, squirming greenish-grey swarms. Chickens feasted to the bursting point.[2]

Building a successful community

The early pioneers were hard-working and full of initiative. On top of the extremely hard toil in "breaking out" their farms from the prairie, a job that required at least three horses in front of a well-sharpened plow, and the building of a house for their families, they managed within the first 10 years to establish both a Danish congregation in 1875 and to build a Danish folk school in 1878. In this way a religious and cultural nucleus was formed, which acted as a magnet for new immigrants both from Denmark and from other places in America, where earlier immigrants felt the need of such Danish institutions to alleviate the homesickness from which all immigrants suffered.

Word of this successful Danish settlement, with plenty of good land, spread in various ways – through letters back to Denmark, through the Danish language press in America, and wherever Danes met in places further east, and the Elk Horn-Kimballton settlement, as it became known, grew rapidly. By 1882 a church building had been erected in Elk Horn and a permanent pastor, Kristian Anker, had been appointed. He was also in charge of the folk school, which became an important cultural center for the community. The pupils were young adults from other Danish settlements in Iowa or the neighboring states, but the evening lectures on general topics were open to everyone, and many of the local farmers participated in them.

The Elk Horn folk school was modelled on the Danish folk high schools.

Elk Horn Folk High School, Elk Horn, Iowa. 1898.

These schools, attended especially by the sons and daughters of farmers, were inspired by the philosophy of the Danish Bishop N.F.S. Grundtvig, and over the course of only a little more than 25 years, from about 1850, they had managed to give a cultural identity to the rural Danish population, and greatly improve the previously rather low educational standards. Emphasis was placed on intellectual development and the broadening of the horizons of the pupils. Lectures and discussions at the folk high schools on a variety of subjects, such as the Bible, Danish history, literature and many practical subjects were of great importance in opening the minds of the pupils to new ideas. There were no examinations or fixed curricula, but, of course, in the Elk Horn folk school the teaching of English to the newcomers was an important task.

Religion – two different factions

Each immigrant brought with him the religious beliefs corresponding to his background in Denmark. Lutheranism was the choice of the overwhelming majority, and both the factions of Lutheranism within the Danish folk church, Inner Mission and Grundtvigianism, were represented. One of the

early settlers, on whose land the whole of the town of Elk Horn developed, was Rasmus Hansen, a staunch supporter of the rather strict Inner Mission Lutheranism. When new immigrants arrived, they were often helped during the initial settlement phase by Rasmus Hansen or other early pioneers of the same persuasion, and it was natural for them to choose land near these early contacts. In the same way, the first group to buy land around what later became Kimballton were Grundtvigians, i.e. followers of the teachings of Bishop Grundtvig. They had a rather more worldly and much less strict view of life than the adherents of Inner Mission, and were joined by later arrivals with the same beliefs.

In this way the two towns, just two miles apart, and the surrounding rural areas were from the beginning largely settled by people who had different religious traditions. For the first 20 years, however, they all thrived within the same church, just as in Denmark, where members of the Inner Mission and the Grundtvigian faiths were all members of the Danish State Church. The difference was not only doctrinal, but also extended into everyday life. For adherents of Inner Mission all alcoholic drink was sinful, and dancing and other entertainments were not considered proper. Grundtvigians, on the other hand, had nothing against an occasional glass, and dancing, particularly folk dancing, and entertainment, in the form of reading, lectures or amateur theatricals, was a part of the culture which made up the broad spectrum of life which was Grundtvigianism. A Danish theologian describes the conditions that led to the formation of two such different factions within Danish Lutheranism as follows:

> It is two completely different views of man: a light view with a feeling for human life in its breadth and multiplicity, and with an understanding of the contribution of history or mythology in explaining life – and then a dark view: life is nothing but a time of trial, an examination; death means judgment; every day is therefore literally the last.[3]

These differences, he believed, were caused by hard social and psychological realities stemming from the division within the Danish rural population in the middle of the 19th century, when a prosperous period allowed the farmers to reach a level where they could look beyond the cares of the day, while the poorer classes, farm workers and servants, were dominated by the gloomy view of life that resulted from having to live from day to day, with the life hereafter as the only realistic potential reward. In America these differences were partly eliminated, because the human qualities that were required to make good as an immigrant were not dependent on Danish class boundaries, but the basic religious feelings persisted and manifested themselves in many different contexts.

Kimballton, Iowa. The Danish Lutheran Evangelical Church in the background. c. 1914.

The occasional difference of opinion within the church's board of governors, which of course contained both points of view, can be seen from the minutes. In 1886 a pietistic majority voted to have a saloon in Kimballton closed, and some years later the problem of allowing the shops to stay open and the dairy to function on Sundays gave rise to discussion. Some members felt that it constituted a desecration of the holy day to permit such opening hours and should not be tolerated by the congregation. Others were of the opinion that nothing would be gained by using force and that a friendly discussion would be more effective.

These differences of opinion were not peculiar to the Elk Horn-Kimballton community. The whole of the Danish Church in America had for some years had problems reconciling the views of the pietistic priests with those of the Grundtvigians, and in 1894 a split resulted. In the Elk Horn congregation, the followers of the Inner Mission pastor Kristian Anker took possession of the church and church property and barred the others from the use of the building, while 32 Grundtvigian members formed a new congregation located in Kimballton. The two congregations both flourished, and, seen in a longer perspective, the split, painful as it must have been at the time, probably contributed to the growth of the settlement as a whole. It allowed each faction to establish its own particular views and beliefs much more clearly than had been the case when coexistence within the same congregation had made compromises necessary on both sides. In

this way, Elk Horn attracted those for whom the purity of their faith was of paramount importance, while a large number of people who wanted to maintain the cultural ties to their Danish roots were attracted to the Kimballton area. However, the very fundamental differences which lay behind the church split in 1894, and the bitterness which resulted from the battle over the church property in Elk Horn, caused the two populations to develop reservations about each other, despite their common ancestry.

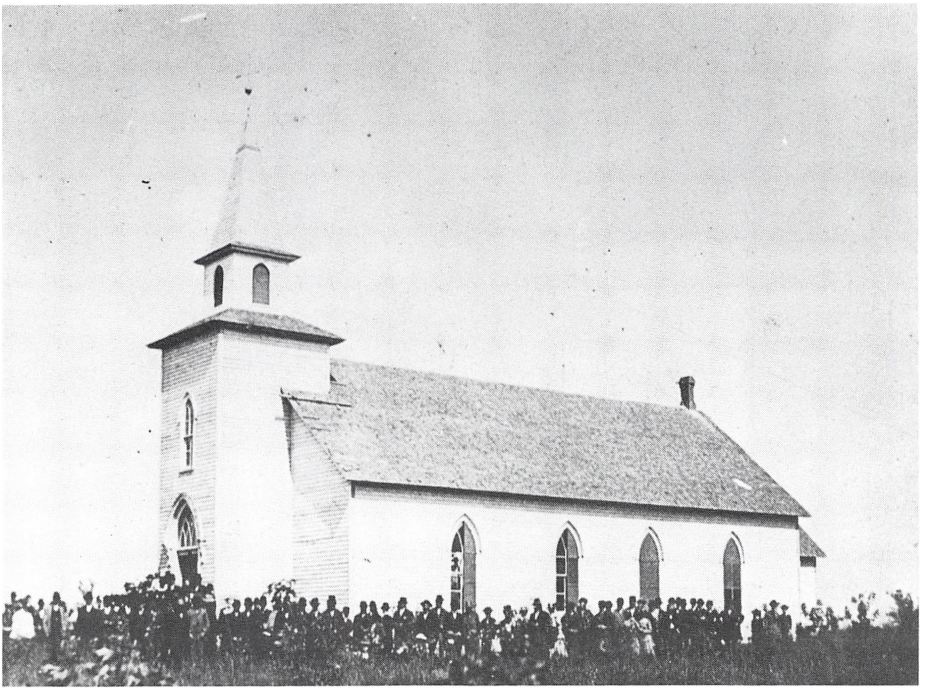
The preservation of the Danish language

The question of how much effort should be used to retain Danish was one of the issues on which the two groups differed. In the early years, there does not seem to have been much of a problem; the language of the settlement was Danish. This is clearly evident from a statement made by Pastor Anker sometime during the 1880s:

> Elk Horn is near the middle of the Settlement. Here are storekeepers, a blacksmith, carpenters, a harness maker, and painters. Everything is quiet and peaceful as in a village at home – Visitors often say that Elk Horn is a little Denmark – one may live months in Elk Horn without needing to use any other language than Danish; and here are certainly many homes where English is only spoken when a Jewish peddler or some American solicitor arrives. But, of course, the children learn English. Yet if the Danish school and church do their work, I can not conceive of the time when Danish will not be the community language.[4]

The fact that the children were educated in English in the American schools caused some mothers to worry about their children not receiving religious instruction in their own language. The tearful entreaties of one mother to Pastor Anker made him determined to find a solution, and despite the poverty among the settlers in the early years, the matter was considered to be of major importance. A joint effort was made to bring a teacher over from Denmark in 1883, and he taught the young children until the age of 11, when they would join the common school. Small one-room schools in each district, with one of the young Danish female immigrants as teacher, also helped to keep the language alive.

The official view of the Inner Mission faction had from the beginning been that the Danish language should only be used as long as it was necessary to reach new immigrants, while for Grundtvigians the mother tongue was an integral part of the culture which was contained in their religion and should be preserved. These different policies towards language retention are clearly evident in the lives of the communities. They were also



The Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church of Elk Horn, Iowa. The first Lutheran Church in Elk Horn; built in 1882.

influenced by the different ethnic makeup of the two populations. In Clay township, where Elk Horn was situated, there was already a mixture of ethnic groups when the first Dane arrived; by 1895, however, the Danes had grown to become the dominant group, and by 1910 they made up 85 percent of the population. In Sharon Township, containing Kimballton, there had scarcely been any earlier non-Danish settlement, and in 1910 the Danish contingent made up over 95 percent of the total.

In Elk Horn the so-called children's schools – "børneskoler," where instruction was given in Danish, were abandoned shortly after the turn of the century. One last determined effort was made in 1907, when the church board employed Miss Emma Søholm to run a Danish school for some months. The number of pupils enrolled was so small, however, that it was closed after a few days, and Miss Søholm was paid $30 for the trip she had made in vain. In Kimballton, similar schools were operated for a number of months each year, at least until 1920, and the Danish language was used in the community a lot longer. Even the teachers in the American schools in Kimballton spoke Danish, as can be seen from the reminiscences of Alice Petersen:

> The day I started school in 1931 I could speak only the Danish language, probably three-fourths of the class was in the same predicament. Amanda Jensen was our teacher, so there was no problem.[5]

In both communities, the ethnic concentration of Danes was so great that Danish was used for church services for many years. In 1916 a service in English was introduced in Elk Horn on Sunday afternoon for the members of the congregation who did not wish to attend the Danish service, and gradually English services became predominant. The last service in Danish was celebrated in 1948. In Kimballton, an occasional English service was introduced during the 1930s, and around 1940 there was an equal number of services in each language. It was not until 1961, when a parson was employed who did not speak the language, that Danish services were completely abandoned.

In 1918, as a patriotic gesture during the First World War, the governor of Iowa, William Harding, issued a proclamation making it a crime to speak any language other than English in public, on trains, on the telephone, and of course in church services. This caused the number of English services to increase in Elk Horn, and the Danish Sunday school classes to be abandoned, while the proclamation was completely ignored in Kimballton. One service was held at the vicarage, so that it should not be "in public," but already the next Sunday, a Danish service was held again at the church.[6]

A marked difference between the two communities is also apparent in their interest in Danish culture. The Danish Constitution Day was celebrated on June 5th in Elk Horn, as well as Independence Day on the 4th of July, but other than that, there are no traces of any arrangements with a specifically Danish link. This is in complete accord with the policies of the United Church, which was the name of the Inner Mission synod. Assimilation should occur as soon as possible, and as religious devotion was the central issue, very few secular activities were arranged.

In Kimballton, a large number of cultural events in Danish were held each year. Amateur theatricals were performed in Danish every year until 1954, a reading circle met to read Danish literature, and a folk dancing society has existed since early times. When Danish actors and performers toured in America, Kimballton was always included on the schedule, and the town had its own orchestra until the 1930s. These cultural activities, most of them in the Danish language, formed an integral part of the Grundtvigian belief that the ties to the Danish language should be retained, but it did not prevent the Grundtvigians from being interested in and loyal to American institutions, or from feeling that America was their new country.

Most of the 300,000 Danish immigrants to America settled in areas

where they were greatly outnumbered by other groups and were quickly assimilated. For the large group of Inner Mission followers in and around Elk Horn, the rate of assimilation was somewhat slower because the large number of and constant influx of new arrivals made it desirable to retain some knowledge of the language and some church services in Danish. The concentration on the words of the Bible and a moral life-style were not, however, tied to any particular language, so when the rate of new arrivals tapered off, the transition into English was probably easier in Elk Horn than for the citizens of neighboring Kimballton. For the Grundtvigians, the retention of Danish religion, language and culture was seen as so essential a part of their identity that American culture penetrated very slowly. The Danish-American scholar Enok Mortensen describes it thus:

> No ethnic group in America has found it easier to become assimilated than the Danish-Americans; yet paradoxically, no other group has been more zealously aware of its own proud and unique heritage.[7]

Around the time of the Second World War, however, the Danish heritage had melted into the background, and all the immigrants were fully assimilated.

Cultural background and family size

Another feature which points to the different attitudes of the two brands of Lutheranism can be seen in the demography of the area.[8] There is a general tendency for immigrant societies to have a very large number of children, and the rural populations of both Clay and Sharon townships correspond to this pattern. In the town of Elk Horn, the average number of 5.3 children per mother, deduced from the information in the federal census for 1910, conforms to this norm. In Kimballton, however, the number of children per mother was 3.3, i.e. two fewer children per mother, on average. In order to eliminate possible differences due to women having their children earlier in one place than in the other, the average number of children per mother can also be calculated for mothers over the age of 40, who would generally have completed their families. The difference persists; 7.5 children per mother in Elk Horn and 5.2 in Kimballton.

In order to find an explanation for this startling difference in two immigrant towns just two miles apart, inhabited by the same ethnic group, a variety of hypotheses have been considered. The age at marriage can be discarded as a factor, as it was almost identical; 23.2 years in Elk Horn and 23.7 years in Kimballton. Large families are often associated with poor economic conditions, but this must also be discounted, as the average yearly income was very similar in the two towns, and the average property

valuation was considerably higher in Elk Horn, where the number of children was also higher.

A full-page advertisement for a book called *Om den sexuelle hygiejne* (On Sexual Hygiene) in the Danish folk high-school magazine (*Højskolebladet*) for 1889 supports the conjecture that the concept of birth control may have been familiar to the Grundtvigian community of Kimballton, with its close connections to the Danish folk high school movement. The author, Seved Ribbing, writes very openly about almost every aspect of human sexuality, including seven different ways of limiting the size of the family.[9] There is, of course, only a remote possibility that this book would have found its way to the American Midwest. However, the very fact that it was possible to openly advertise its existence in the folk high school magazine illustrates the general attitude of openness to new ideas that was characteristic of the Grundtvigian movement, and shows that this topic was not taboo in the folk high schools. It was almost the rule rather than the exception during the second half of the 19th century for the young sons and daughters of the Danish farming population to spend at least a winter season at a folk high school. So, although there is no way of proving that the early immigrants to Kimballton had attended a folk high school in Denmark before their departure, the strong adherence to its traditions in the community and the congregation is a very strong indication that at least some of its more influential members had done so. In this way, they could have become influenced by the information about limiting the number of children which was spreading in Denmark at this time.[10]

Another factor which strongly points to the availability of knowledge about family limitation in Kimballton is the age of the women at the birth of their youngest child. If this event occurs considerably before the normal end of the child-bearing period for women, it is a strong indication that at least the idea of the "safe period," if not actual contraceptive means, has been used. The information on mothers above the age of 40 in the 1910 federal census shows that the average age at the birth of the last child in Elk Horn was 41.7 years, which is near the end of the child-bearing cycle, while it was only 35.7 years in Kimballton.

This provides a strong indication that, until around the turn of the century, the Grundtvigian background influenced the number of children born to Kimballton women, while the pietistic attitudes in Elk Horn caused family sizes there to conform more closely to the norm for immigrant communities. After 1900, the character of the Danish influx to the area changed.[11] Instead of being dominated by family immigration, the emphasis changed to young, unmarried adults, particularly men, and the demography and family patterns of the Danish community were correspondingly modified.

Ethnic farming methods

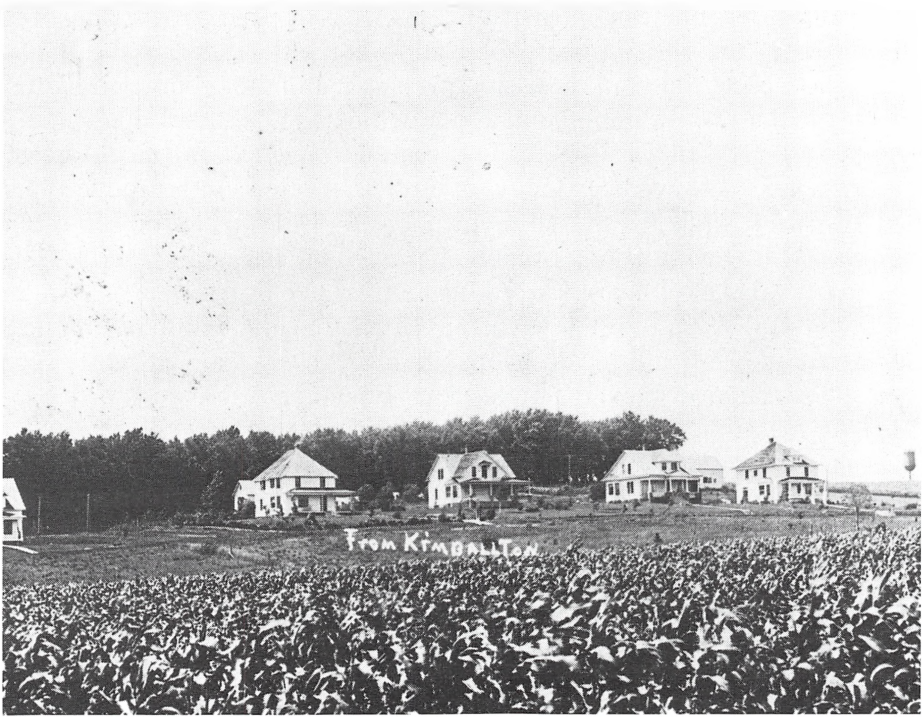
The establishment of a large settlement was in part due to the arrival of many newcomers, attracted by the well-functioning community and the prospects for the area, but it was also dependent on the strong attachment of the established population to the region. Their participation in the ethnic community was so important to the Danes, especially the farmers, that their mobility, once they had settled there, was very low compared to the normal rate among immigrants near the frontier.[12] The high commitment of the Danish families to their new home, compared to that of the non-Danes, had the effect of squeezing out the latter group and increasing the ethnic domination of the Danes.

Danes became so numerous in the area that they spread into several of the neighboring townships. By 1910 the percentage of ethnic Danes, that is Danes of the first or second generation plus those children of the third generation whose names showed their fathers to be of Danish extraction, was over 25 percent in a cluster of 11 townships. In nine of them the percentage was over 40, and in the central four townships of Jackson, Clay, Sharon and Oakfield, the proportion of ethnic Danes was over 80 percent (in the case of Sharon township over 95 percent).

Ever since the historian Frederick Jackson Turner formulated his thesis about the leveling influence of the harsh conditions of the frontier, it has been generally accepted that local conditions of soil and climate and the example of native-born farmers determined the agricultural methods employed by the immigrants.

Very little source material has survived to allow the examination of the application of this theory to strongly ethnic communities, but a section of microfilm entitled "Crop and Other Farm Statistics," containing statistical information on each township in Iowa for the period between 1917 and 1945, has made it possible to correlate agricultural production to the percentage of Danes in the population of each township. This study[13] has shown that, rather than imitating the methods of their neighbors, Danish farmers, some of whom had spent more than 40 years on the prairie, still utilized farming traditions which were prevalent in Denmark before they left.

In the field of agriculture, the common Danish ethnic background of Clay and Sharon townships was a stronger influence than their religious and cultural differences. Apart from the above-mentioned 11 townships dominated by the Danes, the only township in Shelby and Audubon counties with a majority of any one ethnic group was Westphalia, where Germans made up almost 75 percent of the population. In all other townships



Houses in Kimballton. 1914.

there was a mixture of various small ethnic groups and native-born Americans.

It was the ambition of most immigrants to own their own farm, and the proportion of Danes who reached this goal was larger than average. In the 11 townships with a Danish population numbering more than 25 percent, the percentage of owned farms is considerably higher than in all other townships except Westphalia, where ownership was also very high. It seems that a stable ethnic community encouraged farm ownership rather than rental.

Most of the Danish immigrants were poor when they arrived and were only able to acquire a small farm. Rasmus Hansen, one of the earliest settlers in Elk Horn, has described how they often started:

> Many first purchased only forty acres, usually paying down $70. They built board shanties ten feet square, barely sufficient to hold a bed, a table and a few necessary household articles – Then they obtained a cheap team, a wagon and plow, a cow, an old sow, and some chickens, and proceeded to break out the farm.[14]

The Danish tradition for intensive livestock production, which had been developed in the difficult years for Danish agriculture during the 1880s, was a good background in these circumstances, and the production figures show that the Danish immigrants did much better than most other immigrants on their small farms. In the four central townships with more than 80 percent Danes, the average number of bushels of cereal crops produced per acre was 41.4, while the overall average for all townships in the two counties was 37.0. Livestock production showed even larger differences. The combined value of all livestock production per acre in the state of Iowa in 1920 was $18.30, and for the townships in Shelby and Audubon counties, apart from the 11 "Danish" townships, the average was $17.10. For the four central Danish townships, the livestock production per acre was worth over $4 more than in the other townships, with an average value of $21.40.

Dairy farming was well known to the Danish immigrants because it had played such an important and profitable role in the restructuring of Danish agriculture during the 1880s. With the formation of cooperative dairies, even the smallest farmer with just one or two cows benefited from the rising prices. The first cooperative dairy was founded in 1882 on the Danish mainland. Only eight years later, a group of farmers met at the Esbeck hardware store in Kimballton on the American prairie and organized a cooperative creamery, and a similar venture was undertaken in Elk Horn. This early start was made possible because two Danish buttermakers had heard about the folk school in Elk Horn and decided to spend the winter there. Such expert help at a very early date made dairy farming a profitable business, and in the agricultural statistics from around 1920, the townships with the highest percentage of Danes still had on average the highest percentage of milk cows, even though dairy farming had by then also been taken up in other areas.[15]

Economic benefits of migration

One of the strongest incentives to emigrate was the hope of improved economic circumstances. Information about the wages of the Danish immigrants is generally not available, but in the Iowa State census for 1915 each person was asked to report his total income for 1914, so that a comparison with the wages for similar jobs in Denmark at the same time is possible. Artisans show the greatest improvement, with wages in some cases four to five times those paid for similar crafts in Denmark, but for almost every single occupation the pay was considerably better than it would have been in Denmark, representing a real gain, since the cost of living was only about 15 percent higher. However, the most important improvement for the immigrants was undoubtedly the much less rigid

structure of American society, which made it possible for people with initiative and drive to succeed, even though they did not have any special education, and for agricultural workers to become farm owners. In Denmark it required a university degree to become a doctor or a parson, and long training to become, for example, a postmaster or a bank manager. The doctor in Kimballton in 1915 had spent a year at a homeopathic college in Chicago, but still had a higher income than his better trained colleagues in Denmark, and most vicars in America had been educated at a theological seminary in a much shorter time than was needed in Denmark, and were still almost as well paid.

The founder of the *Landmands National Bank* in Kimballton, Hans Madsen, was a harness maker who started banking in his back room in 1907. His bank grew and was managed so well that it was the only one in the area to survive the economic depression of the 1930s and received official recognition as a "sound bank" with access to the Federal Reserve System.[16]

While the average incomes in the two towns of Elk Horn and Kimballton were almost identical, there were great differences between the farmers of the two surrounding townships of Clay and Sharon. They had all improved their incomes compared to the average income for farmers in Denmark, which was $677 a year,[17] but in Sharon Township farmers made an average of $1,716, while Clay farmers had an average income of $774, less than half as much. Property valuations for 1915 show the farms in Clay Township to be worth on average about $16,000 compared to the $21,000 value of Sharon farms.

The average sizes of the farms in the two townships were similar, so the most likely explanation for the difference can probably be found in the different backgrounds of the two groups in Denmark. Most of the immigrants in Clay Township began in the modest way described by Rasmus Hansen. Furthermore, their background in Denmark as agricultural workers or servants did not provide them with any great skill in farming their small acreage so that they had to learn gradually, by experience and by watching their more successful neighbors. Many of the farmers in Sharon Township came from the Danish farming classes, and had perhaps been younger sons who were not able to take over the home farm, but who might have received a sum of money as an inheritance with which to get started. More importantly, they had participated in the running of their home farm before emigration and had in many cases spent a winter at a folk high school or an agricultural school, as was customary for farmers' children. In this way they were well trained to manage a farm and to get the most out of the fertile Iowa soil.

The farmers in Clay Township were of course not blind to the success, especially of animal production, in Sharon, and with their growing experi-

ence and skill they were gradually able to move into this field; the number of farm animals increased rapidly in Clay Township after about 1910. American agriculture experienced a very long stretch of improved conditions after the severe recession of the 1890s, and when the U.S.A. entered the World War in 1917, market conditions for farmers improved even further, so that there seemed to be no limit to the amount that could be sold at very good prices. This encouraged all farmers to mechanize and expand their holdings as much as possible to take advantage of this golden opportunity. In most cases it was necessary to take out extra mortgages on the farms. Property values grew to unprecedented heights and mortgages were easy to obtain.

The very large demand for foodstuffs continued for the first few years after the end of the war, but in 1920 agriculture in most European countries started to function again, and there was a general shortage of money to import food from overseas. Furthermore, the harvest of 1920 was exceptionally good everywhere, and suddenly the bubble burst – it was no longer possible to sell the huge American agricultural production.

More than a quarter of the farmers in Clay Township had mortgaged their farms to such a degree that the equity in 1925 was negative, and many others were only just solvent. In Sharon the farmers had been able to finance the increase in production without excessive loans, so here the crash was not so crippling. A comparison of the property valuations per acre for the two areas before, during and after the boom reveals the extent of the disaster for the Clay farmers. In 1915 the value per acre of the Danish Clay farms was $103, while it was $154 in Sharon Township. During the boom, in 1920, the average in the area was around $300 (no separate figures exist for the two townships), but in 1925 the level had dropped right back to $106 in Clay Township, while it was $172 in Sharon, a substantial drop, but still significantly higher than it had been in 1915. A study of the percentage of the average value of the farms covered by loans reveals an even more alarming picture. In Sharon Township, the farmers increased their loans from about 27 percent of the property value in 1915 to 33 percent in 1925, while the Clay farmers gambled so hard on improving and mechanizing their farms during the boom that their loans rose from 21 to 59 percent.[18]

The census material is not yet available for the period after 1925, so it is not known exactly how the Clay farmers recovered after this economic crisis. But recover they did, and both Clay and Sharon townships are today populated by farmers who share in the general patterns of prosperity and recession that befall American agriculture.

The resurgence of ethnic traditions

During the 1930s, and especially after the Second World War, ethnic features faded more and more into the background as assimilation proceeded. The populations of the two towns lived the lives of small rural communities all over America. It seemed as if the specifically Danish imprint on American life might disappear altogether although, as has been described above, Danish language and culture continued to play an important role in the Grundtvigian community around Kimballton. However, the awakening of the interest in ethnic roots that occurred during the 1970s and 1980s inspired various activities in Elk Horn and Kimballton. In 1975, Harvey Sørensen of Elk Horn conceived the daring idea of importing an old windmill from Jutland to tower over the town as a landmark. After many problems, a windmill bought in Nørre Snede, Jutland, and dismantled piece by piece, was reassembled at the southern entrance to Elk Horn, where it now attracts thousands of visitors every year. Interest in the Danish language also flourished to such an extent that a number of evening classes were started, and research into old family histories began.

In Kimballton, a city park was opened with a small statue of the little mermaid from the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale, and for the town's centennial in 1983 an impressive collection of family histories was assembed and published, giving an informative and inspiring glimpse into the past history of the area.

The most tangible evidence of this newly awakened interest in the Danish past was the decision of the Danish American Heritage Society to locate The Danish Immigrant Museum in the Elk Horn-Kimballton community. The competition for this project was fierce, but through the remarkable efforts of the local inhabitants, a site in Elk Horn was selected as the home for the museum. The first wing is presently under construction, and the exhibits and collections of artifacts will soon provide their many descendants with poignant insights into the lives, customs and culture of the original Danish immigrants.

Notes

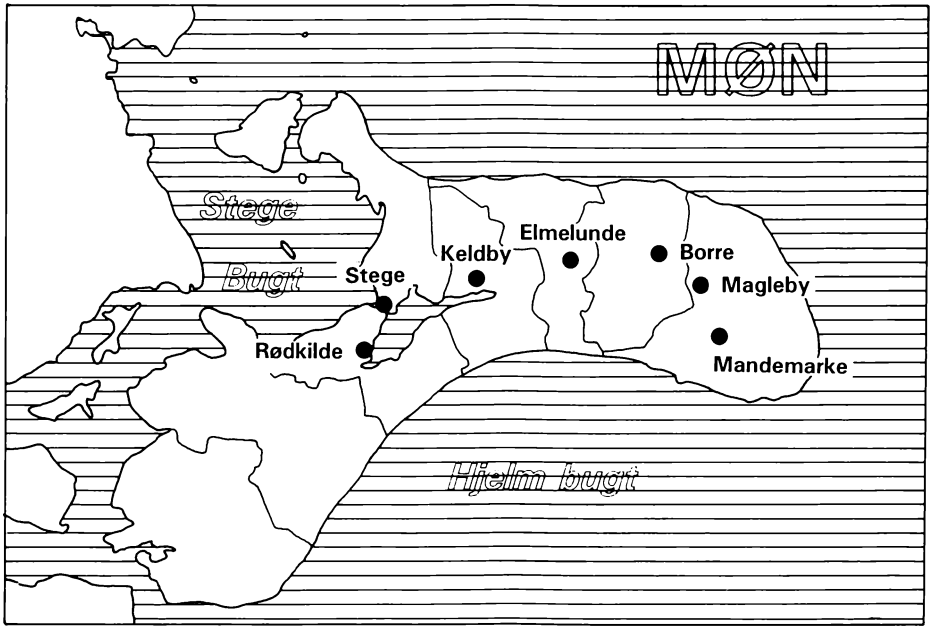
1. J. Jørgensen, "En Begyndelse. Elk Horn-Kimballton Settlementet" (A Beginning. The Elk-Horn-Kimballton Settlement), *Julegranen*, Cedar Falls, Iowa, 1922.
2. "Elk Horn's First 50 Years," *The Elk Horn-Kimballton Review*, Burt Wittrup, ed., June, 1966.
3. P.G. Lindhardt, *Vækkelse og kirkelige retninger* (Revival and Church Denominations), Copenhagen, 1959, p. 66.
4. *Meddelelser fra den dansk-amerikanske Mission* (Reports from the Danish-American Mission), Odense, Denmark, 1872-1894, vol. III, pp. 268-273.

5. *Kimballton Centennial 1883-1983*, Kimballton, Iowa, 1983, p. 35.
6. Jette Mackintosh, "'Little Denmark' on the Prairie: A Study of the Towns of Elk Horn and Kimballton in Iowa," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 1988, vol. 7, no. 2.
7. Enok Mortensen in the preface to Erling Duus, *Danish-American Journey*, Franklin, Massachusetts, 1971.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 56 and Jette Mackintosh, *Danskere i Midtvesten* (Danes in the Midwest), Ph.D. thesis, University of Copenhagen, 1990, chap. 4.
9. Seved Ribbing, *Om den sexuelle hygiejne* (On Sexual Hygiene), Copenhagen, 1889.
10. It is conventional to pinpoint the time for the introduction of methods of contraception to the decade in which the fertility curve first shows a fall of 10%. In Denmark such a fall can be registered in Copenhagen in 1886-87, and in regions throughout the country in succeeding decades until 1910.
11. Jette Mackintosh, "Migration and mobility among Danish settlers in southwest Iowa." *Journal of Historical Geography*, 1991, vol. 17, p. 170.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 173-181, provides a detailed investigation of this subject and a comparison with other ethnic groups.
13. Jette Mackintosh, "Ethnic Patterns in Danish Immigrant Agriculture: A Study of Audubon and Shelby counties, Iowa," *Agricultural History*, 1990, vol. 64, no. 4.
14. Unpublished memoir.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
16. *Kimballton Centennial*, *op.cit.*, pp. III, 25.
17. *Statistisk Tabelværk* (Statistical Tables) Danish Census, 1916, p. 30.
18. The figures are based on the manuscript for the Iowa State Census for 1915 and 1925, Clay and Sharon townships, and on the "Farm Land Statistics" in the Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920. See also J. Mackintosh, "Danskere i Midtvesten," *op.cit.*, chap. 6.

Three Farm Families on Either Side of the Atlantic

An Example of Family and "Chain" Emigration from the Island of Møn in the 19th Century

by Steffen Elmer Jørgensen



Map of the island of Møn.

"...they say there is no work here, and yet..."

Throughout the 1870s and 80s, until her sadly premature death from tuberculosis in 1891, Helene Dideriksen, a farm girl from Nørre Vestud on the Danish island of Møn, faithfully kept a diary and exchanged many letters with her friends. On April 11, 1880, she noted: "...on Wednesday an auction at Jørgen Skov's. They have now gone to America."[1] On New Year's Day, 1881, she described a meeting at the free school in Nyborre. Her cousin, Hans Christoffer Strandskov gave a talk there about America.[2] He brought greetings from his family in America and stayed on Møn for the holidays before returning to Askov Folk High School. This school had started a training course for laymen willing to take on the difficult task of preaching among the Danes who had emigrated to America. More than a year later, on April 18, 1882, Helene attended a meeting where she heard the former Danish-American minister, Jakob Holm, talk about the American mission.[3] Hans Christoffer Strandskov also took part in this meeting and spoke of the folk high school in Elk Horn, Iowa. On April 22, some of the family gathered to bid farewell to Hans Christoffer, his father Lars and numerous others who were returning to America, or going there for the first time. Like many other emigrants who, for one reason or another, had returned to their homeland, they would now serve as guides for new emigrants.

In a letter dated April 19, 1882, Helene wrote that "people here are frantic to travel to America, it's as though everyone has a fever."[4] In November, 1882, her commentary on the enormous emigration which had taken place that year included the notation: "they say there is no work here, and, yet, those who stay are so busy that they cannot do half what is necessary; it is a strange situation; here there is a lack of both time and work, and you would think one could make up for the other."[5]

The frequent intermarriage of the farm families of the island of Møn in the 1800s led to the formation of family "clans." Three of these clans, the Strandskovs, the Billes and the Skovs, will be described in the following.

If Helene's diary is to be believed, by the late 1800s the island of Møn was in the throes of an "epidemic of emigration" which lasted for several decades. Emigrants-to-be often visited the island, and the folk high schools and free public schools were generous with information about the missionary work carried out among Danes in the United States. For many years, news of America and how emigrants from the farms of Møn fared there filled everyone's thoughts.

Møn and emigration

For the farmers and smallholders of Møn, America was "the promised

land." We know for a certainty that by the end of 1914 at least 3,100 Møn-islanders had emigrated to countries overseas.[6] This number is undoubtedly low, as some emigrants went unregistered, and we know that emigration from the island, which in 1901 had a population of 15,780, continued up to 1929.

The following will serve to illustrate how emigration touched the lives of all members of one branch of a particular family clan and left others completely untouched. We seem here to be dealing with a particularly infectious "ailment" which hit at random. Numerous emigration studies have shown that overseas emigration from Europe displayed significant regional variations. The greatest intensity was often seen in marginal areas far from population centers.[7] Within those regions from which there was intensive emigration, large concentrations of emigrants came from just a few parishes, while other parishes gave up few emigrants. Within certain parishes all the emigrants sometimes came from a single village, just as, within certain families, all the emigrants were sometimes from the same nuclear family. While no major conclusions can be drawn from the emigration story of the Strandskovs, Billes and Skovs, these families can help to illustrate the phenomenon of rural, "chain" emigration.

Møn was one of the areas of Denmark hardest hit by the emigration of its population, and Elmelunde Parish, the home of the Strandskov and Bille families, was one of the hardest hit parishes of Møn. The Emigration Records of the Copenhagen Police for the years from 1869 to 1914 show that there were 226 emigrants from Elmelunde.[8] At least 48 others had emigrated prior to 1869 or were registered in other ways. This gives a total of at least 274 emigrants. The census of 1860 shows the population of Elmelunde Parish to be 954. By 1880 this number had fallen to 915, and in 1901 there were 846 persons living in the parish. The emigration from 1860 to 1901 amounted to almost a third of the population in 1901 (32.3%). A similar decline in population also occurred in the parish of Magleby, while on the island as a whole, there was a slight increase in population between 1880 and 1901 – from 13,148 in 1880 to 15,780 in 1901.[9]

This stagnation was neither the result of a decline in birthrate nor an increase in mortality rate, but was, rather, the result of emigration to America and to other parts of Denmark. This has been a chronic condition on the island ever since emigration began to accelerate in 1860. The largest number of inhabitants ever recorded was 16,000, and today (1991) the population numbers 11,000.[10] Møn's particular problem is its peripheral location, scarcely conducive to the development of industry and manufacturing. There was a time when the island experienced a population explosion and was one of Denmark's most densely populated areas. The town of Stege grew rapidly in the first half of the 1800s due to the grain trade, but

many jobs were lost when this growth slowed in the second half of the century.[11] There were few resources to tap in developing an alternative to farming, and the work available to local craftsmen could not support a population increase.

In the parish of Keldby, where the Bille family had its roots and the Skovs lived, the Emigration Records show that 158 persons emigrated from 1869 to 1914. Other sources indicate that at least 48 others emigrated prior to 1869, giving a total of at least 206 persons. As in Elmelunde, the population peaked in 1855 with 1,385 persons, while in 1901 there were only 1,250. The percentage of those who had emigrated in relation to the population of 1901 was here only 16.5 %.

Emigration from Møn in general, and from the parish of Elmelunde in particular, began in 1844 when teacher Hans Christensen Fugl emigrated to Buenos Aires, Argentina.[12] Following this, in 1852-53, the Mormons introduced the people of Møn to the idea of emigration.[13] Citizens from the two parishes of Elmelunde and Keldby were among the first large group of those who joined the Mormons in a movement known as the Forsgren-emigration.[14] In general, however, emigration did not begin to accelerate until about 1859-60, and it did so with such speed that by the end of 1871, 900 persons had emigrated.[15]

The two parishes in question were predominantly agricultural areas, and the most important non-agrarian jobs were in the various crafts. Sixty percent of the population of Elmelunde were engaged in farming, 12% were craftsmen and 14.7% were farm hands or unskilled workers.[16]

An exodus of families. The Strandskov families of Møn

Our story begins with the farmer Kristoffer Madsen Strandskov, his wife, Ane Kristine, and their seven children, born between 1819 and 1832.[17] The three youngest children emigrated with their spouses in 1871 and 1872. They settled in Carlston Township near a previously established Danish Baptist colony in Clarks Grove in Freeborn County, Minnesota. The Carlston Township settlement was characterized by the large number of Danes of the Grundtvigian persuasion from the islands of Lolland and Møn, and here the three families lived in almost as close proximity as they had on the island of Møn. In 1900 there were 1,743 Danish-born residents in Freeborn County.

Minnesota

It is not known when and how the Møn-islanders, in particular those from the parishes of Elmelund and Keldby, first heard of Carlston, Minnesota.

A farmhouse and water tower in Freeborn County, Minnesota. (Where not otherwise indicated, the pictures accompanying this article are the property of Møens Museum, Stege, Denmark.)

The first Danes in Carlston were immigrants who had left the puritan environment of the Danish Baptists in nearby Clarks Grove. Lars Strandskov's eldest son, Hans Christoffer, described the actual decision to emigrate as follows:

> As a child I heard a lot about America. Our old hired hand had two sons and a daughter over there, and our neighbor, Jens Bille, had three sons and a daughter over there. Someone or other from almost every home in Hjertebjerg had emigrated. When someone came home from America it was only natural that they should visit us because Father was so interested.[18]

In the Emigration Records of the Copenhagen Police (April 30, 1872) there is an entry for "farmer" Lars Christian Strandskov, 39, with wife (Ane) Marie, 33, and six children between the ages of 11 and six months.[19] Accompanying them were their hired girl and one of her brothers as well as a young family of smallholders. Their destination is listed as Wells,

The railroad station in Freeborn, near Carlston, Minnesota.

Minnesota, a small railway town in Faribault County (a neighboring county to Freeborn). In 1871, Lars' brother, Kristen Kristoffersen, his wife Mette and five children and his sister, Mette Kirstine, with her husband, Jens Christian Jørgensen, and their eight children between the ages of 20 and six months emigrated to Austin, Minnesota, the largest town in Freeborn County and near Alden in Carlston Township.[20]

The family of Lars Strandskov is of particular interest. They came to Alden in May of 1872 and were well-received by Lars' brothers and sisters. He also had a cousin there, as well as a number of acquaintances from Møn. He and his family moved in with his cousin and shortly thereafter bought a quarter section farm (160 acres) with a house. Later they acquired a team of horses, a new timber wagon and furniture. The family didn't start from scratch as they had money from the sale of their farm in Denmark. As H.C. Strandskov put it:

> We were so busy adjusting to this new home, so different from our home in Denmark. There were neighbors everywhere, a cousin south of us, some good, old friends from Møn east of us, another Danish family north of us and two English families west of us. My uncle lived four miles away and my aunt five miles away. ... Every day there were new and strange situations that we all had to learn to deal with.[21]

The family was certainly not among strangers, and yet the process of adjustment was not an easy one. Although Lars was full of energy and optimism, every Sunday his wife Ane Marie sat by one of the windows staring eastward toward the distant island of Møn with tears in her eyes. Twenty-five years later, in a letter written March 15, 1897, she described her feelings upon receiving a picture of the church in Elmelunde in a letter to her niece, Bodil-Stine Nøhr in Hjertebjerg:

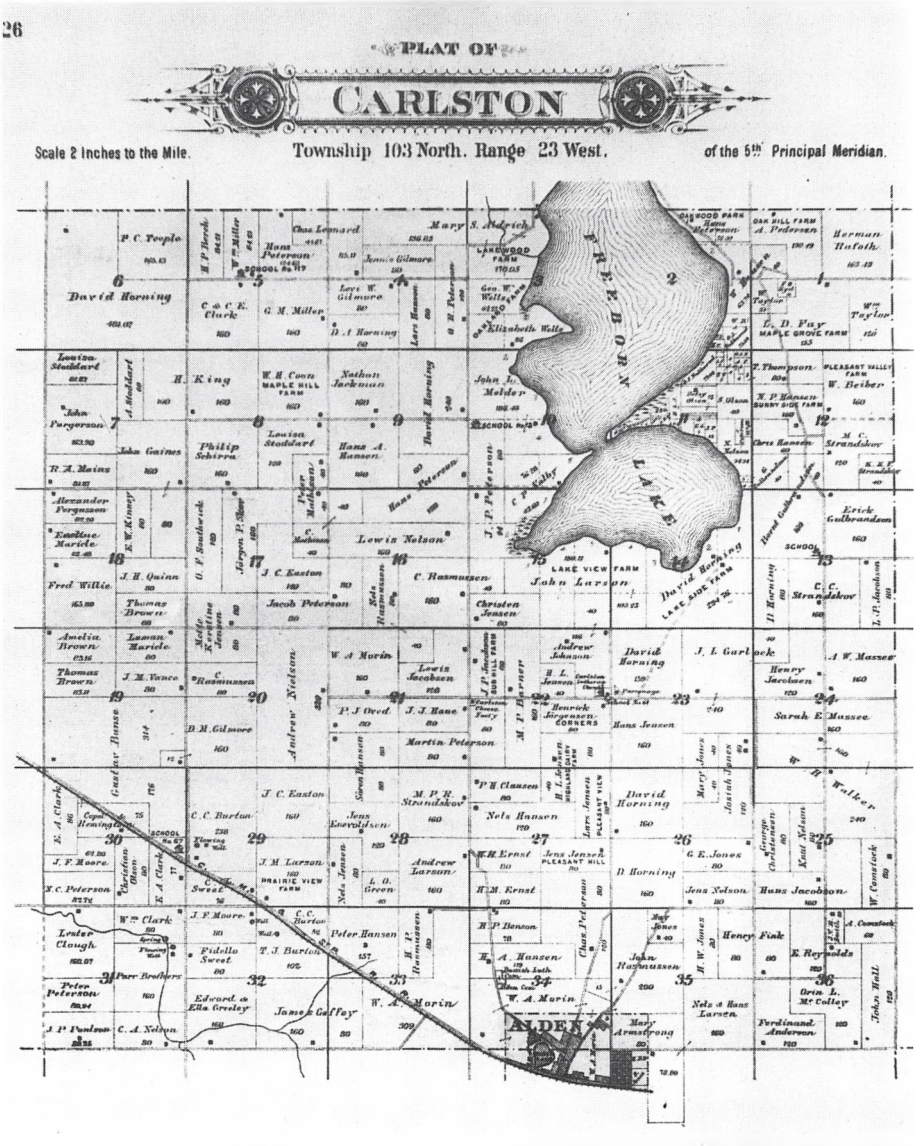
> Yes, why couldn't I have stayed in dear Hjertebjerg, as I so wanted to. I am glad I found it in my heart to follow my dear Lars since he wanted it so much. Many of our children would have emigrated anyway... I cannot say I have had no joys [here], that would be wrong. But my thoughts often travel homeward, especially after receiving a letter from home.

As farmers, the Strandskovs were not typical emigrants. According to Kristian Hvidt only 0.2% of those who took part in the mass emigration of the 1800s earned a living from farm work; their families must, of course, be added to this number.[22] My own study of the early emigration from the islands of Lolland, Falster and Møn showed there were, in fact, few farmers. It must be taken into consideration, however, that in the police records of those who made out an emigration contract, the occupation "farmer" is often given, regardless of whether the person in question was the owner of a large estate or a hired hand.

What of the fate of the second generation in America?[23] Lars Strandskov died in 1890, at the age of 57. His two elder sons, Hans and Niels Christoffer, were ministers, and it therefore became the duty of the younger son, Mads Peter, who was no more than 25 at the time, to take over the family farm. As early as 1897, Mads Peter and two of his brothers-in-law had gone to South Dakota to look for land which could be acquired there for $5-10 per acre (land in Freeborn County sold for $40 per acre). Mads Peter and his wife, Maren Barner, sold the family farm in Minnesota in 1899. They moved to North Dakota, where they joined 100 other Danish families, and bought a quarter section homestead.

The younger brother, Laurits, also moved to North Dakota, and he and his mother Ane Marie settled in Kermit, about 30 miles west of Flaxton, only ten miles from the Canadian border.

In 1910 the family was again on the move, and Mads Peter and Maren moved to Dagmar, Montana. Here they settled in one of the last colonies established by the Danish Church.[24] This colony was started by E.F. Mad-



Plat of Carlston Township, showing that several of the quarter section farms were owned by Strandskovs. 1895.

sen of Clinton, Iowa, one of the hardliners of the Grundtvigian cause and the Danish organisation known as "Dansk Folkesamfund" (Danish Folk Society). Madsen was convinced of the value of maintaining the Danish

language and culture among immigrants in America and felt this could best be accomplished in isolated colonies far out in the country.

Mads Peter sold his farm in Flaxton, North Dakota, for $5,600 and paid only $1,600 for a quarter section with a house in Dagmar. He was therefore able to make the trip to Montana riding his newly purchased "Flour City" gas tractor – a technical marvel to which he hitched a wagon to carry his animals and furnishings. Laurits and Ane Marie joined them. Soon Laurits married and moved with his wife to her native West Denmark, Wisconsin.

Mads Peter's sister, Maren, and her husband, Jens Peter Jacobsen, lived first in Flaxton and later in Dagmar where they operated a farm and were custodians of the church which was dedicated in 1916.

Ane Marie Strandskov died in Dagmar in 1917 without ever having reconciled herself to her change of homeland. The most remarkable thing about this pattern of moves is that the Danish settlements grew by a process of gemmation – new settlements grew out of old ones, and newly arrived Møn-islanders were invited to join. Also worthy of note is the fact that, in spite of their mobility, these people succeeded in maintaining close family ties.

No intermarriages with other nationalities took place in the second generation of the Strandskov family. Intermarriages occurred once more in the third generation, but the majority of spouses were Danish-Americans. The family continued to be closely knit in the third generation and also maintained contact with Møn.

It would be an exaggeration to describe the emigration of the Strandskov family itself as "chain" emigration. The three Strandskov families came as parts of larger groups of emigrants in 1871 and 1872 and served as "magnets" and guides for other, later emigrants from Møn in 1882.

The Bille and Skov families

Lars and Ane Marie Strandskov's neighbor in Elmelunde Parish on Møn was Jens Hansen Bille. Seven of the eight Bille children emigrated to Luck Township in Polk County, Wisconsin – to West Denmark, as the Danish settlement there was known.

The fate of those members of the Bille and Skov families who emigrated to the United States has not been so meticulously charted as the fate of Strandskov family members. It is, however, interesting to note that they all spent their lives in Luck, Wisconsin.

It is difficult to determine precisely how many Møn-islanders came to the colony of West Denmark, but existing reports rarely mention other than the Bille and Skov families. A large number of the earliest settlers in West Denmark did not come directly from Denmark but from the settle-

The old West Denmark Lutheran Church. Dedicated in 1900.

ments, Neenah, Waupaca and Oshkosh near Lake Winnebago in Wisconsin.[25]

The young Billes and Skovs, who had worked as hired hands and craftsmen's apprentices, were more "average" emigrants than the Strandskovs. There are no letters or other detailed descriptions of the circumstances under which the two former families emigrated.

The founding of the West Denmark colony

The emigration tradition was already well-established on the island of Møn when in the spring of 1867, a former Jutland farmer, M.C. Pedersen from Sindbjerg near the town of Vejle, who had emigrated in 1863, traveled throughout Denmark trying to convince others to follow in his footsteps.[26] It was he who succeeded in convincing Jens Jørgen Bille of the wisdom of emigration. Pedersen lived in Neenah, Wisconsin, but it was his dream to found a settlement on the prairie where even the poorest emigrant could have his own farm.[27] In the spring of 1868 he returned to the United States with a group of Danish emigrants, including Mads Peter and Hans Bille who joined their brother, Jens Jørgen. They first settled in Waupaca, Wisconsin. In the meantime, M.C. Pedersen continued his frontier search for the ideal place for a settlement. He had first thought of Minnesota, but a German immigrant had convinced him that the best land for poor people was timberland. In the first place, it was cheaper, and, although clearing it would be hard work, building materials would then be close at hand.

Pedersen learned of the sale of public domain lands in Wisconsin in St. Croix and Polk counties along the St. Croix River which forms the border between Wisconsin and Minnesota. This area was in no way reminiscent of the rich farmland of Møn, but the rolling, tree-covered hills were beautiful. The quality of the land varied considerably from place to place, and in some areas was very rocky. In early 1869 there was no railroad. Kristian Østergaard, who taught at the Danish seminary at the folk high school in West Denmark, characterized the settlers' lives as follows:

> It is not children's work to clear some 25 acres or more of heavy forest vegetation and wait in slim circumstances until it turns into a decent field. A few who have the best land may get on fairly well, but most will hardly bring it further than to have nearly paid their holding before the next generation takes over.[28]

Østergaard also commented that the people had become introverted by loneliness, the quiet and hard work.

M.C. Pedersen found the land he was looking for in Polk County. The three Bille brothers came to the settlement in the fall of 1869. A fourth

brother and two sisters, as well as Niels and Maren Kirstine Skov, joined the group in April or May of 1870.[29] Other Billes and Skovs came to the settlement throughout the 1870s. The following table shows the number of Danes in Polk and St. Croix counties from 1870 to 1910:[30]

	Polk County	St. Croix County
1870	106	71
1880	540	207
1890	844	320
1900	1040	362
1910	1064	309

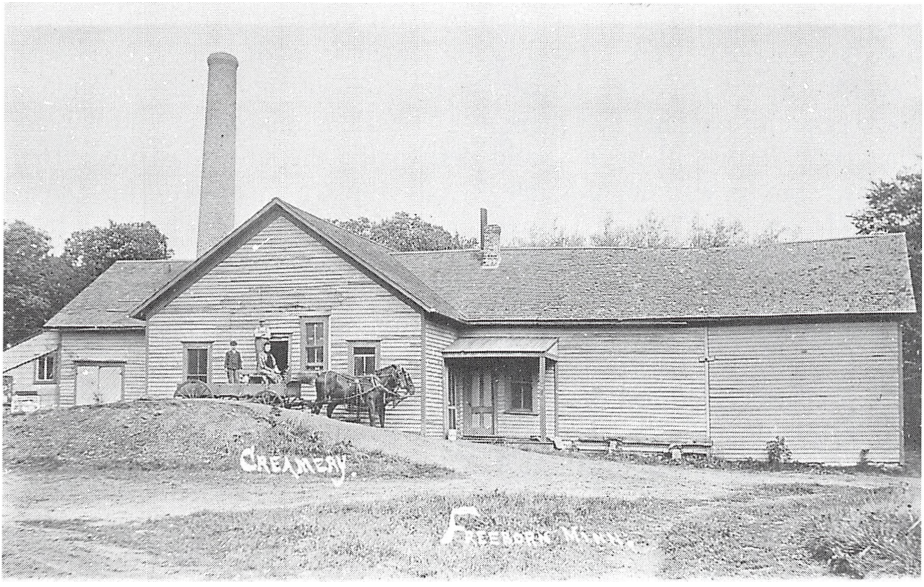
It is not possible to see from the Emigration Records of the Copenhagen Police whether large numbers of Møn-islanders had West Denmark, St. Croix Falls, or another community as their destination, and the Skov and Bille families may have been the only people from Møn in Polk County. Most of the earliest settlers appear to have been from M.C. Pedersen's own area near Vejle. There was not the same strong regional domination in this settlement as was seen in Carlston, Minnesota. There were, however, a number of Møn-islanders in nearby Stillwater, Minnesota, on the opposite side of the St. Croix River. The Danes in Polk County lived in several different townships.[31]

"West Denmark" in Luck Township was the name given to the entire settlement which dominated Luck and the northern part of Milltown and extended into Lake Town and Sterling and toward the east into Bone Lane.

Before and after their emigration, the Luck Township Billes and Skovs had at least 66 children. While the two families lived for only a short time in Polk County, Carlston Township was the site of a true "community transplantation" for approximately 250 people from the islands of Møn and Lolland.

Family emigration – A status report

None of the three families described above ventured into the unknown when they emigrated. They had a tradition upon which to build, and in every case there was some connection to the United States. The process was also selective within the larger families – it proved "contagious" within some nuclear families and left others untouched. In spite of its mobility, the Strandskov family managed to maintain close family ties even in the second generation. This family did not begin to intermarry with other nationalities, and then only to a lesser degree, until the third generation. The second



A dairy in the small town of Freeborn, near Carlston, Minnesota.

generation of the Bille and Skov families, most of whom were born in the United States, began to take partners of other nationalities.

Prior to emigration, members of the Bille and Skov families had worked as hired hands. This, in addition to the fact that most members of these two families emigrated at an early age and took part in "chain" emigration, makes them more representative of the average emigrant than the Strandskovs. The emigration of the Strandskov family was more in keeping with the older form of emigration, group emigration, where many families emigrated together. The settlements of Carlston and Luck were also quite different. Carlston was to a much greater degree a "community transplantation" of people from the islands of Møn and Lolland than the mixed settlement of Luck Township. In both settlements, however, it was possible for the Danes to live a very Danish life. They had Danish churches and schools, lectures were given in the Danish language, and their dairies were operated as they were in Denmark. The people from Møn could live among family and friends, and the second generation could find not only Danish husbands and wives, but spouses from the home island of Møn. These settlements were populated with Danes as a result of an unbroken chain of emigrations which continued until agricultural reforms and industrialization in Denmark were so far advanced that the farm families of Møn no longer thought of emigration as the only path to a secure future.

The immigrants in both Carlston and Luck Townships lived in multi-

ethnic environments, a fact ignored by most sources. The Norwegian and Swedish elements were strongly represented in both places. Norwegian historical geographer Jon Gjerde said in describing the assimilation of Norwegian immigrants that there was "a curious mixture of tradition and change."[32] Both settlements could perhaps be thought of as little "Denmarks," but it was not possible in either place to farm using Danish methods, and Swedes and Norwegians would undoubtedly have felt more at home than Danes in the wooden farm buildings and churches we see in pictures from the two settlements.

Some would claim that a study of "community transplantation" cannot be carried out on the basis of Danish material alone. However, the combination of genealogical methods and census reports from both the new world and the old do make this possible. These examples from the island of Møn would seem to confirm that possibility.

Notes

1. Bodil K. Hansen, ed., *Helene Dideriksens dagbog og breve 1875-1891*. (Helene Diderik-sen's Diary and Letters 1875-1891), Copenhagen: Landbohistorisk Selskab, 1984, p. 91.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 243.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 247.
6. Determined on the basis of the author's study of the Stege passport records and various listings of departures in the parish books and rolls of conscripts, as well as the Emigration Records of the Copenhagen Police. For the years after 1871, Mrs. Eva Varnike of Lillerød kindly made available to me a copy of her registration of emigrants from Møn taken from the emigration records from 1868 to 1914.
7. See, for example, Kristian Hvidt, *Flugten til Amerika* (Flight to America), Århus, Denmark, 1971, pp. 96-104, 124-143; Hans Norman, *Från Bergslagen till Nordamerika* (From Bergslagen to North America), 1974, pp. 16-20, 114-135; Wolfgang v. Hippel, *Auswanderung aus Südwestdeutschland*, Stuttgart, 1984.
8. See note 6, the registration made by Mrs. Eva Varnike.
9. *Statistiske Meddelelser* (Statistical Reports) 4th series, vol. 37, Copenhagen, 1911.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Steffen E. Jørgensen, *"Emigration Fever" – The Formation of an Early Rural Emigration Tradition on Lolland-Falster and Møn, Three Danish Islands, c. 1830-1871*, Ph.D. Thesis, European University Institute, Florence, Italy, 1991.
12. Described in *Hans Christensen Fugls erindringer* (Hans Christensen Fugl's memoirs), unpublished manuscript at the Royal Library, Copenhagen, Denmark.
13. *Partial Roster of the John E. Forsgren Company of Emigrants from Scandinavia 1852-53*, Danes Worldwide Archives, Aalborg, Denmark.
14. Sjællands Stifts Bispearkiv. B.5.a Afgjorte Sager (Archives of the Bishop, Diocese of Zealand. B.5.a Completed cases), 1854, The Provincial Archives of Zealand, Copenhagen.

15. Steffen E. Jørgensen, *op.cit.*
16. *Folketællingen 1870. Elmelunde Sogn, Møenbo Herred, Præstø Amt* (Census 1870. Elmelunde Parish, Møenbo District, Præstø County), The Danish National Archives, Copenhagen.
17. Much of the information about the Strandskov family is taken from Cora E. Fagre, "The Lars Strandskov Family," unpublished manuscript, 1975, (courtesy of Mrs. Gerda Winther of Stege), and Carol Anderson, "Greetings to the Descendants of the Billes and Skous Who Settled in Luck," an unpublished manuscript, (courtesy of Mr. Asger Schou Hansen, Ullemarke, Møn).
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Københavns politis udvandringssager: Register over udvandrere, direkte og indirekte 1868-1940* (Copenhagen Police Emigration Files: Records of Those Who Emigrated, Directly and Indirectly 1868-1940), The Provincial Archives of Zealand, Copenhagen.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Børnevennen for Søndagsskole og Hjem*, vol. 51, 1930.
22. Kristian Hvidt, *op.cit.*, pp. 212-213.
23. H. Hansen, "Brødrene Strandskov" (The Strandskov Brothers) *Kors og Stjerne*, 1930, pp. 39-42.
24. Henrik B. Simonsen, *Kampen om Danskheden* (The Struggle for Danishness), Århus, 1990, p. 165 ff.
25. The West Denmark colony is described by A. Bobjerg in *En dansk Nybygd i Wisconsin. 40 Aar i Storskoven* (A Danish Village in Wisconsin. 40 Years in the Forest), Copenhagen, 1909, and "Danskerne i Polk County, Wis." (Danes in Polk County, Wisconsin), in: P.S. Vig, ed., *Danske i Amerika* (Danes in America), vol. 2, Minneapolis, 1908, pp. 174-98.
26. *Møens Avis* 28 January 1868, p. 4, column 1 "M.C. Pedersen af Ørum pr. Vejle" (M.C. Pedersen of Ørum near Vejle) or *Lolland-Falsters Stifts-Tidende* 16 April 1867, "Fra Amerika er hjemkommen M.C. Pedersen af Vester Ørum Mark pr. Vejle og agter om Gud vil atter at afrejse sidst i Mai Maaned" (M.C. Pedersen of Vester Ørum Mark near Vejle is home from America and, God willing, will return late in May).
27. A. Bobjerg, *op.cit.*
28. Kristian Østergaard, "Nybygden West Denmark" (The Village of West Denmark), *Højskolebladet*, 1893.
29. The five persons mentioned here do not appear in the police records. Jens Jørgen Bille's name does, however, appear in the passport records.
30. *The Statistics of the Population of the United States*, ed. Francis A. Walker, Washington, D.C., 1872. "From the Returns of the Ninth Census (June 1, 1870)," vol. I, p. 360.
31. A. Bobjerg, *op.cit.*, pp. 32-33.
32. Jon Gjerde, *From Peasants to Farmers*, Cambridge, 1985.

An Outline of the Historiography of Danish Emigration to America

by Erik Helmer Pedersen

Over the years, more than half a million Danes have left their homeland to seek a new and, possibly, better future in the United States. In light of this number, surprisingly few Danish historians have dealt with the topic of Danish emigration to the United States. In fact, if a summary of Danish contributions in this area includes only works of research, the first important publication appeared as late as 1971. The first study which identified and described the lives and probable fate of the many Danes who emigrated to America was Kristian Hvidt's doctoral dissertation, *Flugten til Amerika, eller Drivkræfter i masseudvandringen fra Danmark 1868-1914*[1] (Flight to America, or the Forces Leading to Mass Emigration from Denmark 1868-1914).

Prior to the publication of Kristian Hvidt's dissertation, a number of historians had dealt with the statistics of emigration. Three economists with an interest in demographic studies analyzed the statistics which resulted from the registration of immigrants to the United States made by Danish and American authorities. The pioneer in this area was V. Falbe-Hansen.[2] His article, based on American statistics of early immigration from Denmark, weighs the loss and gain to Danish society resulting from emigration. In spite of what he considers a loss of "human capital," he concludes that emigration provided social advantages, both to those who participated in it, and to the country they left behind. More space was made available for the lower classes when the unemployed sought other job opportunities, as he puts it.

An article by William Scharling[3] is similarly optimistic. In his opinion, the improved market conditions in America led to mass emigration, and he saw no cause for pessimism in this development. The article of a third economist, Adolph Jensen,[4] is less optimistic, as he concludes that "the best" emigrated, and the rest stayed at home. At least as far as the economy was concerned, he felt there was a loss as migration did not reduce the level of unemployment to any degree. Many years later Adolph Jensen was given an opportunity to put Danish emigration in an international perspective with his contribution to the comprehensive work, *International Migrations I-II* (1929-31).

Although *Flight to America* is, likewise, largely based on statistical material, it also offers relevant historical comment. Kristian Hvidt's conclusions put mass emigration from Denmark to the United States in a wider European context. The fluctuating rhythm of the numbers follows a familiar pattern, with peaks in the first years of each decade from 1860 to 1914. What began as family or group emigration became the emigration of single individuals, and as time passed, an increasing number of women emigrated.

It is characteristic of Danish emigration that relatively greater numbers emigrated from the towns than from the countryside, with 342 emigrants per 100,000 persons in towns and only 186 per 100,000 persons in the country. Like most other historians, Kristian Hvidt credits interaction between the pressure of poor economic conditions in Denmark, the "push factor," and the apparent attraction of the country of destination, the "pull factor" as the cause of emigration. He does point out, however, that in addition to the classic push-pull factors, there may have been a third factor, namely, the massive advertising campaigns conducted by travel bureaus in an effort to create an emigration "market."

The study of emigration

Kristian Hvidt's results must, of course, be seen in a Scandinavian context, as the study of emigration to America began much earlier in Norway and Sweden than in Denmark, and Norwegian and Swedish historians have made important contributions to this field of study.[5] Prior to a meeting of Scandinavian historians in Copenhagen in 1971, a number of younger historians from the Nordic countries prepared a report[6] describing the status of research at that time. In it, the authors attempt to analyze developments in historical-sociological terminology. This report formed the basis of a debate of the principle issues at hand as pointed out in the published proceedings of the meeting.[7]

In his paper "Udvandringen fra Frederiksborg amt 1869-1899"[8] (Emigration from Frederiksborg County 1869-1899), historian Niels Peter Stilling presents a detailed study of the relationship between local and regional pull factors, on the one hand, and corresponding national conditions on the other. The author points out that the less well-developed the industrial structure of a given local area, the greater the migration. The decision to emigrate was undoubtedly based on social considerations as the great majority of emigrants came from the lower classes in farming areas. In spite of this, Niels Peter Stilling finds the models generally used in explaining emigration to be lacking as they don't touch upon relevant individual moti-

vation. In order to uncover the motive behind the individual decision to emigrate, it is necessary to study the emigrant letters. Other of the author's articles deal with this same topic.[9]

Historian Steffen Elmer Jørgensen has provided good background information on the reasons for leaving Denmark.[10] His Ph.D. dissertation[11] provides evidence documenting the reasons for early emigration from a particular area in Denmark. The author demonstrates the existence of a much earlier and more significant emigration tradition on Lolland, Falster and Møn than has previously been identified.

In her paper, "Udvandringen til Amerika fra Humble sogn"[12] (Emigration to America from Humble Parish), Ane Dorthe Holt concludes that, as a group, emigrants were distinctly different from the general population of a given area. Their parents had a lower social status, they were sent out to work on farms at an earlier age, and they had no special reason to seek their fortunes on Langeland, the island of their birth, or, for that matter, in Denmark.

In a European context, the emigration of Danish Mormons, which began in 1852, was unusually large. In many respects the emigration of this particular group can be thought of as an expression of that atmosphere of leave-taking prevalent in Danish farming areas in the second half of the 1800s.[13] Jørgen W. Schmidt provides a well-documented account of the atmosphere which, in the period from 1852 to 1900, led to the emigration to Utah of 12,350 Danish Mormons over the age of 12. Jørgen Würtz Sørensen has also given this subject special attention in a number of publications.[14] It is his opinion that the success of the Mormons in Denmark should be thought of in terms of a popular protest against the "establishment" rather than an expression of religious zeal.

John Pedersen's article "Fald og frelse. Nogle træk af den organiserede udvandring fra Horsens Tugthus 1859-1914"[15] (Fall and salvation. Some aspects of the organized emigration from Horsens Prison 1859-1914) deals with a special aspect of emigration history. He describes how one particular organization, Horsens Fængselsselskab (Horsens Prison Society), assisted several hundred former convicts in making a new start overseas.

Women from a completely different environment are the subject of Dorte Christensen's article, "Dannede kvinders udvandring til Amerika"[16] (The emigration to America of cultivated women). As the author herself points out, this is the story of a small group of women who emigrated to Hartford, Connecticut, in 1888 intending to create new lives for themselves as respectable ladies in "God's Own Country."

A number of regional historians and genealogists are currently engaged in studies of emigration, and we can look forward to future contributions which will increase our understanding of the origins of those who emi-

grated, their identities, and those personal motives which led young people, in particular, to follow the general emigration pattern of the time. There is room both for statistical analysis, which places a numerical value on individual reactions, thus permitting these to be viewed in a larger context, and for sociological and socio-psychological analysis which attempts to determine who left and who remained behind, regardless of the fact that the social situation in both cases was identical.

Kristian Hvidt's interest in the means of transport chosen by the emigrants has, unfortunately, not been followed up by many Danish historians. One exception is the article by Niels Larsen, "The Danish Atlantic Transport System 1880-1900"[17] which presents opinions more thoroughly developed in a later, unfortunately, unpublished paper on the Danish steamship line *Thingvalla*, which carried a large number of the emigrants from Scandinavia to their new homes. The remarkable number of those who traveled in the opposite direction indicates that there were many more "round trips" than was previously thought. In fact, an "emigrant" can have traveled to America any number of times and still have ended his days in Denmark.

American historians have, of course, long been interested in the subject of immigration to the United States and settlement there. A number of Danish historians have also dealt with the problems of assimilation, not least those involving the Danish church in America. Bishop N.F.S. Grundtvig's view of the organic connection between the religious and the human aspects of existence were of tremendous significance for both religious and secular life in 19th century Denmark. The success of the Danish folk high schools as centers of learning for both young people and adults can be traced to the influence of Grundtvig's ideas. Many Danish emigrants were familiar with Grundtvig's ideas and were, therefore, eager to transplant the best elements of these to American soil. The influence of the Grundtvigian perception of Christianity can be felt to this day among, in particular, those immigrants who settled in the Midwest. Historians Lars Scheving and Tine Wanning have studied various aspects of this attempt to transplant a Danish philosophy of life to America.[18]

The story of the Danish church in America is presented in detail and discussed by historian Henrik Bredmose Simonsen in *Kampen om danskheden. Tro og nationalitet i de danske kirkesamfund i Amerika*[19] (The Struggle for Danishness. Belief and Nationality in the Danish Churches in America).

Only a few Danish authors have dealt with the process of settling on the prairie, or, for that matter, anywhere else in the United States. In his article, "Danske immigranters assimilering og sociale mobilitet i Pottawattamie County USA"[20] (The assimilation and social mobility of

Danish immigrants in Pottawattamie County USA), Holger Dyrbye relates how a small group of Danish immigrants survived economically and socially after being transplanted to the United States. He concludes that, contrary to the commonly held view, the immigrants in his study were not as successful, nor did they become assimilated as quickly as, for example, Swedish immigrants.

The best known of the Danish prairie settlements are the neighboring towns of Elk Horn and Kimballton in southwestern Iowa. In her studies, Danish historian Jette Mackintosh convincingly describes how social, economic and cultural factors have been closely and inseparably woven into the fabric of daily life in the two villages.[21]

Much of the above-mentioned pioneer work on emigration to America places Danish historical research in a wider tradition, involving the study of transplantation from a European to an American setting. The research has been modeled on the work of, among others, Jon Gjerde on Norwegian settlement in America[22] and Robert C. Ostergren on the move from Dalarna in Sweden to Minnesota.[23] The completion of an emigration database at the Danes Worldwide Archives will make possible detailed investigations of the relationship between departure from Denmark and settlement in America.

In many respects, Danish research is at the threshold of the exploration of the history of emigration to America, the largest migration in historic times. It is our hope that, in cooperation with colleagues in Scandinavia and in the United States, we will soon be able to fill in some of the biggest gaps in our knowledge of why people felt tempted to exchange an organized existence in Denmark for a more exciting, but less secure, destiny far from home, on the unfamiliar frontiers of America.

Notes

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Collecting and Preserving the Danish-American Immigrant Story

An Overview of Current Research and Preservation Efforts

by John Mark Nielsen and Peter L. Petersen

Dana College, Blair, Nebraska. 1895.

Introduction

In 1973 at *Scanpresence*, a conference sponsored by the University of Minnesota and SAS/Scandinavian Airlines which brought together individuals interested in the Scandinavian-American experience, J.R. Christianson stated that when it came to the Danish-American community's efforts to preserve their heritage something had gone wrong.[1] There had been hopeful beginnings in 1930 when the Danes Worldwide Archives was founded in Aalborg, Denmark. However, because of World War II and because the Danes Worldwide Archives was unable to establish and maintain an identification with the wider Danish emigrant population overseas and to secure their financial support, the hopes and dreams for this institution were never fully realized. Likewise, the existence of the Archives in Denmark inhibited the establishment of an historical society or centralized archives in North America since those who supported the founding of the Danes Worldwide Archives in Denmark were the very individuals who might have been able to bring unity to the small, widely scattered and badly divided Danish immigrant community in North America.

The result was that Danish-Americans showed little support for the Danes Worldwide Archives in Denmark and that, unlike Norwegian and Swedish-Americans who had established historical societies, archives and museums in the United States, Danish-Americans lacked the unifying organization of an historical society or centralized museum and archives in this country. Consequently, there had been no organized attempt by Danish-Americans to collect, preserve and exhibit artifacts important to their immigrant story, nor had there been a systematic effort to support research and to pursue a publication program. This, Christianson concluded, had seriously deterred Danish-American historical scholarship.[2]

Since Christianson gave his presentation in 1973, dramatic events have occurred which inspire renewed hope that Danish-American historical scholarship might make long overdue strides. Most important has been the effort to establish unifying organizations and to develop existing resources. Foremost, was the founding in 1977 of the Danish American Heritage Society and the Society's commitment to publish a journal and newsletter. Growing out of the efforts of Society members, The Danish Immigrant Museum was incorporated in 1983 as an institution to collect, preserve, study and exhibit the material culture of Danish immigrants.

In the area of archives, Dana College in Blair, Nebraska, and Grand View College in Des Moines, Iowa, the two existing educational institutions founded by Danish immigrants, have devoted resources to upgrade existing archival collections and to support dedicated research. Known as The Danish Immigrant Archives – Grand View College and The Danish Immigrant

Archives – Dana College, both have retained their independent identities but are committed to working cooperatively with each other and with The Danish Immigrant Museum in Elk Horn, Iowa. In addition, Grand View College and the Danish American Heritage Society sponsored and published in 1988 the *Danish Immigrant Archival Listing*, a guide to source materials related to the Danish immigrant experience found in archives and libraries in the United States, Denmark, and Canada. In 1989, The Danish Immigrant Archives – Dana College accessioned and began cataloging the Hansen-Mengers Collection, an accumulation of over 11,000 letters written between the 1880s and 1970s by an extended Danish immigrant family. Finally, because of the interest in the immigrant experience by the wider academic community, numerous articles, dissertations and books have been published testifying to a new vitality in Danish-American historical research.

The Danish American Heritage Society

The Danish American Heritage Society has its roots in the proceedings of the 1973 *Scanpresence* conference mentioned above, which were edited by Eric Friis and published as *The Scandinavian Presence in North America*. On reading this book shortly after it appeared in 1976, Arnold Bodtker, a graduate of Grand View College and a long time resident of Junction City, Oregon, suggested to his son, Egon, and several other friends in the area who were deeply appreciative of their Danish heritage, that something had to be done about the lack of a society dedicated to preserving and promoting Danish-American traditions. The group decided to issue a letter proposing the formation of a society and inviting a small monetary contribution to underwrite organizing efforts. So gratifying was the response from around the United States, Canada, and abroad that the group felt it could move forward. In 1977, The Danish American Heritage Society was formally organized and an executive committee was formed, consisting of four members, three from Junction City, Oregon, and one from nearby Salem. Arnold Bodtker was elected president, Gerald Rasmussen, vice president, Karen McCumsey, secretary, and Egon Bodtker, treasurer.[3]

The name Danish American Heritage Society represented careful thought. Members were determined that the society not be simply an historical society, but that the focus be on the Danish-American heritage with the larger mission of promoting research into the life and culture of Danish-Americans and encouraging expression in the arts, humanities and social sciences. This understanding of heritage reflected the influence on the founding members of N.F.S. Grundtvig and his ideas concerning culture. At the same time, the group was anxious that the society move beyond

simply representing that segment of the Danish-American population influenced by Grundtvig and be inclusive of the many other influences on Danish immigrants. To its credit, the Danish American Heritage Society has been largely successful in being an inclusive society and has avoided the division that marked earlier efforts to form similar organizations such as Dansk Folkesamfund (Danish Folk Society) or Dansk-amerikansk Historisk Selskab (Danish-American Historical Society).

From the beginning, Arnold Bodtker envisioned two publications, a journal providing an outlet for both scholarly and popular articles, as well as memoirs and reminiscences, and a newsletter informing members of events and issues of current interest. First published was the newsletter; its function has been to inform the growing membership of activities both planned and accomplished. The first volume of the journal, entitled *The Bridge*, appeared in May, 1978. Bodtker, who served as the first editor, explained that the name could symbolize many things, "a bridge between Danish-Americans and Danes in Denmark, a bridge between present day Danish-Americans and their forbears who migrated to this land, a link between the different ways that many of us view our Danish heritage."[4] Now in its fifteenth year, *The Bridge* has offered a mix of scholarly articles and personal reminiscences that have made it a valued publication to both Society members and the wider academic community. Beginning in 1992, The Danish American Heritage Society will offer a prize of $300 for the best article published in the preceding year. This represents a further attempt to encourage research and reflects a degree of financial stability. Two other individuals have served as editor. Donald Watkins of the University of Kansas edited *The Bridge* from 1982 to 1984 when Arnold Bodtker again took over. Since 1988, Egon Bodtker has served as editor.

With over 600 members in the United States, Canada and in Europe, the Danish American Heritage Society continues to be a most important organization for inspiring interest in the wider vision of collecting and preserving the Danish immigrant story. Though its executive committee continually struggles with problems of achieving wider representation and better communication within the Danish immigrant community, it has been affirmed by the growth in membership among both academics and younger individuals.

The Danish Immigrant Archives – Grand View College

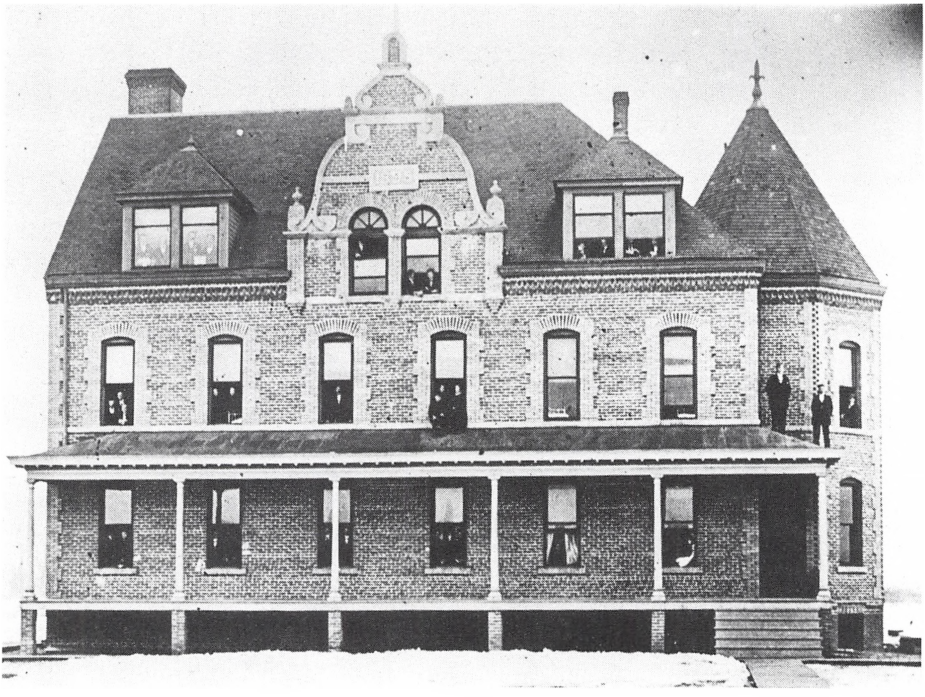
The Danish Immigrant Archives – Grand View College has its roots in earlier attempts to collect materials related to the Danish immigrant experience. In 1906, Benedict Nordentoft, then president of Grand View College, and Kristian Østergaard, a pastor, teacher and writer, established an ar-

chives at Grand View College for the newly founded Dansk-amerikansk Historisk Selskab (Danish-American Historical Society). While this organization never flourished, the small amount of material collected served as a nucleus for The Danish Immigrant Archives – Grand View College. When Enok Mortensen moved to Des Moines, Iowa, in 1947, he brought with him the substantial compilation of archival materials he had used in preparing his work *Danish-American Life and Letters*. This he added to the existing collection to form a rich historical repository. Under Johannes Knudsen's leadership, a room for the archives was provided in the Grand View College library and a concerted effort to catalog and care for the collection was made. As a part of this effort, Thorvald Hansen, a member of the history faculty at the college was designated as archivist, a position which he held until his retirement. Currently, Dr. Rudolf Jensen, Associate Professor of Scandinavian Studies, serves as archivist for the collection.

The Danish Immigrant Archives – Grand View College contains materials that reflect the culture and experience of Danish immigrants to North America. Particular, but not exclusive, emphasis is placed on individuals and institutions shaped and influenced by the life and writings of N.F.S. Grundtvig. Consisting of over 400 linear feet, much of the material records the activities of members and organizations of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church and its predecessor institutions. Because the collection has been expanding, plans have been made to double the size of the archival area.[5]

Among the important materials contained in The Danish Immigrant Archives – Grand View College are: publications of the Danish Lutheran Church, past and present (102 linear feet); Danish and Danish-American newspapers and periodicals, including a complete run of *Dannevirke* (57 linear feet); Danish immigrant literature and research publications (45 linear feet); private individual collections, papers and notes including the papers of past Grand View College presidents, A.C. Nielsen and Ernest Nielsen (24 linear feet); and constantly expanding files on individuals, families, communities, churches, and fraternal organizations.

Given Grand View College's association with individuals shaped by the thought of N.F.S. Grundtvig, significant materials reflecting this influence are: the N.F.S. Grundtvig Studies Collection (27 linear feet); Danish and Danish-American music and songbooks collection (12 linear feet); the Danish-American folk school history and the history of Grand View College (10 linear feet); and a collection treating Danish history, culture and geography (54 linear feet). Two individual collections deserve special mention since they reflect a Grundtvigian influence and their work is seminal to understanding the Danish-American experience; these are the papers of Enok Mortensen, one of the most important Danish-American writers of the



Grand View College, Des Moines, Iowa. Founded 1895.

immigrant generation, and the papers of Einer Farstrup who played a critical role in the early Danish Church in America.

The Danish Immigrant Archival Listing

An important recent contribution to Danish-American immigrant studies has been the *Danish Immigrant Archival Listing: A Guide to Source Materials Related to the Danish Immigrant in America to be Found in Repositories in the United States, Canada, and Denmark*, published in 1988.[6] Sponsored by Grand View College and the Danish American Heritage Society, it was compiled by historian and archivist, Thorvald Hansen. Though not planned as such, this work in many ways compliments the earlier published *Bibliografi over Dansk-Amerikansk Udvandrerhistorie* (Bibliography of Danish-American Emigration History) which appeared in Denmark in 1986 and lists materials held by Danish libraries and archives.[7]

Divided into two major sections, the entries and a general index, followed by two shorter sections, a supplemental index and a list of contributing repositories, the *Danish Immigrant Archival Listing* (DIAL) includes 4,082 entries from over 150 repositories. The entries are arranged

alphabetically by last name of author or by subject if it is a geographic location. Consequently, even this section functions as a kind of index. The following General Index is arranged by names of organizations, institutions, geographic place names and other broad subject headings. This is followed by a Supplemental Index which lists further names, organizations and places. Unfortunately, as a number of reviewers have pointed out, there is a lack of correspondence between the two indices which is confusing, and the general nature of the subject headings often limits their usefulness. Nevertheless, the *Danish Immigrant Archival Listing* is a most important source for locating widely scattered resource materials and can serve as an important beginning to a computerized database of Danish immigrant materials.

The Danish Immigrant Archives – Dana College

Since 1985, Dana College has devoted significant financial and human resources to upgrading the organization and care of its archival holdings. A special room was constructed to safely store the collection and to provide working space for researchers. In addition, a computer specifically dedicated for archival use was added to facilitate research and communication with The Danish Immigrant Museum and The Danish Immigrant Archives – Grand View College. Providing leadership for these efforts is Ruth Rasmussen, Director of Library Services, and Sharon Jensen, Assistant Library Director with responsibilities for archival collections as well.

Like the collection at Grand View College, the materials contained in the Danish Immigrant Archives – Dana College reflect the entire story of Danish immigration to North America but also emphasize Danish Lutheranism. Consisting of over 700 linear feet, much of the content documents the activities of members of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church and its predecessor organizations. Among these materials are: the most extensive collection of books, pamphlets, newspapers and other materials printed by the Danish Lutheran Publishing House which was located in Blair, Nebraska; a collection of the published writings of P.S. Vig, a pioneering Danish-American historian and theologian; records of church conventions and publications (33 linear feet); the personal papers of P.C. Jensen, U.E.L.C. archivist, and N.C. Carlsen, president of the U.E.L.C. from 1925 to 1950 (26 linear feet); anniversary booklets and church bulletins from U.E.L.C. congregations (6 linear feet); and the manuscripts and memoirs of many pastors and church members (40 linear feet). In addition there are microfilm collection of the newspapers, *Den Danske Pioneer* and *Danskeren*.

The archival holdings include significant collections dealing with the wider story of the Danish immigrant experience. The Hansen-Mengers

Dana College student body, Blair, Nebraska. 1914.

Collection, described below, contains materials that portray the everyday life of an extended immigrant family and is unique due to its size. The Lauritz Melchior Collection (40 linear feet) contains the personal papers, scrapbooks, costumes and original recordings of this world famous opera star. The Sophus Keith Winther Collection (8 linear feet) includes many personal letters and papers only recently opened for public scrutiny. Known for his novels describing the Danish immigrant experience: *Take All to Nebraska*, *Mortgage Your Heart*, and *This Passion Never Dies*, the collection includes an unpublished manuscript as well as a significant dime novel library.

The Hansen-Mengers Collection

The heart of The Hansen-Mengers Collection is the 11,000 letters written between the 1880s and the 1970s by one extended Danish immigrant family. They begin in 1887 when C.C. Mengers arrived in the United States from Fredericia, Denmark. He was followed in 1891 by his brother Viggo. Both men became Lutheran pastors in the pietistic Danish immigrant church and served numerous parishes from Philadelphia to Coalridge, Montana. As they carried on their ministries, they corresponded extensively with each other, the church leaders in the synod they served, their past parishioners and family and friends both in the United States and in Denmark. Both men married, and their children and grandchildren continued

to correspond with each other and with family in Denmark and to collect and save this correspondence.

The collection, which was given to Dana College in 1988 and which includes over a thousand letters from each decade, offers a rare insight into the Americanization of an extended immigrant family. Since many letters were exchanged with other family members, both sides of the correspondence are extant. While the family's church participation played an important role in their lives, the letters relate much about life in the Danish-American community. Topics range from the usual matters of families – births, baptisms, graduations, weddings and deaths – to often astute comments on world events, national politics and economic conditions both in the United States and Denmark.

The collection is also of interest for what it reveals about language acquisition. Approximately a third of the 11,000 letters are in Danish with almost all letters written before the turn of the century being in Danish. Gradually, English becomes common although correspondence is carried on in Danish into the 1960s.

The letters of The Hansen-Mengers Collection constitute over 53 linear feet. While the initial cataloging is complete, work continues on computerizing and cross-referencing important identifying information such as who wrote each letter, to whom it was written, the date it was written, the language in which it was written, its format, enclosures if any, and where it was post marked. Further indexing is being done to reflect the content, allowing researchers to gain access based on the subject matter. Additional materials in the collection include a manuscript collection of sermons preached by Rev. L.C. Hansen; numerous notebooks from preparatory schools, Brorsen Folk High School, Dana College and Trinity Seminary; mementos from United Evangelical Church conventions from 1900 to the final one in 1960; and an extensive collection of photographs and clippings. The scope of the collection is unique and offers numerous possibilities for research.

Books, articles, and dissertations

In 1976, the entire issue of *Scandinavian Studies* was devoted to the Danish immigrant experience. Richard Vowles and Mary Kay Norseng described the American years of Wilhelm Dinesen and Clemens Petersen. Drawing upon research each had done for their longer, book-length works, Dorothy Burton Skårdal and Marion Marzolf explored the subjects of Danish-American literature and the early Danish-American press. Concluding this issue was Philip Friedman's "A Danish-American Bibliography" which updated in a small way Enok Mortensen's seminal bibliography, *Danish-*

The faculty of Trinity Seminary, 1898-1899. Left to right: H.O. Frimodt-Møller, A.J. Dahm, P.S. Vig, Viggo C. Mengers and C.X. Hansen. (Photo: Dana College.)

American Life and Letters, published in 1945.[8] No comprehensive bibliography has appeared listing publications since 1976 although the Danish American Heritage Society in 1988 did publish an index of articles and book reviews printed in *The Bridge* during its first ten years of publication, and Edith Matteson contributed a brief historiographic essay to *The Immigration History Newsletter*.[9]

Computer searches of OCLC (Online Computer Library Center) and other databases reveal that there has been considerable publication activity since 1976. Much of this activity was inspired by the scholarly efforts in Denmark of Kristian Hvidt and Erik Helmer Pedersen and a number of the latter's students at the University of Copenhagen.[10] The existence of *The Bridge* has been most important in providing an outlet for some of this scholarly activity, but numerous articles have also appeared in state historical journals as well as in the *Journal of American Ethnic History*, the publication of the Immigration History Society.

A number of books deserve special mention. Most important continues to be the publication of George Nielsen's *The Danish Americans* in 1981, the most comprehensive history of Danish-Americans to appear since the collaboratively written *Danske i Amerika* (Danes in America). Drawing primarily from letters written to newspapers in Denmark, Frederick Hale's

Danes in North America retells the Danish immigrant story through their correspondence. Other fine histories written for younger audiences are Peter L. Petersen's *The Danes in America* and Mark Mussari's *The Danish Americans*. *The Danish Texans* by John L. Davis suggests the kind of work that could be done in recounting the Danish immigrant experience in individual states.

A number of works have appeared treating the history of Danish immigrant institutions. *Schools for Life*, a history of the Grundtvigian folk schools in America by the preeminent Danish American historian, Enok Mortensen, appeared in 1977. Two years later, Marion Marzolf authored a comprehensive study entitled, *The Danish Language Press in America*. Thorvald Hansen, in addition to the work he did in compiling the *Danish Immigrant Archival Listing*, published two other works, *School in the Woods*, a history of the Danish Lutheran seminary at West Denmark, Wisconsin, and *We Laid Foundation*, a history of the early years of Grand View College in Des Moines, Iowa. Peter L. Petersen's *A Place Called Dana* is the centennial history of Trinity Seminary and Dana College. A fine example of meticulous and time consuming field work is Edith and Jean Matteson's *Blossoms of the Prairie*, containing the histories of all the Danish Lutheran congregations and preaching places in Nebraska and brief biographies of the men who served these congregations. These works and the many other books, articles and dissertations listed in the following "Danish-American Bibliography" testify to the current interest in research and writing on the Danish immigrant experience.

Conclusions

Much has taken place since J.R Christianson addressed *Scanpresence* in 1973. From its founding, the Danish American Heritage Society has been the driving force for collecting, preserving and studying the life and culture of Danish Americans. For 14 years, the Society has issued *The Bridge*, providing a significant publication for both scholarly research and popular articles, memoirs and reminiscences. Likewise, it has supported research efforts through its sponsorship of the *Danish Immigrant Archival Listing*. The Society also played a seminal role in supporting the efforts that led to the founding of The Danish Immigrant Museum. This museum offers dramatic physical evidence that there exists a central repository for collecting and preserving the artifacts that will be used to tell the story of the Danish immigrant experience through exhibits and hands-on experiences. Finally, the Danes Worldwide Archives in Aalborg, Denmark, and the Danish Immigrant Archives at both Grand View College and Dana College offer important resources in terms of collections and constituencies. A

growing spirit of cooperation between these institutions inspires hope that the Danish immigrant community in North America can begin to realize the dreams of those individuals who founded the Danes Worldwide Archives in Denmark over 60 years ago.

While there is renewed hope in the efforts of the last 15 years, the conditions are still present that led earlier attempts to fail. The Danish immigrant community in North America remains widely scattered, and none of these new institutions has as yet been able to forge a truly national or international identity and loyalty. Because of assimilation, many older organizations such as the Danish Brotherhood in America face challenges to their very existence. In addition, few Danish-Americans of later generations possess Danish language skills. Local efforts such as Elverhoy Museum in Solvang, or the centers planned for Fresno, California, and Portland, Oregon, are important for raising local consciousness but can divert limited resources from the achievement of larger goals. Finally, there continues to be a need for coordination between all the various organizations interested in the Danish immigrant heritage. Lacking is the kind of unifying organization that, for example, can be found in The Federation of Danish Associations in Canada. Such an organization might better inform and coordinate the efforts of all the various existing groups and invite the kind of support necessary for completing larger projects. Despite the efforts of The Danish American Heritage Society, no organization as yet has been able to fill this need.

Years from now historians will be able to measure the significance of current efforts to collect and preserve the Danish immigrant story. Those working today can celebrate that which has been accomplished and pledge themselves to continue in the hope that their efforts will inspire in subsequent generations an appreciation for the dynamic nature of the immigrant experience and the story of those who emigrated from Denmark.

Notes

1. Erik J. Friis, ed., *The Scandinavian Presence in North America*, New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1976, p. 112.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
3. Egon Bodtker, telephone interview, 25 January, 1992.
4. Arnold Bodtker, "Editorial Statement," *The Bridge*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1978, p. 1.
5. Rudolf Jensen, telephone interview, 22 January, 1992.
6. Thorvald Hansen, *Danish Immigrant Archival Listing: A Guide to Source Materials Related to the Danish Immigrant in America to be Found in Repositories in the United States, Canada, and Denmark*, Pella, Iowa: Town Crier, 1988.
7. Elisabeth Riber Christensen and John Pedersen, *Bibliografi over Dansk-Amerikansk Udvandrerhistorie: Den danske udvandring til USA fra 1840 til 1920 og den dansk-amerikanske historie til 1983* (Bibliography of Danish-American Emigration History. Danish Emigra-

tion to the USA from 1840 to 1920 and Danish-American History until 1983), Aalborg, Denmark: Aalborg Universitetsforlag, 1986.

8. Philip S. Friedman, "A Danish-American Bibliography," *Scandinavian Studies* vol. 48, no. 4, 1976, pp. 441-444, and Enok Mortensen, *Danish-American Life and Letters: A Bibliography*, Des Moines, Iowa: The Committee on Publications of the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1945.
9. "Index: *The Bridge*, 1977-1987," *The Bridge* vol. 11, no. 1, 1988, pp. 79-88, and Edith Matteson, "State of the Art: The Historiography of Danish-American Immigration to North America," *The Immigration History Newsletter*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1987, pp. 1-6.
10. Kristian Hvidt, *Flugten til Amerika*, Århus, Denmark: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 1971; *Flight to America* New York: Academic press, 1975; *Danes Go West*, Skørping, Denmark: Rebild National Park Society, Inc., 1976, and Erik Helmer Pedersen, *Drømmen om Amerika*, Copenhagen, Denmark: Politikens Forlag, 1985.

A Danish-American Bibliography

compiled by John Mark Nielsen and Peter L. Petersen

The following is a bibliography of books, articles, and dissertations that treat the Danish-American experience and that have appeared since the publication of Philip S. Friedman's "A Danish-American Bibliography" in *Scandinavian Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (Autumn, 1976), pp. 441-444. Included are a number of works published before 1976 but not listed in Friedman's bibliography. Not included are works appearing in *The Bridge* from 1977 to 1987. For this bibliography, see "Index: *The Bridge*, 1977-1987," *The Bridge*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1988), pp. 79-88. Articles published in *The Bridge* after 1987 are included here.

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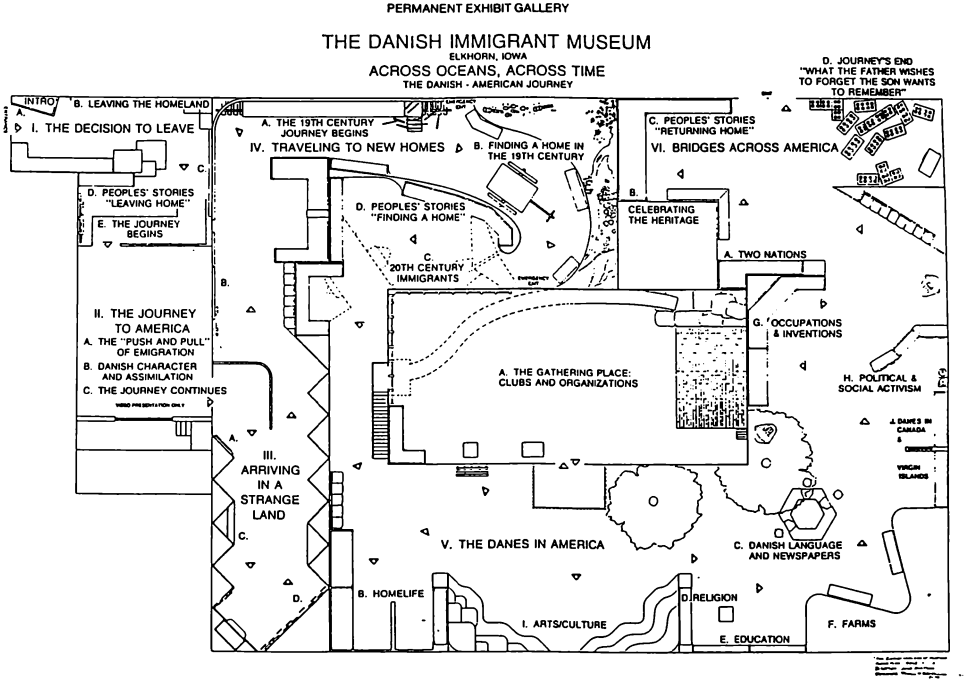
The Danish Immigrant Museum – An International Cultural Center

by June Sampson



The permanent exhibit gallery of The Danish Immigrant Museum, Elk Horn, Iowa.

Selecting the museum site

On a bitterly cold Sunday in February 1983 an informal committee of Danish-Americans selected the two small Iowa towns of Elk Horn and Kimballton as the site for the museum which would tell the story of the Danes in North America. Once the site for the museum had been selected, The Danish Immigrant Museum was incorporated by the Iowa Secretary of State, and its official life began.

Visitors to the area, arriving in Elk Horn/Kimballton from a well-marked exit off Interstate Highway 80, which links New York with San Francisco, often ask, "Why did the Danes settle here?" As Museum representatives across the country talk about the Museum generating interest and support, people also ask "Why is the Museum located in Iowa?" The answers to both questions are remarkably similar.

The first Danes who came to southwestern Iowa found relatively cheap land for sale from railroad land speculators and "Yankees" living on thinly scattered farms. Although fertile, the land was hilly by Iowa standards so that people either had to farm on sloping hillsides or in boggy, bottom lands. When the Elk Horn Lutheran Church was established in 1876, with the folk school quickly following in 1878, these events were well-publicized in emigrant literature and became additional attractions for Danish settlers. In 1869, the Rock Island railroad was completed through the town of Atlantic, Iowa, 15 miles to the south, thus providing access to major trading centers in Des Moines and Omaha. The Atlantic Northern and Southern Railroad, a spur built by a group of local Danish-American investors, improved access to the area even more, moving people in and out and farm products to market.

The first Danish-Americans to settle in southwest Iowa formed the beginning of a long chain linked by family ties. The Danish language has many words for specific familial relationships such as *moster* and *faster* (mother's sister and father's sister) giving some indication of the importance of those relationships to the Danes.

The Museum committee was also attracted to the area by the availability of land and the easy access to major transportation facilities. Land could be purchased for the building site at a fraction of the cost of a lot in, for example, the Minneapolis/St. Paul area. Interstate highways have taken the place of railroads, and the major east-west Interstate Highway 80 passes within seven miles of the 20-acre site selected for the building. Measured in time rather than miles, a visitor could land at airports in Omaha or Des Moines and be at the Museum within two hours.

The deciding factor in placing the Danish national museum in the center of the country was, however, the people of Elk Horn/Kimballton, and the

way they celebrate their heritage. Over 350 letters were written to the committee to explain why the Museum should be in Elk Horn/Kimballton, and people turned out by the hundreds for a meeting in the school auditorium where they signed up for various volunteer jobs. The Iowa Congressional delegation wrote letters (Senator Roger Jepsen wrote in Danish) and Iowa Governor Terry Branstad addressed the gathering.

The national committee knew something of the Danish heritage of the communities, but they soon learned a great deal more as their hosts didn't hesitate to talk about how they were the largest rural settlement of Danes in America, celebrated their heritage with Danish Day and the Tivoli Fest, and had worked together to bring a windmill from Nørre Snede, Denmark, turning it into a major tourist attraction. The Committee was impressed with the cooperative spirit of the community which had reassembled the windmill and created the Little Mermaid Park in Kimballton. These efforts were only the most recent in a series of community-wide projects such as building a swimming pool and a nursing home. Danish-American archives already established at Grand View College in Des Moines, Iowa, and Dana College in Blair, Nebraska, added to the attractiveness of the region. These colleges with their Danish roots are both nearby and could provide the Museum with additional visitors and staff support.

Purpose and planning

The many resources of the area attracted the Committee just as they had attracted the first Danish settlers. Both groups also recognized the potential for future development and had wonderful dreams of the future. While the young immigrant family might have had a general plan for creating a better life in America, the newly formed Board of Directors of The Danish Immigrant Museum soon had some very specific plans and guidelines for its development, beginning with a written purpose:

> The purpose of the Danish Immigrant Museum is to collect, preserve, study and interpret the artifacts and traditions of the Danes in North America.

With this purpose in place, the Museum was suddenly way ahead of most American museums in charting its future and in developing policy. The purpose clearly states the geographic region (North America) to be represented in the collections, exhibits and programs. The time period addressed by the Museum is not limited to "our grandfather's time," but allows a focus up to the present day. While excluding archival material, the purpose is innovative in that it includes traditions as well as three-dimensional artifacts. Documenting folklife traditions, preserving them in recorded in-

terviews and a "Tradition Bearers' file," then presenting them in folklife festivals and special performances takes The Danish Immigrant Museum beyond the historical museum into the realm of the cultural center. Its goal is to preserve traditions by creating an awareness and appreciation of them.

Expanded and reorganized following the incorporation of the Museum, the Board now represents the wide interests of the public it hopes to serve. The Museum is a non-profit corporation and its assets and collections are held in public trust. Recognizing its responsibility, the Board hired an executive director and adopted a collections policy within a year. Although somewhat naive in terms of how long the planning and fund-raising for a building would take, committees appointed by the Board soon plunged into the process of selecting an architect and developing a building program to guide the design. The policy and design were based squarely on the purpose. Thus the emphasis in collecting is on the material culture of the first generation of Danish-Americans, and the design of the building includes plenty of space for performances and rooms where folklife activities can be carried out.

Land and facilities

A Museum site was made available when the Elk Horn Lutheran Church donated 20 acres of land on the west edge of town. During the planning and construction phases, the Museum has its headquarters in donated and rented spaces in Elk Horn. From these offices several national, direct mail membership and building-fund campaigns have been carried out, the newsletter has been printed, fund-raising strategies have been planned, and artifacts have been accessioned, packed and stored.

As the number of people who have contributed to the Museum's effort rose from 1,000 in 1985 to 4,000 in 1991 and the number of artifacts steadily increased to over 5,000 pieces of handwork, furniture, tools, photographs and books, more space was needed, and in 1992 storage space was doubled.

In temporary quarters, a staff consisting of an executive director, an executive secretary, a director of development, a development coordinator and a campaign secretary have not been able to provide traditional museum programs and exhibitions. Instead, the Museum has sponsored traveling exhibits, folklife demonstrations, Danish language classes and lectures at various locations in the Elk Horn/Kimballton community and around the country. American museums call these "outreach programs"; they are usually suggested as later stages of development for a museum to expand their programs "beyond their walls." Without walls, the Danish Immigrant Museum began its life with outreach programs.

In 1990, Bestemor's Inc. (formerly the Elk Horn-Kimballton Arts and Recreation Council which chose this American spelling of *bedstemor*, the Danish word for grandmother) presented The Danish Immigrant Museum with a completely restored and furnished historic home built by a Danish immigrant in Elk Horn about 1908. Suddenly the Museum had a fully operational public exhibit, but again, this program did not take a traditional form. In presenting this remarkably generous gift, the Board of Bestemor's Inc. requested that the Museum keep the same philosophy of open exhibits and hands-on use that they had used to create the warm and cozy atmosphere of a Danish-American home. Consequently, the Museum accepted the house and contents as a part of its educational collection and provides tours seven days a week from May 1 through September 30.

Building in progress

Future exhibits, collections, offices and programs, however, will be centered at the facility now under construction on the 20-acre site to the west of Bedstemor's House. Here, stretching to the north and west, one can see a rolling landscape of farmland with scattered clusters of barns and farm houses reminiscent of Denmark. On the site itself more than 48,000 cubic yards of earth have been moved to create a level parking area and platform for the building. This major reworking of the site allows for a single level building without stairs and other barriers to access. The parking lot is masked by berms from the road and from the curving entrance drive so that visitors will only see a building rising to a height of 43 feet (a little over 13 meters) as they approach the structure.

The master plan for the landscaping of The Danish Immigrant Museum (designed by Jane Sorensen of Dodson Associates, Ashfield, Massachusetts) proposes the use of native trees and shrubs in a manner that suggests a Danish landscape of groves, hedgerows, and a single specimen tree in the Museum's courtyard area. Beyond the sculpted hillocks where the building and parking area will be situated, a native prairie of tall grasses and flowers is now being recreated. This will be the prairie that the first immigrants found in rough pastures and lowlands. Surviving remnants have provided the plant inventory which has been transplanted at the site.

Designed by Astle/Ericson & Associates of Omaha and Salt Lake City, the Museum itself will consist of a series of low buildings around a central courtyard suggestive of a Danish farm. The pitch of the roofs and exterior facing of stucco and exposed wood will also suggest the Danish influence. The interior, however, will respond to the needs of a contemporary museum, not only in the layout of the various functions, but also in the mechanical and electrical design to insure proper climate control and secu-

"Bedstemor's House" built in 1908 by the Danish immigrant Jens Otto Christensen in Elk Horn, Iowa.

rity for the collections and exhibits.

The 16,000 square foot structure now under construction will form a core for Museum activities and allow for reasonable expansion. Phased construction of the Museum structure was planned from the beginning because of the ambitious scale of the facility as an international cultural center, and to allow for the growth of collections and staff.

The public exhibition areas, the gift shop and the dining area are included in the present structure. Later expansion will rearrange spaces and allow for much larger areas. A multi-purpose community room for programs and classes and where larger groups can meet is the first anticipated addition.

The design of all of the phases has, however, undergone an evolution from the first conceptual drawings and the following schematic design and construction documents. Cost-cutting measures led to simplifying details and the adding of a basement (below ground construction being cheaper than a "finished" above-ground structure). The layout of exhibit areas was modified to allow for a Danish-American Wall of Honor for the recognition of donations to the Museum and immigrants. It also became clear in the years between the initial design and the beginning of construction that there

was a major interest in and need for a family history library and clearing-house for genealogical information, resulting in an expansion of this area. Families inquired when they could reserve space to hold their reunions, and so the need for a larger dining area became obvious.

Each step in the construction was celebrated, beginning with a ground breaking ceremony and later a *rejsegilde* (to celebrate the putting up of the rooftree). The laying of the cornerstone and cutting of the ribbon will no doubt also be celebrated, and there will surely be a housewarming.

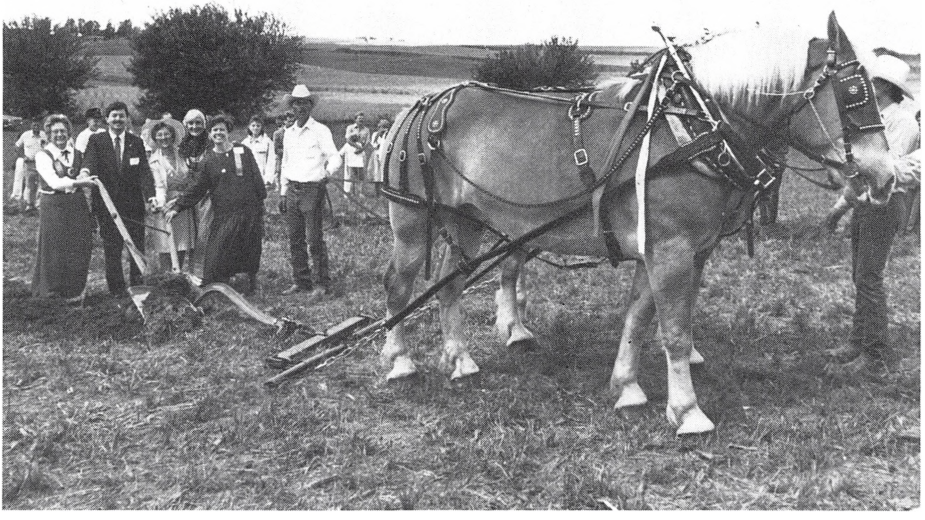
Growth of collections

The collections of The Danish Immigrant Museum have also been building over the past seven years. Donations have come from all parts of the United States, Canada and Denmark. They range from prehistoric stone tools found on farms in Denmark to traditional handwork made by a third-generation Danish-American and a suitcase carried by an immigrant on a plane in 1950.

The primary criteria for inclusion in the Museum is a connection with the first generation of immigrants or with a Danish tradition carried on in later generations. Because of the relatively recent arrival of immigrants, the Museum has been able to ask the vital questions of provenance. Who used it? Where did they come from? Where did they live? That an artifact is "typical" of a period, area or group does not justify the Museum's care and preservation of it if it lacks this documentation.

As a result, the feelings of some potential donors who cannot document the source of materials, or who have English or German heritage, have been injured. Limited resources (staff, space, funding) make these hard decisions necessary and force staff to explain goals more effectively. The Museum's goal is to document the lives of Danish-Americans through their material culture, to recreate their arrival, their homes and their work, and to shed light on their transition from Danes to Americans.

Because there are limited staff and volunteers, collection of artifacts has been passive, that is, donors bring their treasures or the things they don't know what to do with to the Museum's headquarters instead of the staff discovering collections or artifacts and persuading owners to part with them. The result is that, although the Museum's collection contains many items of value, they may have little market value. Examples of material culture from older generations of Danish-Americas show what these people felt was important enough to save – things which the present generation has no use for – a handwoven feather tick, *skudsmaalsbog* (a testimonial of character) or a vaccination certificate. Children and grandchildren also clearly recognize the significance of these things and wish to see them



The ground is broken for The Danish Immigrant Museum, September 5, 1988.

preserved for future generations. While staff might wish for the things of everyday life which they could use to recreate various time periods or stages in the immigrant experience, donors instead entrust wedding dresses or silver given at anniversaries to the Museum. Royal Copenhagen and Bing and Grøndahl china is brought to symbolize Danish heritage rather than dishes used at the kitchen table.

The Danish Immigrant Museum's collection clearly reflects the cultural values of Danish immigrants of earlier generations and Danish-Americans of the third and fourth generations because of the artifacts they have selected for preservation. Other historical museums in the Midwest are sure to have examples of saddles, guns, souvenirs of famous people (an autograph, a lock of hair, etc.) and world's fairs, political buttons, crazy quilts and rustic furniture, but unique to The Danish Immigrant Museum's collections are tabletop flag poles, presentation silver, handwoven ticks, *gaekkebreve* (similar to a valentine greeting), *aebleskive* pans, and an unusual quantity of handwork, cookbooks and songbooks. The challenge will be to interpret the artifacts and describe the values they represent in exhibits and programs.

Exhibit philosophy

The Museum has two types of collection. The permanent collection contains objects which relate closely to the key ideas and events of the story of the Danish immigrant; it will be used for exhibition and study. Although the purpose of all exhibits is educational, a second collection is designated specifically as the educational collection. The materials in this collection will be used in talks and demonstrations to allow visitors and program participants the opportunity to touch and feel the actual artifacts. Educational collection artifacts will also be used in exhibit situations where the environment or security of the artifact might be threatened.

Bedstemor's House and its contents have already been mentioned as an example of The Danish Immigrant Museum's educational collection. Tours of the house show furnishings still in use as they would have been in the period between 1910 and 1920. Fires are still lit in the stoves to boil coffee and heat the dining room. The table is set for Patron Members of the Museum who may have a Danish-American coffee party as one of their benefits of membership. Decorations are put up at Christmas, and special displays, such as a bride's wedding gifts, are set up seasonally. Extended tours for school groups with hands-on activities, involving them in the everyday chores of young people, are being planned.

In Bedstemor's House everything is now "open" with no barriers or glass cases. The exhibits installed in the new facility, however, will be a combination of artifacts from the permanent collections in secure areas and artifacts from the educational collection to allow guests an occasional first-hand experience of hefting a suitcase or leafing through a leather-bound Bible. Every effort will be made to treat the people who come to the Museum as guests, not as paying customers, visitors that will never be seen again, strangers, or tourists. Guests in Danish-American homes often comment on the visit as being a special experience marked by hospitality and good food. The Museum's goal will be to recreate something of that special experience.

An exhibit floor plan, outline of artifacts and storyline have been prepared by a group made up of historians, Museum staff, exhibit design and fabrication consultants, rural tourism experts, and Danish immigrants. The journey of the immigrant, both physical and spiritual, from Europe to North America and from being a Dane to becoming an American, will be presented in panels, audio visual presentations, restorations, recreations and display cases. In keeping with the theme and title, "Across Ocean, Across Time," the visitor will move through the exhibit from the homeland, Denmark, across the Atlantic to new homes, occupations, innovations, politics, organizations and celebrations. The emphasis will be on

experiences common to the Danish immigrant rather than the achievements of a few. The Danes are a very small minority of the total European migration and may be a minority of Museum visitors as well. The exhibits will, therefore, help people to identify with Danish-Americans rather than make comparisons.

Preserving traditions

Collections and exhibits will be based on tangible evidence of the Danish-American experience – the artifact. Intangible evidence – the traditional ways of doing things – will form the basis of programs and demonstrations. Traditions include ways of preparing foods, folk dancing, singing, story-telling and patterns of speech. The celebration of holidays and milestones of life (confirmations, weddings and anniversaries) are also part of folklife and will be documented, preserved and presented by the Museum.

A Tradition Bearers' file has been started to document traditional ways of doing things. It consists of names and photographs of and tape-recorded interviews with Danish-Americans who are noted for their handwork, woodworking, cooking, music, paper-cutting, blacksmithing and more. Some of these Tradition Bearers have already participated in the annual Tivoli Fest, Elk Horn's celebration of its Danish heritage. The surface has hardly been scratched when it comes to the potential number of people who are Tradition Bearers. Public presentation to engender appreciation and respect and spark the interest of current generations in carrying on traditions is a new field which The Danish Immigrant Museum will be able to explore further when it has the facilities.

Family history

The study and appreciation of family history and genealogy do not need the same encouragement and fostering of special interest needed to continue Danish traditions. The Museum will face a challenge in meeting the demands of a large and active segment of the population who wish to trace their roots. Since the publication and broadcast of Alex Haley's *Roots*, genealogical study in the United States has boomed. Because of the extensive publicity of the campaign to raise money for its construction, many people have learned of the Museum and think immediately that this will provide a new source of information about their families. The staff already handles letters, calls and visits almost daily and has developed a cadre of volunteers who can help with local questions and a list of professionals who will do more extensive research.

As a museum rather than an archives, The Danish Immigrant Museum is

not gathering the records and documents needed to carry out research on its premises. Instead, the Museum will act as a clearinghouse for information on libraries, sources, expert assistance, translators, and techniques for finding family members. Plans for the Museum, however, have always included a family history area because family histories represent valuable sources of first-hand experience and the individual stories which make the artifacts come alive. As awareness of the Museum spread and the number of inquiries and family histories increased, plans were modified to allow more space for individual genealogies. Staff of the Family History Library in Salt Lake City have helped the Museum to plan this space and their cooperation will be a key element of the service offered by the Museum in the future.

The Wall of Honor concept was included in the above plans for expansion. The Wall of Honor will recognize the immigrants of every period with a plaque on a prominent wall in the completed Museum building. A file with a family history form, family tree and family group sheet will be requested for each person so honored. Photos, obituaries and newspaper clippings are also welcomed in these files. A computer database with indexing by key categories, such as town of origin in Denmark, helps in making searches. Longer histories and first-hand accounts are also solicited for the family history library. A contribution of $200 per name will reserve a place on the Wall of Honor and help to build the Museum.

Support and the future

The Wall of Honor is only one of the means employed to raise funds for construction and operation of the Museum. Support is being sought in letters sent throughout the country, in meetings where staff and volunteers share plans and dreams, in calls on individuals in their homes and offices, and in newspaper and magazine articles and advertisements. Individuals and corporations in the United States, Canada and Denmark are eligible to become members of the Museum and to receive membership benefits and may establish memorials to honor departed family and friends as well as have areas of the building named for themselves or for their companies. Applications have also been made to private and government foundations to secure their support of construction and special projects.

Individual contributions account for almost 90% of all the funds received to date. Danish-Americans quickly adopted the American volunteer spirit; they realized that if their churches and schools were to become realities they had to give their support. As the Museum seeks support from many sources, it is, once again, individuals and families who respond and contribute toward making it a reality.

Other sources of funding have not been neglected. The State of Iowa and

regional corporations and foundations have been generous. Federal support, however, is limited to programs rather than bricks and mortar; to date a National Endowment for the Arts grant has helped provide the research needed to establish the Tradition Bearers' file. Revenue has been generated by admissions to Bedstemor's House, the sale of Christmas cards and special fund-raising events such as dinners in private homes and *aebleskive* suppers.

The estimated cost of Phase I of the building is $5.4 million. Construction of the 16,000 square foot core of the facility began in 1990 and will cost $1.8 million plus exhibit and site development costs. Over $2 million has been raised to date to provide for operational costs and for construction. It is anticipated that both costs and revenues will increase when the Museum opens. Special events, the sale of memberships, gift shop sales and admissions will make up the revenue. The larger facility will require more staff and increase the cost of utilities, maintenance and programs.

With the opening of the new building and with each year of reaching out to a wider segment of the population, more support is anticipated. Only a fraction of the Danish-American population has heard of the Museum and only a small percentage of this number has been asked for their support. As a national museum and international cultural center, The Danish Immigrant Museum is the first project to seek out representation for all regions. The Museum is being aggressively inclusive of the various religions of the immigrants and is calling on everyone of Danish heritage in North America to join in the effort to preserve their culture and share it with others.

The Danes Worldwide Archives 1932-1992

by Henning Bender

Max Henius (1859-1935). (Photo: Sophie Nielsen).

The sixtieth anniversary of the Danes Worldwide Archives is no ordinary occasion – it marks the anniversary of the *world's oldest emigration archives*. It has always been the responsibility of the Archives to collect and provide information based on the records, manuscripts and photographs of those people who, at one time or another, emigrated from Denmark. The Archives exists today because many of those emigrants, their families and descendants wished to preserve their history by donating material to the Archives and because there has been a continuing interest in emigration history. Today the Danes Worldwide Archives can provide information about some 500,000 Danes who emigrated and counts among its users their over 2 million descendants. Added to this number are, of course, those researchers who have a special interest in emigration history. Such research is complicated by the fact that, in spite of the large percentage of the population they represented at the time of emigration, those who chose to leave their homeland often became a "forgotten people." In their countries of destination, they were part of a small group, one of many ethnic minorities of little historical interest in their own right.

It is the task of the Danes Worldwide Archives to stimulate interest in the history of those Danes who chose to lead their lives outside Denmark. The problems involved in carrying out such a task are reflected only too well in the turbulent history of the Archives. This history includes the story of a charismatic man of vision – Max Henius – who took the initiative in founding the Archives and who wished to preserve his own story as well as those of his contemporaries. But it is also the story of how interest in this material and in the Danes Worldwide Archives declined, as many of those who had emigrated during the emigration "boom" died. Finally, it is the story of how interest in the Archives re-emerged as the descendants of Danish emigrants throughout the world began to seek their roots.

Max Henius and the Danes Worldwide Archives

Max Henius (1859-1935) was made an honorary citizen of the city of Aalborg in northern Jutland, the mainland peninsula of Denmark, on his seventieth birthday on June 16, 1929. This honor was bestowed, not so much because Max Henius had been born in Aalborg – he had left the city at the age of 17 – but because, in the eyes of the Danish public in 1929, he was the uncrowned king of Danish-Americans and the prime mover behind the annual American Independence Day celebrations held at Rebild National Park, a few miles south of Aalborg. Aalborg, a town which prided itself on being Denmark's most "American" city, wanted to recognize his achievements. The city also wanted to be known for its American spirit of progress as well as its straightforward way of doing things, ability to make

quick decisions, modern buildings and industrial growth. Max Henius and Aalborg's energetic mayor from 1925 to 1945, Marinus Jørgensen, spoke the same language. Both had an unusual talent for inspiring others with their zeal. Added to this was the fact that, in Aalborg, Max Henius' father, Isidor Henius, had made the Henius name synonymous with industrial growth.

At the age of 17, Isidor Henius (1820-1901) emigrated from Thorn, Poland, to Aalborg, where in the mid-1800s he founded Denmark's first modern destillery. This factory was sold to a Copenhagen syndicate in 1881 which meant that Max Henius could not follow in his father's footsteps as head of the company. Having completed his education in chemistry in Germany, Max sought his fortune in Chicago. Together with a German friend, he started the Wahl-Henius Institute for Fermentology in Chicago in 1886. Here they introduced the revolutionary, new methods of growing yeast developed at the Carlsberg Laboratory in Copenhagen on which modern brewing technology was based. The Wahl-Henius Institute became the most important training school for brewers in the United States, and in the 1890s, the Institute implemented successful improvements in Chicago's water and milk supply systems. Max Henius was appointed to a number of honorary public positions, met many public figures and traveled widely. He set something of a record in his day by crossing the Atlantic Ocean no fewer than 94 times in his lifetime. Little by little, the virtually omnipresent Max Henius became a well-known personage in Danish-American circles.

Max Henius had never become involved in the more popular forms of Danish-American organizational work: in the Danish churches, societies and lodges. His contacts included a small group of intellectuals who gathered around "the round table" in Wilken's restaurant in La Salle Street. "The Circle" met there, and well-known guests from Denmark could count on a hearty welcome there when they visited Chicago. The founding in 1906 of the "Danish-American Association," whose purpose was increasing awareness of the work of Danish-Americans in the United States and in Denmark through meetings and cultural exchange, was a natural extension of the La Salle Street get-togethers. The association was never very successful; membership never exceeded 500, and throughout its ten-year lifetime, it was severely criticized by all other Danish organizations in the United States for what was referred to as "aristocracy of the spirit." In spite of this, the association left its mark by setting up The American-Scandinavian Foundation in 1910, supporting a number of publications about the history of Danish-Americans and, finally, initiating the Independence Day celebrations which continue to this day.

When Mayor Marinus Jørgensen met Max Henius in 1929, the city of Aalborg had just purchased the estate known as Sohngaardsholm, built by

Docking in Copenhagen aboard *Oscar II*. 1912. Max Henius is fifth from the left.

Isidor Henius in 1886 as his private residence. The purchase was made because the city wished to acquire the estate's land, while there were no immediate plans for occupying the manor house itself. Both Marinus Jørgensen and Max Henius had a certain interest in seeing the building put to some good use, an interest which led to their reaching an agreement. Max Henius describes this in a letter to the Aalborg City Council of January 10, 1930:

> For some time there has been a desire to find a permanent location for the many manuscripts, memoirs and letters concerning Danish emigration to America and the efforts of Danish-born Americans in the development of virtually all aspects of life in the United States, in other words, a true archives should be created, where Danes and Danish-born Americans can find information about Danish-American conditions. Such an archives would also be of great significance in the compiling of the history of Danish-born Americans, a task which no doubt will be undertaken in the coming years. It has occurred to me that Aalborg, which is probably visited by a larger number of Danish-born Americans than any other city in Denmark, should be the home of such a Danish-American archives. In addition, the municipality owns a building which would be especially appropriate for such use, namely, Sohngaardsholm.[1]

Although the idea was completely new – this was the first mention of a Danish-American archives in Denmark – the plan was approved by the City Council just ten days later, on January 20, 1930. The Aalborg City Council rid itself of Sohngaardsholm at no additional expense, and even had some hope that the new Danish-American Archives would attract wealthy American tourists to the city. For his part, Max Henius was given an honorary residence in the building, and his furnishings, records and library formed the basis of the first archives. "The Dan-America Archives Society" was registered as a non-profit organization in Illinois in April, 1930. It was in this way that Danish-Americans secured their own historical archives.

The Archives at Sohngaardsholm

The official transfer of ownership of Sohngaardsholm to The Dan-America Archives Society on July 5, 1930, took place on the condition that the manor house should be used as an archives, a library and, possibly, a museum. The operation of the archives was ensured for the first four years by a donation of $10,000 made by the Danish-American, William S. Knudsen, a director of General Motors in Detroit, while the expense of renovating and furnishing the building was covered by a number of Aalborg firms. In Chicago, an archives committee was set up, and under the leadership of head librarian, J. Christian Bay, this committee began to collect documents and books from Danish-Americans, while a Danish archives committee, headed by editor-in-chief Roger Nielsen of Copenhagen (formerly of Chicago) took over the management of the archives. Chicago librarian, Svend Waendelin (1894-1956), was hired on January 1, 1931, and immediately upon his arrival in Aalborg, he began to catalog the already extensive collection of books and other documents. The work of the archives had, in fact, been underway for a year and a half when it was officially opened by Prime Minister Thorvald Stauning on July 3, 1932. The name had been changed to Danes Worldwide Archives in order to emphasize that the work involved emigration worldwide and applied to all Danish emigrants, not only the large number who had emigrated to the United States.

So far, so good – but if the Danes Worldwide Archives was to survive for more than the initial four years, it was calculated that a capital of at least $50,000 was required. Max Henius planned to raise this amount by canvassing in the United States, but on November 15, 1935, before this plan could be carried out, he died following a traffic accident near Aalborg. Max Henius' funeral service was conducted at Sohngaardsholm at which time Roger Nielsen stressed that

> ...while the Rebild celebrations will cease – coming generations will

Prime Minister Thorvald Stauning at the dedication of the Danes Worldwide Archives on June 3, 1932.

> seek out the Archives in Aalborg, the source of the pioneers – the Archives that were Henius' great plan and which he successfully established with such enormous energy.[2]

The Rebild celebrations, however, did not cease – but the Danes Worldwide Archives had to wait many years for those "coming generations," and waited just as long for a stable economic basis. On the occasion of Danish King Christian X's 10th Jubilee in 1937, a fund was set up in the United States in support of the Danes Worldwide Archives. In spite of the fact that it was said to be a "question of honor" for all Danish-Americans to contribute to this fund, the initiative resulted only in slightly less than $5,000 from 607 contributors.[3] The amount of $5,000, bequeathed to the Archives in Henius' last will and testament, was added to this. The interest earned on this sum of $10,000 – and from 1938, an annual grant of $500 from the Danish government – formed the financial basis of the Danes Worldwide Archives for many years. The amount could often barely cover the salary of the archivist. The situation worsened when war broke out in 1939. On April 9, 1940, Denmark became an occupied country, and connections between Denmark and the countries of destination of those who had emigrated were completely cut off. The work of the American archives committee came to a halt and with it the collection of materials that had taken

place in the U.S. throughout the 1930s. On December 15, 1943, Sohngaardsholm was seized by the German forces, the Danes Worldwide Archives lost its home, and the books and other documents were packed away in the basement of a manor house outside Aalborg. The work of the Archives lay dormant during the war years and continued to do so for a number of years to come.

The wandering archives

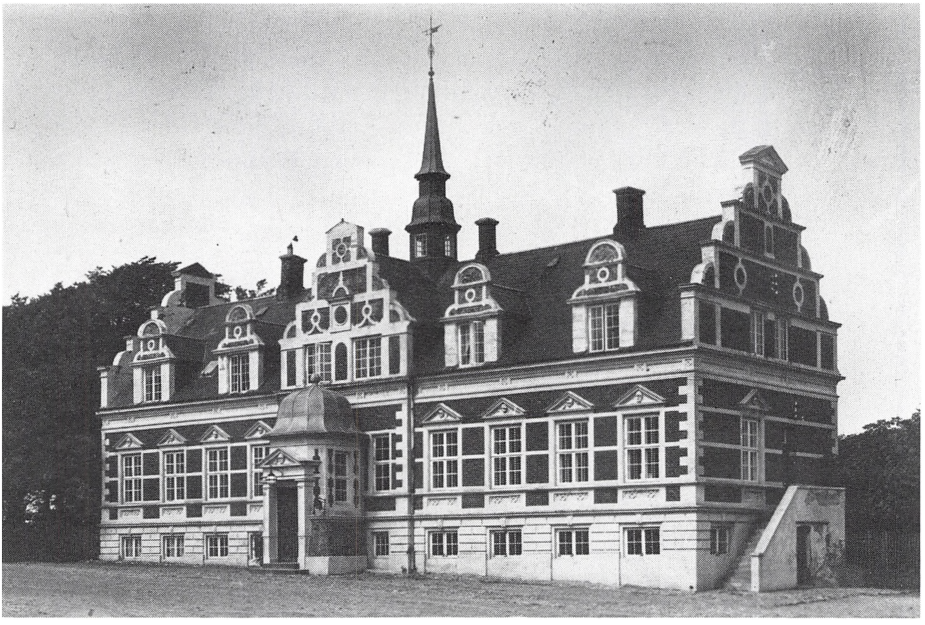
The desire to reopen the Danes Worldwide Archives at Sohngaardsholm at the end of the war in 1945 was never realized. For one thing, Sohngaardsholm housed refugees and prisoners of war up until 1948 and, for another, the Danish board of the Danes Worldwide Archives had privately agreed already in 1944 that the Archives should be moved to Copenhagen.

When in 1949 the Aalborg City Council requested that the Archives move back to Sohngaardsholm, the request was therefore refused. An offer from Dansk Samvirke[4] to move into suitable facilities in their building in Copenhagen, at no expense to the Archives, had already been accepted. Dansk Samvirke and its 10,000 members could guarantee the Danes Worldwide Archives both "customers" and financial support from all over the world. In addition, some felt that it was more appropriate for the Archives to be located in the nation's capital than in Aalborg where "the location of the Danes Worldwide Archives is rather inconvenient for students and others who are interested in its material."[5]

On September 1, 1950, the Danes Worldwide Archives reopened after a period of seven years – but the following seven years in Copenhagen were not happy ones. The Archives noted a total of 100 visitors, and its economy continued to go downhill. The Archives was given notice on August 1, 1955, after Dansk Samvirke had decided to install a *paying* lodger in their attic rooms. The Archives then moved to a basement in the Copenhagen suburb of Hellerup. Sven Waendelin died the following year on June 14, 1956. Thus ended 25 years of devoted service to the Danes Worldwide Archives for which he received little more than a symbolic wage.

It was at this point that the board of the Archives seriously began to consider closing down. Aalborg, however, which had no cultural institution of national significance, was still interested in keeping it open. Sohngaardsholm had, in the meantime, been taken over by others, but the city was willing to put an apartment in a new area in the southern part of the town at the disposal of the Archives free of charge. The Archives moved back to Aalborg, where it reopened under the leadership of Tyge Lassen on July 1, 1957.

This was, of course, not the best of solutions. There was scarcely room



Sohngaardsholm. Built in 1886.

for the collection, which already filled 500 meters (over 1600 ft.) of shelf space in the 68 square meters (approx. 730 sq. ft.) of floor space in the apartment, and there was no room for expansion or for users. Barely 100 users a year visited the Archives during this period, and the fact that it survived at all can only be attributed to the enthusiasm of the head of the Archives, Tyge Lassen. After his death in 1964, former president of the Rebild Society, Holger Bladt, became head of the Archives. When he died in 1976, his widow and close assistant, Inger Bladt, took over as head of the Archives, and she held this position until 1983. It is of some significance that the number of genealogical inquiries began to increase from year to year. Those "coming generations" were, finally, coming to life!

An increasing interest in history has been noted in various areas since the early 1970s. The 1970s marked the establishment of historical archives in communities throughout Denmark – likewise in Aalborg in 1974. The Aalborg Historical Archives was among the first to hire a professional archivist, the reason being that the new archives, together with the Danes Worldwide Archives, was to create a scientific environment for the university established in Aalborg that same year.

The apprenticeship

Bank Director Eigil Hastrup served the Danes Worldwide Archives as chairman of the board of directors from 1976 to 1983, and he was eager to strengthen the Archives. Having been the prime mover behind the establishment of a university in Aalborg, he now wanted to see the Danes Worldwide Archives connected in some way to this institution of learning. This would, on the one hand, ensure the position of the Archives as a national, government supported Archives and, at the same time, add a dimension to the teaching of history at the new university which other Danish universities did not have. Lengthy negotiations were held, and in the meantime, the Danes Worldwide Archives was kept afloat by contributions made by the chairman's bank.

All goals appeared to have been reached when the Danes Worldwide Archives celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1982. The Archives moved into its current home in the old, but well-suited, centrally located main library building in Aalborg where it shared 1,800 square meters (approx. 19,375 square feet) of space with the Aalborg Historical Archives. The Municipality of Aalborg paid the rent, while, for a trial period of 5 years, 50% of the amount of wages and other operational expenses was paid by the university and the remaining 50% was shared equally by the County of North Jutland and the Municipality of Aalborg. The university was given a majority of positions on the board of directors in what was known as "The Danes Worldwide Archives at the University of Aalborg." At the end of the trial period, the Archives was to become a part of the university or another public institution. The Danes Worldwide Archives had lost its independence, but had apparently been guaranteed far better means for carrying out its activities than ever before.

A new board of directors for the Archives was appointed in 1983 with Professor Mogens Baumann Larsen as its chairman, and on January 1, 1984, a new chief archivist, Helle Otte, was hired. Helle Otte took on her new responsibilities with admirable energy, and the Danes Worldwide Archives became for the first time a truly professional institution. A Danish-American bibliography was published as well as books on Danish emigration to Brazil and Australia; a Danish Emigration Historical Society was founded, and in 1985, the society initiated the publication of the Danish language journal, *Emigranten*. New contacts to Danish emigrants and other researchers were made on study tours to the United States, Brazil and Australia. Helle Otte succeeded in giving the Danes Worldwide Archives a professional profile. At the same time, the number of users increased to the 200 to 300 noted in the Archives' first years. A similar number of inquiries was received by mail and telephone.

Inger Bladt, head of the Danes Worldwide Archives from 1976 to 1983.

In spite of the success of this trial period, the promised status was not granted – the Danes Worldwide Archives did not become a government supported, national archives! In accordance with the original agreement, both county and municipality cut off financial support in 1986 and 1987, respectively. Surprisingly, the University of Aalborg also withdrew its support at the end of 1988. This apparent change of heart may have been due to the fact that the teaching of history at the university had been given a lower priority than it had enjoyed five years previously. In any case, the resulting lack of funds led to the firing of the entire staff of the Danes Worldwide Archives. The idea of continuing the Archives on the basis of contributions from Danish-Americans was put forward, but was probably never realistic, and this meant that the Municipality of Aalborg was now the sole "owner" of an Archives housed in a municipally-owned building, but with no money and no staff. The municipality wished, once and for all, to find a permanent solution to the position of the Archives in Aalborg, and, as of January 1, 1989, it was, therefore, combined with the Aalborg Historical Archives. At the same time, the Municipality of Aalborg agreed to support the Archives financially with the amount previously paid by the

University of Aalborg. The Danes Worldwide Archives and the Aalborg Historical Archives, which up to this time had shared a building, now became two parts of the same entity with a joint board of directors and chief archivist and with the name, "The Historical Archives." Most important of all, the municipal funds made it possible to hire Birgit Flemming Larsen as assistant archivist for the Danes Worldwide Archives. With a persistent claim to its identity and to the tasks and purpose assigned to it in 1932, the Danes Worldwide Archives had, once again, survived. Not only did the Archives survive – it thrived – new sponsors came forward in support of its efforts, and there proved to be financial advantages to the joint operation of the two archives. Contrary to expectations, the Danes Worldwide Archives was able to *increase* its activities after January 1, 1989.

The Danes Worldwide Archives today

Today it is safe to say that the Danes Worldwide Archives has solved those problems which so often plagued its existence in the past. Financial stability has been achieved – today grants are provided by various foundations and firms and, not least, by the European Commission.

The publishing activities initiated by Helle Otte have continued and increased. The book, *Danish Emigration to Australia*, published in 1988, was followed by *Danish Emigration to New Zealand* (1990) and *Danish Emigration to Canada* (1991) and, finally, by the current publication, *Danish Emigration to the U.S.A.* The success of these books is a clear indication that there *is* a widely felt need to study the history of those Danes who emigrated. At the same time, the books have helped to establish good, lasting contact with all those who share an interest in emigration history. Publication of the annual, Danish-language journal, *Emigranten*, has not been continued. The Danish market is simply too small, and knowledge of the Danish language among the descendants of emigrants too limited, to make this endeavor worthwhile. It is felt that the interest of those who wish to study Danish emigration history will be met with the English-language series, *Danish Emigration to...*

The publication of these books, together with the growing interest in history and the increased resources of the Danes Worldwide Archives, gained in coordinating its work with that of the Aalborg Historical Archives, has greatly increased public interest in the Archives and the work carried out there. Interest in the work of the Archives has never been greater, and statistics show that approximately 1,500 inquiries, equally distributed among those who come to the reading room and those who write or contact the Archives by telephone or telefax, are received annually. A collection of books, photographs and manuscripts documenting the his-

tory of Danish emigration and the history of Danes outside Denmark make it possible to answer these inquiries. It is also important in providing user assistance that the Archives have access to a comprehensive collection of parish registers and Danish census statistics, as well as complete lists of the names of Danes who emigrated in the years from 1868 to 1940. Although these lists are available in several other places, wide use is made of those at the Danes Worldwide Archives, where a computerized database is currently being created. This database is expected to be completed in 1993, thus enabling future generations to uncover their Danish roots with even greater ease.

The increased use made of the Danes Worldwide Archives in recent years is also reflected in an increase in donations of historical material. In Denmark there is a great interest in collecting, copying and registering the letters written by emigrants to those they left behind – letters often hidden away in cupboards and drawers, if they haven't already been discarded. Source materials such as these letters are obtained primarily through close cooperation with Denmark's 450 regional historical archives who also assist the Danes Worldwide Archives when a user needs further information regarding a particular area which may have been the home of his or her ancestors. Outside the borders of the country, special efforts are made to explain to emigrants and their descendants just how important it is that the sources of their history are preserved – and that careful thought should be given before old letters, records, books and photographs are discarded. This means, of course, that there must be archives prepared to preserve and register this material.

The future

It will *not* be necessary to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the world's oldest emigration archives – as has been the case on all previous anniversaries – by protesting the deplorable state of affairs and future prospects of the Danes Worldwide Archives. On the contrary, the situation of the Archives has never been better, and today it is not only an institution on a par with similar institutions in most other European countries, it is part of an integrated organization in Aalborg with *no* danger of being closed down. One cannot help but wonder why the Danish government, as opposed to the governments of other European countries, has not chosen to support the only national archives whose influence reaches beyond national borders in exploring the history of our emigrated countrymen. More important, however, is the fact that the Municipality of Aalborg has taken this national task upon itself by ensuring the financial and professional future of the Danes Worldwide Archives. Today the Archives can base this future on a quickening of interest among Danes in the history of their emigrated coun-

The home of the Danes Worldwide Archives in Aalborg, Denmark. 1989.

trymen – an interest which is growing at the same time as the descendants of Danish emigrants awaken to a need to find their own roots in Danish communities and families.

It is the heartfelt wish of the Danes Worldwide Archives that, in future, Danish immigrants throughout the world will succeed in organizing Danish *immi*grant archives, thus making possible the preservation of historic sources where this history was made. The Danes Worldwide Archives will continue to coordinate this worldwide endeavor via the exchange of copies of material and registers. Only when the gaps in the overseas network are too large should relevant materials be *deposited* in Aalborg – certainly a better solution than allowing the materials to simply disappear.

The collection, registration and storing of basic information about Danish emigrants and their stories is best carried out in two places. First of all, where the emigrants themselves settled and spent their lives – secondly, in the country they left behind and to which they sent their letters. This twofold registration, coordinated on a worldwide basis, making use of modern information technology, would give us an overall view of Danish emigration history. Not until such cooperation is implemented will the Danes Worldwide Archives truly live up to its name. A start has been made with the establishment of The Association of Migration Institutions – an organization set up to coordinate the efforts of European emigration institutions and similar institutions all over the world.

Notes

The information in this article was gathered from the many sources available at the Danes Worldwide Archives. The following archives were of particular interest: Det danske Udvandrerarkivs arkiv (The archives of the Danish Emigration Archives), 1930- ; Max Henius' private archive as well as the archives of J. Christian Bay, Roger Nielsen and Erik Jensen; the archives of the Danish-American Association 1909-1917 and the Jacob A. Riis League 1918-1919 as well as the archives of Rebild National Park 1909-.

1. Max Henius' Archive (Danes Worldwide Archives, Aalborg, Denmark).
2. From an article in the newspaper, *Aalborg Amtstidende*, November 15, 1935.
3. Christian den 10's Jubilæumsfond (King Christian X's Jubilee Fund), 1937 (Danes Worldwide Archives, Aalborg, Denmark).
4. Dansk Samvirke (Danes Worldwide) was founded in 1919. The association has as its aim the strengthening of connections among Danes at home and abroad and the providing of information about Denmark. Dansk Samvirke works closely together with the Danes Worldwide Archives.
5. The Roger Nielsen Archive (Danes Worldwide Archives, Aalborg, Denmark).

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Danish Society for Emigration History

It is the aim of the Society to promote and provide information about the study of Danish emigration history.

For information regarding membership please contact the Danes Worldwide Archives.

Published by the Danes Worldwide Archives:

Emigranten, no. 1, Danish Society for Emigration History, 1985.
Emigranten, no. 2, Danish Society for Emigration History, 1986.
Emigranten, no. 3, Danish Society for Emigration History, 1987.
Emigranten, no. 4, Danish Society for Emigration History, 1988. (Special issue entitled "Danish Emigration to Australia").
Danish Emigration to New Zealand, Henning Bender and Birgit Flemming Larsen, eds. (out of print).

Danes Worldwide Archives Studies in Emigration History.

No. 1 – Elisabeth Riber Christensen and John Pedersen, *Bibliografi over Dansk-Amerikansk Udvandrerhistorie. Den danske udvandring til USA fra 1840 til 1920 og den dansk-amerikanske historie til 1983* (Bibliography of Danish-American Emigration History. Danish Emigration to the USA from 1840 to 1920 and Danish-American History until 1983), Aalborg, Denmark: Aalborg Universitetsforlag, 1986 (out of print).
No. 2 – Helle Otte, *Danske Erhvervsimmigranter i Brasilien*, 1988.
No. 3 – *Danish Emigration to Canada*, Henning Bender and Birgit Flemming Larsen, eds., 1991.

The above publications are distributed by:

The Danes Worldwide Archives
Ved Vor Frue Kirke,
Postoffice Box 1731
DK-9100 Aalborg, Denmark
(Telephone +45 98 125793; Telefax +45 98 102248)

Danes Worldwide Archives
Ved Vor Frue Kirke
Post Box 1731
DK-9100 Aalborg, Denmark
ISBN 87-982912-5-4