

## **Danish American Heritage Society**

4105 Stone Brooke Road

Ames, Iowa 50010

Phone 515.232.7479 or 480.816.8725

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Inquiries concerning membership in the Society and subscription to *The Bridge* should be sent to The Danish American Heritage Society, 4105 Stone Brooke Road, Ames, IA 50010.

*The Bridge* and the *Newsletter* are semi-annual publications of the Society. *The Newsletter* contains items of current interest including occasional essays, book notes, and news of Danish organizations and activities in the United States and Canada. *The Bridge* contains articles, book reviews, and review essays dealing with all aspects of the Danish experience in North America.

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*The Bridge: Journal of the Danish American Heritage Society* appears twice a year and contains scholarly articles and book reviews dealing with all aspects of the Danish experience in North America. Past issues of *The Bridge* have also contained Danish-American memoirs, essays, short stories, collections of letters and historical documents. Book reviews and review essays in *The Bridge* deal with Danish life and history and the broader Scandinavian experience in North America as well as the Danish-American experience. *The Bridge* occasionally reprints previously published material.

Manuscripts submitted to *The Bridge* should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Manuscripts may be submitted in either English or Danish but will be published in English. Please submit electronic versions of the article, endnotes, and illustrations in separate files in MS Word or a comparable format, preferably on a disk or CD. Include a brief—50-100 words—author’s biography suitable for the journal’s “Contributors to This Issue” section.

Please address all manuscript submissions to either of the following Co-Editors:

Birgit Flemming Larsen  
Co-Editor of *The Bridge*  
Klostermarken 13  
DK-9000 Aalborg  
Denmark  
<birgit\_f\_larsen@hotmail.com>

Peter L. Petersen  
Co-Editor of *The Bridge*  
1407 26<sup>th</sup> Street  
Canyon, TX 79015  
806.655.2308  
<repete71@hotmail.com>

## Editorial Statement

This issue of *The Bridge* features articles on three important aspects of the Danish immigrant experience in the United States, namely politics, religion and business.

Jørn Brøndal attempts to answer the question of whether there was ever a Danish-American political subculture in the Midwest in the decades before World I similar to that of immigrants from Norway and Sweden. Brøndal's conclusion, based on impressive research, may surprise some of our readers.

Robert A. Olsen explores the use of the Danish language in a variety of religious denominations in the United States. By examining the Religious Bodies Census conducted by the federal government for three decades beginning in 1906, he is able to identify many of the congregations that used Danish in their worship services.

Helle Neegaard and Robert Smith continue their study of entrepreneurship in Denmark and among Danish Americans. If you have not read their article in the previous issue of *The Bridge*, perhaps you should do so before reading the one here. They invite responses from our readers and the editor would be happy to pass these along to them.

It has become a tradition that at the end of each decade of publication we offer our readers a listing of all the articles and book reviews published in *The Bridge* during previous ten years. James D. Iversen has compiled an index of all articles and book reviews that have appeared in our journal between 1998 and 2007. Earlier indexes are in Vol. XXI: 1 and Vol. XI: 1. The DAHS website offers a complete listing as well.

Book reviewers often complain that five hundred words are enough to do justice to some books. We agree and have instituted an opportunity for both review essays and longer reviews. For examples of both, see the review essay by Lea Rosson Delong and the review by Rolf Buschardt Christensen at back of this issue.

## Contributors to This Issue

Jørn Brøndal is Associate Professor of American History and Director of Studies at the Center for American Studies, University of Southern Denmark. He studied at the University of Wisconsin-Madison on a Fulbright scholarship in 1994-1995 and received his Ph. D. degree from the University of Copenhagen in 1999. He has written extensively about ethnicity and politics. His book, *Ethnic Leadership and Midwestern Politics: Scandinavian Americans and the Progressive Movement in Wisconsin, 1890-1914* (2004), received an Award of Merit from the Wisconsin Historical Society. He is presently writing a Danish-language book on the civil rights movement and an English-language book on Danish travel writers in the United States.

Robert A. Olsen counts both Lutherans and Baptists among his Danish ancestors, as well as Quaker relatives. An Iowa native, he currently lives in Houston, Texas and enjoys researching and writing about things Danish, particularly the Religious Aspects of Danish immigrants. His paternal grandmother lived in the Danish settlement of Fredsville, Iowa, while his paternal grandfather was born in the vicinity the former Pine Creek Danish Baptist Church near Independence, Iowa. All four of his paternal grandparents were born in Denmark.

Robert Smith is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Entrepreneurship, Aberdeen Business School, The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, Scotland. Rob has eclectic research interests and has written articles on entrepreneurial narrative, entrepreneurship and family business, rural entrepreneurship, dyslexia and entrepreneurship and criminal entrepreneurship. His interest in Danish history results from his writing association with Helle Neergaard.

Helle Neergaard currently holds an Associate Professorship in Entrepreneurship at the Aarhus School of Business, Aarhus University, in Denmark. She has spent a number of years travelling and has become increasingly intrigued by how culture influences the way humans organize their activities. She has worked in the field of entrepreneurship for several years, focusing on female

entrepreneurs in particular and trying to understand the differences in characteristics between Danish female entrepreneurs and those from other countries. As a result, her recent interests have been directed toward the origins of entrepreneurial intentions and self-efficacy theory.

James D. Iversen is President of the Board of Directors of the Danish American Heritage Society. He attended Dana College before earning his Ph. D. at Iowa State University. He is Professor Emeritus of Aerospace Engineering at Iowa State and has served as Visiting Scientist at the Marine Research Laboratory at Lyngby, Denmark and as Guest Professor at the University of Aarhus.

Lea Rosson DeLong is an independent curator and art historian focusing on American art of the Depression era and contemporary art. She is the author of Grant Wood's *Main Street*, *Christian Petersen, Sculptor*, *Shifting Visions: O'Keeffe, Guston, Richter* and numerous other exhibition catalogues and publications.

Rolf Buschardt Christensen is Press and Information Officer for the European Union Delegation in Ottawa, Canada. He was born in Copenhagen and came to Canada when he was ten years old. He has a B.A. in history from the University of British Columbia and an M.A from Carleton University in Ottawa. He has published over 200 articles about the Danes in Canada

# The Bridge

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# Politics Among Danish Americans in the Midwest, ca. 1890-1914

by Jørn Brøndal

During the last decades of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, ethnicity and religion played a vital role in shaping the political culture of the Midwest. Indeed, historians like Samuel P. Hays, Lee Benson, Richard Jensen (of part Danish origins), and Paul Kleppner argued that ethnoreligious factors to a higher degree than socioeconomic circumstances informed the party affiliation of ordinary voters.<sup>1</sup> It is definitely true that some ethnoreligious groups like, say, the Irish Catholics and the German Lutherans boasted full-fledged political subcultures complete with their own press, their own political leadership and to some extent, at least, their own ethnically defined issues. Somewhat similar patterns existed among the Norwegian Americans.<sup>2</sup> They too got involved in grassroots-level political activities, with their churches, temperance societies, and fraternal organizations playing an important role in modeling a political subculture. Supported by an enthusiastic Norwegian-American press, these ethnics contributed significantly to the election across the Midwest of numerous Norwegian Americans to local political office both at the township and the county level. Other Norwegian-American politicians made it to the state legislatures and some even to a governorship or to the United States Congress. Norwegian-American politicians like Knute Nelson—who was governor of Minnesota 1893-95 and U.S. Senator 1895-1923—and Andrew J. Volstead—whose name was attached to the law that introduced Prohibition to America in 1919—were to a considerable extent identified with their ethnic background.

Does it also make sense also to speak of a Danish-American political culture in the Midwest? This would at the very least require that a certain level of ethnic cohesion could be established among the Danish Americans in the Midwest sufficiently powerful to sustain colonies of Danish immigrants and networks of Danish-American institutions. Let us look into this proposition.

As far as settlement patterns are concerned, the main impression is that Danish Americans did not cluster together to the same extent as their Norwegian- and Swedish-American counterparts. My investigation of the ethnic composition of Wisconsin's 1,654 minor civil divisions in 1905 confirms this thesis. Whereas almost one in three first- or second-generation Norwegian Americans lived in a locality that was at least fifty percent Norwegian-American, and whereas approximately one in seven Swedish Americans lived in a locality that was at least fifty percent Swedish-American, only one in fifteen Danish Americans lived in a locality that was at least fifty percent Danish-American. In Wisconsin, in other words, Danish Americans were more scattered in their settlement patterns than Norwegian or Swedish Americans, a result that is confirmed fully by Torben Grøngaard Jeppesen's recent demographic-statistical survey of life among Danish Americans between 1850 and 2000. Despite this relative dispersal, however, Danish Americans did still cluster together to a larger extent than, say, people of English or Irish heritage. Moreover, some Danish Americans definitely sought actively to create Danish-American ethnic enclaves, resulting in the establishment of such Danish-American colonies as West Denmark and New Denmark in Wisconsin, Eklhorn-Kimballton in Iowa, and Dannebrog in Nebraska.<sup>3</sup>

Another important parameter of ethnic cohesion is the existence of ethnic institutions, such as churches, temperance societies, and fraternities. As far as religious matters are concerned, according to the not too reliable statistical information available on church attendance the Danish Americans were far less active than either the Swedish Americans or Norwegian-Americans. My own rough estimate suggests that whereas nearly one in two first- or second-generation Norwegian Americans was a church communicant who in 1900 affiliated with a "national" Lutheran ecclesiastical organization, and whereas the corresponding figure for the Swedish Americans was one in five, for Danish Americans the figure was only approximately one in fifteen. Since not all people attending church service were communicant members, the actual number of church goers was probably significantly higher.<sup>4</sup> Even though these figures hardly are fully reliable, they do nevertheless express a clear

tendency: The Danish Americans were distinctly less involved in ethnically defined religious activities than their Norwegian- and Swedish-American counterparts, a circumstance also noted by some contemporary observers.<sup>5</sup> Even though the lower level of religious activities among Danish Americans may to a certain degree be ascribed to the fact that Denmark in the second half of the nineteenth century was a more urbanized society than either Norway or Sweden—based on the thesis that the churches enjoyed a more powerful presence in the countryside than in the cities—the main reason for this phenomenon is, simply, that the Danish Americans were more dispersed in their settlement patterns across the Midwest than their Norwegian- and Swedish-American counterparts. To be sure, some Danish Americans affiliated with Norwegian-American churches whose language, after all, came close to the Danish. Indeed, some Danish-American church pioneers—most prominently Pastor Claus L. Clausen—were very active within Norwegian-American religious life.<sup>6</sup>



Claus L. Clausen

Besides the churches Scandinavian-American ethnics were free to participate in a welter of other ethnic activities. Thus, Norwegian and Swedish Americans nurtured a strong temperance movement. Judging from the available source material, however, Danish Americans did so to a far lesser extent. This would seem to reflect that in the Old World the Danish temperance movement, successful as it was in some regions, was no real match for its booming Norwegian and Swedish counterparts.<sup>7</sup> In a historical review of temperance activities within Scandinavian America, Waldemar Ager, a leading Norwegian-American prohibitionist, even noted that he had never heard of a Danish-American temperance association.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, in Omaha, Nebraska, a Danish-American anti-prohibition league came into being, a type of organization that was quite common among German Americans.<sup>9</sup> Even though there are good

reasons to presume that Danish-American members of the Inner-Mission United Danish Church were drier at the personal level, overall, than the Grundtvigian members of the Danish Church, there is no doubt that Danish-American temperance activities generally were a mere shadow of Norwegian- and Swedish-American.<sup>10</sup>

Within at least one area of ethnic activism, however, Danish-American associational life truly flourished. The Danish-American fraternities—offering sickness and funeral relief, as well as a welter of social activities, to their members—were a real match for their Norwegian- and Swedish-American counterparts. Discussing life in Danish America, the Danish-language *Folkets Avis* (*The People's Paper*) of Racine, Wisconsin, asserted rather boastfully in 1903, "A huge number of Danish churches and schools have arisen over there," adding with somewhat more accuracy, "and the Danish Brotherhood has evolved into a chain that connects almost all the Danish colonies in North America."<sup>11</sup> According to a Norwegian-American observer, "...if the Danes are rather indifferent to churchly matters, they have a tendency to come together and enjoy the social life."<sup>12</sup> Similarly, two other observers suggested that one reason that the Danish Americans had not been overly active in establishing churches, schools, and a Danish-American literature was "that they have turned their energies in other directions, especially towards organizing and maintaining secular societies."<sup>13</sup>

Several Danish-American fraternities existed side by side. One was Dania which was established in Racine, Wisconsin, in 1877 and which besides supporting "sick and needy members" featured a song and theater association, as well as a library containing 2,000 volumes. When Holger Drachmann, the Danish writer, visited Racine in 1900, he was celebrated in Dania Hall where "'The Girls of [German-occupied] Southern Jutland' crowned him as the bard of cheerfulness."<sup>14</sup> By far the largest Danish-American fraternity was the Danish Brotherhood. Established in 1881 by veterans of the Danish-Prussian wars of 1848-50 and 1864, the fraternity was originally named De danske Vaabenbrødre (The Danish Brothers in Arms). Already the following year, however, it changed its name, and from 1883 it was accompanied by Dansk Søstersamfund (The Danish Sisterhood).<sup>15</sup>

Besides offering health insurance and funeral coverage, the Danish Brotherhood arranged many social activities on an ethnic basis. In 1896, members of Lodge number 89 in Superior, Wisconsin, thus met every first and third Friday of the month, and on special occasions the lodge arranged picnics featuring such activities as running contests and dancing.<sup>16</sup> In 1902, the Racine lodge sponsored a festival with two musical bands playing Danish songs and two professional wrestlers offering robust entertainment. Moreover, the lodges from Racine and Kenosha participated in a tug of war competition, with the Racine brethren winning the coveted prize which "they immediately converted into liquor, generously treating and refreshing the losers with it so that they would not all have to go home as invalids."<sup>17</sup>

The membership information that the Danish Brotherhood itself provided strengthens the impression that we are here dealing with a strong organization, for are we to believe the figures, the Danish Brotherhood in 1907 boasted no fewer than 17,173 members and 255 lodges. Those lodges existed in largest numbers in Nebraska, Illinois, and Iowa, respectively.<sup>18</sup> Are we to trust these figures, the Danish Brotherhood thus had a somewhat larger membership than the United Church and a considerably larger membership than the Danish Church.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, taking into consideration that membership of the fraternities was all-male, whereas membership of the churches was mixed, almost twice as many men participated in the fraternities as in the two competing Danish-American churches combined. It should also be noted that whereas the Danish Brotherhood boasted slightly more than 17,000 members in 1907, the largest Norwegian-American fraternity, Sons of Norway, reported just about 8,000 members in 1910.<sup>20</sup>

A glance at the Danish-American press leads us back to the overall Scandinavian-American pattern: Judging by available circulation figures, the Danish-language press was much smaller, relatively speaking, than the Norwegian-American or Swedish-American. Whereas total Norwegian-American newspaper circulation added up to a size in 1900 that corresponded to 40 percent of the Norwegian-American population (first- and second-generation

immigrants), and whereas the equivalent Swedish-American figure was 43 percent, the Danish-American was just 14 percent.<sup>21</sup>

Even though the exact numbers remain open to question, there can be no doubt about the overall pattern: *Danish Americans lived more scattered than their Norwegian- and Swedish-American counterparts, and, with the important exception of the fraternities, the Danish-American network of ethnic institutions was not as fine-masked as the Norwegian-American or Swedish-American.* Did this translate into weaker Danish-American representation in politics?

There is no doubt that some politicians were indeed elected to political office on the basis of strong support from a specific ethnic group. This was the case particularly at the local level. The existence of political tensions between clusters of Scandinavian Americans and their Yankee neighbors are well-documented, and at times such strain indeed led to political mobilization of the ethnic group.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, reader letters to the Scandinavian-language press in the United States indicate that many a political candidate for elective office was supported by representatives of his ethnic group. Such letters were very numerous within the Norwegian- and Swedish-language press, and now and again missives in support of Danish-American candidates also were printed.<sup>23</sup>

In 1894 a correspondent writing to the Norwegian-language *Skandinaven* of Chicago supported a Danish-American candidate for the office of treasurer in Dane county with the following arguments:

Mr. Hanson is, as mentioned above, a Dane by birth; the Danes make up a very significant portion of the county's Scandinavian population; Norwegian and Danish here mesh perfectly, both in politics and business, in church matters, etc. The Danes—and Mr. Hansen in particular—have for years continually and loudly supported every Norwegian Republican running for office, large or small; but no Dane has yet occupied an office here in Dane. Under these circumstances, is it not fortunate that the Norwegians now have a good chance to reciprocate?<sup>24</sup>

Another reader letter printed in the same paper two weeks later, however, criticized exactly the same political candidate: "He is Danish, but he would like to be—German."<sup>25</sup> Thus, the ethnic

argument could be employed both to support a political ally and to smear a political opponent.

If we assume that politicians were frequently elected to local or county office for ethnic reasons and to state or federal office with strong support from the ethnic press, did Danish Americans stand a real chance of being heard when recalling that their network of ethnic institutions was coarser than that of the Norwegian Americans and Swedish Americans?

An examination of the ethnic makeup of Wisconsin's 100-member lower house of the state legislature, the Assembly, between 1891 and 1914 gives a rather surprising result. Among the 1,200 seats up for election between 1890 and 1912, a considerable proportion was occupied by Danish immigrants, even though they constituted only 0.8 percent of the state population in 1900.<sup>26</sup> Whereas the Norwegian Americans constituted 3.0 percent of the population and occupied 32 of the 1,200 available seats in the Assembly, the Danes occupied fully 31 seats. The Swedish Americans, on the other hand, occupied just two seats, even though their proportion of the immigrant population amounted to 1.2 percent. Although the Danish immigrants only made up 0.8 percent of the Wisconsin population, in other words, they represented fully 2.6 percent of the legislators in the Assembly.<sup>27</sup>

It would seem, however, that ethnicity played a more limited role for Wisconsin's Danish-American politicians than for their Norwegian- and Swedish-American colleagues. This becomes apparent from an investigation of the ethnic composition of the legislators' individual districts. It turns up that to a far *lesser* extent than their Norwegian- and Swedish-American counterparts Danish-American politicians were elected from districts boasting a large proportion of Scandinavian-American voters.<sup>28</sup> Thus, more than 70 percent of the Danish immigrants in the Assembly were elected from districts that were less than 20 percent Scandinavian-American. Only 40 percent of the Norwegian-American members of the Assembly were elected from such districts, and none of the just two Swedish-American.

Another factor is also important: For reasons that are difficult to establish precisely, Danish immigrants were re-elected to their seats

in the Assembly more frequently than their Norwegian-American colleagues. The 31 "Danish-American" seats in the Assembly were in reality occupied by only 16 individuals, whereas the corresponding 32 "Norwegian-American" seats were occupied by fully 26 individuals. In other words, the Danish-born politicians were re-elected to the Assembly more often than the Norwegian-born. The average length of the Danish immigrants' tenure in the Assembly was 3.9 years, whereas that of the Norwegian was 2.5 years. The fact that the Assembly careers of Danish immigrants were of a longer duration than those of the Norwegian immigrants was probably not caused by ethnic factors.

A closer look at Danish-American electoral behavior likewise implies that relatively larger shares of Danish-American politicians were elected to political office for reasons other than ethnicity. The fact is that whereas Republican-dominated single-party political subcultures emerged among Norwegian Americans and Swedish Americans during the second half of the nineteenth century, a similar single-party subculture appears to have been largely absent among the Danish Americans. Analyses of voting behavior in a very few Danish-American ethnic enclaves support this contention. They indicate that Danish Americans, quite unlike their Norwegian- and Swedish-American counterparts, supported the two main political parties in approximately equal proportions.<sup>29</sup>

The extent to which Danish-American voting behavior at least within the Danish-American enclaves was dictated by religious considerations remains unclear. It is obvious, to be sure, that strong tension existed between members of the Danish Church and the United Danish Church, and that each denomination interpreted the concept of "Danishness" in its own way.<sup>30</sup> We should note, however, that even though the Grundtvigians of the Danish Church were usually associated with stronger ties to nationalism and to the Danish



Peder Sorensen Vig  
*Courtesy of Danish American  
Archive and Library*

language than the Inner Missionaries of the United Danish Church, it was nevertheless P. S. Vig, an Inner Missionary, who authored a sizable portion of the most important—and strongly filiopietistic—contemporary work on the Danes in the United States, *Danske i Amerika* (*Danes in America*, 1908). Indeed, in 1895 the same Vig claimed, "If anyone asks me whether I wish Danishness to be retained in America, my answer is a strongly heartfelt, yes, indeed."<sup>31</sup>

Three independent analyses of Danish-American voting behavior in the Elkhorn-Kimballton settlement in Iowa do not provide a clear-cut answer to the question of whether grassroots level religious conflict led to political disagreement. To the extent that such political dispute did arise, it appears to have happened at a rather late point in time, i.e., in the years 1912-16. At that point, as it appears, Danish Americans of Inner Missionary background tended to support the Republican Party whereas Grundtvigians to a larger extent voted Democratic.<sup>32</sup>

The strength of the Democratic Party among Danish Americans in general can definitely not be ascribed to the Grundtvigians exclusively. By far the largest Danish-language newspaper was the secular *Den Danske Pioneer* (*The Danish Pioneer*) which according to one observer "entertained a certain Platonic love for Socialism," and which sometimes attacked the Lutheran pastors for getting involved in politics—besides being banned from Denmark between 1896 and 1898 for its hostile attitude towards the king and the government under J. B. S. Estrup. During the early 1890s, this paper supported the agrarian, radical People's—or Populist—Party, and from the mid-1890s the Democratic Party.<sup>33</sup> As far as Wisconsin is concerned, *Den Danske Pioneer* only rarely discussed political matters there. The paper was published in Omaha, Nebraska, and judging by the relatively few surviving issues, its main geographical orientation was west of Wisconsin.

Overall, Danish-American politicians were weakly represented by the ethnic press. The Inner-Missionary paper *Danskeren* that was published in Neenah, Wisconsin, only discussed politics to a limited extent and then usually from a Republican standpoint.<sup>34</sup> *Folkets Avis* (*The People's Paper*) which was published out of Racine, Wisconsin,

usually retained a politically neutral stance.<sup>35</sup> On a very few occasions, however, that paper would support local Danish-American candidates for political office. Thus, when Danish-American Peter Bering Nelson ran for mayor of Racine in 1902, the paper stated, "We may also hope, by the way, that the Danish population will disregard party loyalties and all as one vote for a fellow national who has honored the nation while never forgetting that he is Danish."<sup>36</sup>

The Danish Americans elected to the Wisconsin Assembly were a rather diverse lot of people. Of the 31 seats occupied by Danish immigrants between 1891 and 1914, four belonged to Socialists. These seats were all occupied by one and the same person, Frederick Brockhausen, who was elected to the Assembly four consecutive times between 1904 and 1910. He was a very prominent figure within the powerful Socialist movement of Milwaukee. In 1910, that city both elected a Socialist mayor and elected the first Socialist ever to the U.S. House of Representatives. Milwaukee, however, only housed relatively few Danish Americans. Most of Wisconsin's Danish-American industrial laborers dwelled in neighboring Racine which did not boast a powerful Socialist movement. Above all, Milwaukee Socialism was a German-American phenomenon, dominated by skilled German-American laborers (whereas its influence originally was much smaller among the city's fast-growing population of unskilled Polish laborers).<sup>37</sup> Another two of the "Danish" seats in the Wisconsin Assembly were occupied by James Larsen of Menokaunee. In 1891 he was elected to Wisconsin's lower house as the lone member of the state's diminutive Union Labor party. Thirteen years later he was elected to the Assembly once again, this time as an Independent. Of the remaining twenty-five seats in the Assembly, one was occupied by a Democrat, the rest by Republicans."<sup>38</sup>

It would seem that at least *some* of these Danish-born Republicans became involved in a Norwegian-dominated Scandinavian-American political culture, rather than a purely Danish-American. This was definitely the case with Henry Johnson, Wisconsin's most prominent Danish-American politician. Johnson, who was involved in Wisconsin's lumbering industry and also owned a farm, was

elected to the Assembly in 1902 and re-elected in 1904 and 1906. He quickly formed an alliance with some of the state's leading Norwegian-American politicians who, in turn, constituted a central part of Wisconsin's Progressive reform coalition under the leadership of the charismatic Robert M. La Follette.<sup>39</sup> Johnson appears to have been a real power among Danish Americans in Wisconsin. When Norwegian-American Andrew Dahl ran for the governorship in 1914, an ally of Dahl suggested that Johnson be persuaded to travel to Racine in support of Dahl's candidacy. Dahl liked the idea, writing a letter to Johnson in which he praised him as the politician in Wisconsin who best knew how to deal with the state's Danish population element.<sup>40</sup>

We must emphasize that Johnson's political strength, his popularity among Danish Americans notwithstanding, had as much to do with his cooperation with several Norwegian-American politicians, notably Andrew H. Dahl. Indeed, the two worked closely together as a political team. When Andrew Dahl was elected state treasurer in 1906, he appointed Henry Johnson assistant state treasurer. When Henry Johnson himself was elected state treasurer a couple of years later—an election marking the culmination of his political career—he reciprocated by appointing Dahl *his* assistant state treasurer.<sup>41</sup>

To conclude, the fact that Wisconsin's Assembly boasted a surprisingly large Danish-born element would seem to result, largely, from several Danish-American politicians being elected to the lower house of the Wisconsin legislature *in spite of* their ethnicity rather than *because of* it. Being Danish-American did not in and of itself constitute a particularly impressive political asset, but neither was it in any significant way a drawback.

The impression that the relative success of Danish-American politicians in Wisconsin should not be ascribed primarily to ethnic factors is affirmed when comparing the Wisconsin scene with politics in neighboring Minnesota where Danish-born politicians played a much more marginal role. Thus, in 1899 the lower house of Minnesota's state legislature contained fully thirteen Norwegian-born politicians, five Swedish-born, and just one Danish-born.<sup>42</sup> If the Danish-American political success in Wisconsin was to be

explained primarily by ethnic political mobilization, why was it not repeated in Minnesota, which in 1900, after all, housed a somewhat larger Danish-American population than Wisconsin in both absolute and relative terms?<sup>43</sup>

Quite symptomatically, whereas the earliest Norwegian- and Swedish-American members of the U.S. Congress—politicians such as Norwegian-born Knute Nelson and Swedish-born John Lind—were strongly identified with their national backgrounds, Charles W. Woodman of Chicago, the first Danish-born member, was not, at least not to the same extent. A Norwegian-American paper characterized him in the following manner:

He is 'one of the boys.' We remember him as the Justice of Peace at Desplaine St.; when the brothels of the district were cleared, the Prostitutes would always bring 'change' for Woodman and in court greet him with salutes, such as "Hello Charlie!" And Woodman let them get away with a quarter of what the police judge had fined them.<sup>44</sup>

Returning to the question of whether it makes sense to speak of a Danish-American political subculture in the Midwest, the answer can at the very most be a very hesitant 'yes,' referring first of all to the situation in the not very numerous Danish-American ethnic enclaves. The Danish-American institutional network was much less fine-masked than its Norwegian-American and Swedish-American counterparts. Still, a number of Danish-American politicians did succeed in jumping on board a Scandinavian-American—rather than a purely Danish-American—political bandwagon. In this way they did sometimes participate in ethnic political networking activities of sorts, but in and of itself the Danish-American component never sufficed for political success beyond the local level.

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel P. Hays, *American Political History as Social Analysis* (Knoxville, Tennessee, 1980), 54; Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York As a Test Case* (Princeton, New Jersey 1961), 165; Paul Kleppner, *The Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics, 1850-1900* (New York, 1970), 35; Richard Jensen, *The Winning of the Midwest: Social and Political Conflict, 1888-1896* (Chicago, 1971), xii.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Jørn Brøndal, *Ethnic Leadership and Midwestern Politics: Scandinavian Americans and the Progressive Movement in Wisconsin, 1890-1914* (Northfield, Minnesota, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> To be precise, 29.2 percent of Wisconsin's Norwegian Americans dwelled in such ethnic enclaves, whereas the corresponding figure for the Swedish Americans was 14.9 percent and for the Danish Americans 6.5 percent. For the English Americans the figure was 2.3 and for the Irish Americans 0.4 percent, cf. Jørn Brøndal, "Etniske enklaver i det amerikanske Midtvesten," *1066: Tidsskrift for historie* 29:2 (1999), 8. Torben Grøngaard Jeppesen *Danske i USA, 1850-2000 – En demografisk, social og kulturgeografisk undersøgelse af de danske immigranter og deres efterkommere* (Odense, 2005). On Danish-American attempts to create ethnic enclaves, see Jette Mackintosh, *Danskere i Midtvesten: Elk Horn-Kimballton bosættelsen 1870-1925* (Copenhagen, 1993); Torben Grøngaard Jeppesen: *Dannebrog på den amerikanske prærie: Et dansk koloniprojekt i 1870'erne – landkøb, bygrundlæggelse og integration* (Odense, 2000); Henrik Bredmose Simonsen, *Kampen om Danskheden: Tro og nationalitet i de danske kirkesamfund i Amerika* (Århus, 1990); A. Bobjerg, *En dansk Nybygd i Wisconsin. 40 Aar i Storskoven (1869-1909)* (Copenhagen, 1909).

<sup>4</sup> By communicant members we here mean active members who had gone through the Lutheran confirmation ritual. According to the sources quoted below, around 1900/1906 the Danish-American Inner-Mission oriented United Church boasted 16,340 communicant members whereas the Grundtvigian oriented Danish Church had just 4,000 communicant members. At the same time, the Danish-American population (first- and second-generation immigrants) added up to 308,488 individuals. This results in a communicant membership percentage of 6.6. The corresponding Norwegian-American figures were 353,435 communicant members, a population of 787,836, and thus a communicant membership percentage of 44.9. The Swedish-American figures were 148,446 communicant members, a population of 1,084,842, and thus a communicant membership percentage of 13.7. My calculations are based on the following sources: Hugo Söderström, *Confession and Cooperation: The Policy of the Augustana Synod in Confessional Matters and the Synod's Relations with other Churches up to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century* (Lund, 1973), 94; United States Bureau of the Census, *Special Reports, Religious Bodies, 1906, Part 1: Summary and General Tables* (Washington, D.C., 1910), 288-290, 371-373, 529-531; O.N. Nelson, "Statistics Regarding the Scandinavians in the United States," in O.N. Nelson, ed., *History of the Scandinavians and Successful Scandinavians in the United States* vol. 1 (Minneapolis 1900), 263; Peder Kjølhede, "Den danske, evangelisk-lutherske Kirke i Amerika fra 1871-1901," in P.S. Vig, ed., *Danske i Amerika*

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(Minneapolis and Chicago 1908), 112; United States Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*, Vol. 1: *Population, Part One*, 810-811, 818-819, and 826-827. Kristian Hvidt, *Flugten til Amerika eller Driovkræfter i masseudvandringen fra Danmark 1868-1914* (Århus, 1971), 315-316, using information from the Danish-American Pastor A. M. Andersen around 1900, sets the total Danish-American communicant church membership at slightly more than 41,000, i.e., a figure twice as large as my own estimate. But Hvidt likewise found that religious activities were most widespread among the Norwegian Americans, with the Swedish Americans taking second place and the Danish Americans third place. The very high percentages Hvidt reached were calculated on the basis of first-generation immigrants only. See also George R. Nielsen, *The Danish Americans* (River Forest, Illinois, 1981), 12-13, and 82-83. For a more generous estimate of Swedish-American church membership, setting the Augustana Synod membership alone at 19.4 percent, see Dag Blanck, *The Creation of an Ethnic Identity: Being Swedish American in the Augustana Synod* (Carbondale, Illinois, 2006), 32.

<sup>5</sup> John H. Bille, *A History of the Danes in America* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1896); see also *Skandinaven*, Chicago, May 13, 1896, Norwegian-American Historical Association, Northfield, Minnesota.

<sup>6</sup> J. Johansen, "De danske Brødre og deres Deltagelse i Arbeidet," in H. Halvorsen, ed., *Festskrift til Den norske Synodes Jubilæum, 1853-1903* (Decorah, Iowa 1903), 447-453.

<sup>7</sup> For a comparative analysis of the Danish and Swedish temperance movements, emphasizing the role that home-grown Grundtvigianism played in hampering Anglo-American religious influences in Denmark, see Sidsel Eriksen, "Vækkelse og afholdsbevægelse: Et bidrag til studiet af den svenske og den danske folkekultur" *Scandia* 54: 2 (1988), 269 and 274-275.

<sup>8</sup> Waldemar Ager, "The Norwegian-American Temperance Movement," typewritten manuscript (1936), p. 1, box 2, in *The Papers of Waldemar Ager*, Norwegian-American Historical Association. Actually, a Danish-American temperance association did exist in Waupaca, Wisconsin, even though a Scandinavian-American observer noted that the level of activity among Danish Americans was less impressive than among the Yankees."A.C." to *Skandinaven*, Chicago, September 20, 1890.

<sup>9</sup> *Reform*, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, September 2, 1890, Norwegian-American Historical Association; Kathleen Neils Conzen, *Immigrant Milwaukee, 1836-1860* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1976), 210.

<sup>10</sup> On this difference between Inner Missionaries and Grundtvigians, see Jette Mackintosh, *Danskere i Midtvesten*, 111-112.

<sup>11</sup> *Folkets Avis*, Racine, February 26, 1903, Wisconsin Historical Society.

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- <sup>12</sup> "A.C." to *Skandinaven*, Chicago, September 20, 1890.
- <sup>13</sup> O.N. Nelson and C. Neumann, "Social Characteristics of the Danes and a History of Their Societies," in O.N. Nelson, ed., *History of the Scandinavians and Successful Scandinavians in the United States* vol. 2 (Minneapolis 1900), 41.
- <sup>14</sup> *Folkets Avis*, May 17 and 24, 1900.
- <sup>15</sup> J.P. Paulsen, "Det Danske Brodersamfund i Amerika," in P.S. Vig, ed., *Danske i Amerika*, 222; Ludvig M. Hoffenblad, "Det Danske Søstersamfund i Amerika," *ibid.*, 230.
- <sup>16</sup> *Folkets Avis*, July 17, 1902.
- <sup>17</sup> *Folkets Avis*, July 17, 1902.
- <sup>18</sup> J.P. Paulsen, "Det Danske Brodersamfund," 222.
- <sup>19</sup> Cf. footnote 4 above.
- <sup>20</sup> Carl Hansen, "Det norske Foreningsliv i Amerika," in Johs. B. Wist, ed., *Norsk-Amerikanernes Festskrift 1914* (Decorah, Iowa, 1914), 281-282.
- <sup>21</sup> My calculations based on *N.W. Ayer & Son's American Newspaper Annual* (Philadelphia, 1900), 1411-1413, which gives the circulation figures that the press itself reported. According to my calculations total Danish-American newspaper circulation added up to 42,937, Norwegian-American to 31,288, and Swedish-American to 461,866.
- <sup>22</sup> For Norwegian-American examples, see Merle Curti, *The Making of An American Community: A Case Study of Democracy in a Frontier Community* (Stanford, 1959), 12-13, 96, 318-326, 334; for a Danish-American example, see Torben Grøngaard Jeppesen: *Dannebrog på den amerikanske prærie*, 241-244.
- <sup>23</sup> Cf. Jørn Brøndal, *Ethnic Leadership and Midwestern Politics*, 214-226.
- <sup>24</sup> "S" to *Skandinaven*, August 15, 1894.
- <sup>25</sup> "Idus Martii" to *Skandinaven*, August 29, 1894.
- <sup>26</sup> *Twelfth Census of the United States*, Vol. 1, Part One, 793-795.
- <sup>27</sup> Information on the ethnic background of the Assemblymen, as well as other biographical data, is provided in *The Blue Book of Wisconsin 1891*, 571-605; 1893, 619-661; 1895, 657-695; 1897, 652-700; 1899, 743-795; 1901, 721-769; 1903, 1069-1112; 1905, 1065-1123; 1907, 1115-1177; 1909, 1083-1146; 1911, 727-786; 1913, 629-689.
- <sup>28</sup> I calculated the ethnic composition of each Assembly district by pairing information of the geographical makeup of each district (which varied from election to election) with data on the ethnic composition of each township in 1905 according to the typewritten manuscript, "A Retabulation of Population Schedules from the Wisconsin State Census of 1905," Madison, 1940, 11 volumes; vol. 6, "Table 26. Number and Distribution of Family Heads by Nativity and Minor Civil Divisions," Wisconsin Historical Society.
- <sup>29</sup> Paul Kleppner, *The Cross of Culture*, 70.

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<sup>30</sup> Paul C. Nyholm, *The Americanization of the Danish Lutheran Churches in America* (Minneapolis, 1963), 79, 242, and 260; Henrik Bredmose Simonsen, *Kampen om danskheden*, 8; Jette Mackintosh, *Danskere i Midtvesten*, 127-128.

<sup>31</sup> P.S. Vig, "Lidt om Danske og Danskhed i Amerika," in *Danskeren*, Neenah, Wisconsin, April, 18, 1895, Wisconsin Historical Society. In the same article Vig, who apparently wished to nip accusations of not being sufficiently nationally minded in the bud, wrote that he would in fact be ashamed of himself if he did not understand the English language; "But I will never be able to love it as I love my mother tongue. I cannot help this, but that is simply how matters stand, and I do not wish it to be any different! Thus: I wish that Danish will be retained in America. It is my wish that my children shall be able to think and speak in Danish and be Danish." Furthermore, Vig ventured that continued Danish immigration to America would contribute to keeping Danishness alive. "But above all the church will be the great, yes the greatest, preserver of Danishness in America."

<sup>32</sup> Stephen H. Rye, "Danish American Political Behavior: The Case of Iowa, 1887-1936," in *The Bridge: Journal of the Danish American Heritage Society*, 2, 1979, 31-44; Bjarne Gade Johansen, "Danske emigranters vælgeradfærd i Iowa: en case-study af fem danske townships i 90'erne," unpublished MA thesis (University of Copenhagen, 1982), 37; Jette Mackintosh, "Politik, kultur og religion i et indvandrersamfund," in *1066: Tidsskrift for historisk forskning*, 23: 4 (1994), 3-10.

<sup>33</sup> Reader letter by Daniel Hejre quoted in *Reform*, August 23, 1898; *Den Danske Pioneer*, October 11, 1894; August 27, 1896; October 29, 1896; Marion Tuttle Marzolf, *The Danish-Language Press in America* (New York, 1979), 58 and 73.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Danskeren*, November 8, 1894; August 13 and November 5, 1896; November 17, 1898.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. the editorial in *Folkets Avis* October 29, 1896, in which the paper refused to take a stand on the defining issue of the 1896 presidential election, the question of whether or not to coin silver.

<sup>36</sup> *Folkets Avis*, April 21, 1902.

<sup>37</sup> Jørn Brøndal, "Socialister, fagforeninger og broderskaber i Skandinavisk Amerika, 1870-1914," in *Arbejderhistorie* 1999: 1, 44.

<sup>38</sup> We may add that two of these Republicans, Christian Wellengard and Ferdinand Wittig, were saloonkeepers by profession, whereas none of the Norwegian- or Swedish-born members was.

<sup>39</sup> Herman L. Ekern to Lily Ekern, January 16, 1903, the *Papers of Herman L. Ekern*, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

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<sup>40</sup> J.D. Beck to Andrew H. Dahl, July 23, 1914; Andrew H. Dahl to Henry Johnson, July 24, 1914, the *Papers of Andrew H. Dahl*, Wisconsin Historical Society.

<sup>41</sup> Andrew H. Dahl to Herman L. Ekern, June 27, 1908, the *Papers of Herman L. Ekern*; Henry Johnson to Otto Krenze, letter placed under the date of September 7, 1914, in the *Papers of Henry Johnson*, Wisconsin Society of History.

<sup>42</sup> Kendrick C. Babcock, *The Scandinavian Element in the United States* (Urbana, Illinois, 1914, reprinted 1969), 150; Jon Wefald, *A Voice of Protest: Norwegians in American Politics, 1890-1917* (Northfield, Minnesota, 1971), 27; Theodore Blegen, *Norwegian Migration to America: The American Transition* (Northfield, Minnesota, 1940), 554.

<sup>43</sup> According to the *Twelfth Census of the United States*, Vol. 1, Part One, Wisconsin boasted 16,171 Danish-born immigrants in 1900, Minnesota 16,299; in Wisconsin they constituted 0.8 percent of the total state population, in Minnesota 0.9 percent.

<sup>44</sup> The paper *Scandia* quoted in the paper *Reform*, November 20, 1894. *Reform* suggested that, "If the following information from "Scandia" is trustworthy, it would be better for the nationality if he had stayed at home." See also Millard L. Gieske and Steven J. Keillor, *Norwegian Yankee: Knute Nelson and the Failure of American Politics, 1860-1923* (Northfield, Minnesota, 1995); George M. Stephenson, *John Lind of Minnesota* (Minneapolis, 1935).

# Danish Language and the Church

by Robert A. Olsen

The first documented account of a Danish language church service on American soil were those conducted by the Rev. Rasmus Jensen, a Danish Pastor who was part of the Jens Munk led expedition of 1619-1620 to find the Northwest Passage to the Orient. Munk's diary states "We celebrated the Holy Christmas Day solemnly, as is a Christian's duty, with a goodly sermon and a mass. After the sermon we gave the priest an offering...."<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately only Munk and two of his 64 men who embarked on this journey survived the winter and returned home, thus resulting in no permanent Danish settlement. Jensen himself died on February 20, 1620 and was laid to rest near present day Churchill, Manitoba, Canada where the two ships had been forced to winter. Several theories exist to explain the tremendous loss of life that winter, including food poisoning due to eating bear meet that was not prepared properly, as well as the extreme elements of the Northern Canadian winter.<sup>2</sup>

The United States Census Bureau has released a new census study every ten years since 1790. Included in this study is a vast amount of information used for an infinite number of reasons by a multitude of organizations, companies, and individuals.

This first census contained information about people born prior to the American Revolution. Subsequent census (through 1840) only included the name of the head of household and grouped members of the household by age and sex. Beginning in 1850 every member of the household was recorded and listed by name, age, sex, color, occupation (of those over 15), country or state of birth, as well as whether or not they had been married within that year, gone to school, could not read or write and if they were either deaf, blind or insane. The 1870 Census also asked if a person's parents had been born in a foreign country. Other questions have been added over the years.

The Census has continued to change its format over the years and currently there are two forms used in the conduct of the census. Most people receive a simple form to answer basic questions,

however, one in six receive an extended form with which the bureau estimates much of the reported data based on this sampling. In 2000 approximately 83 million “short” forms were sent and an additional 15 million “long” forms. The short forms requests less information than is typically on your driver’s license and takes about ten minutes to complete. The long form is estimated to take an average of 38 minutes. This census was also the first to allow respondents to identify themselves as being of more than one race. For more detail on how the census process works see the website:

<http://people.howstuffworks.com/census.htm>

The first United States Census to include any data on Religion in America was the 1850 Census when it included information on churches, church accommodations, and church property. The 1870 Census included statistics for organizations, edifices, sittings, and property. By 1890 it was expanded to include organizations, church edifices, seating capacity, halls/schoolhouse, seating capacity, value of church property, communicants or members, and ministers. Public law 94-521 prohibited the mandatory questioning of religious affiliation so the Bureau of the Census is not considered the source for information on religion. However, beginning in 1906 and running every ten years until 1936 there was a special census called the Religious Bodies Census conducted to report information about Religion in the United States.

The 1906 Report<sup>3</sup> was the first such attempt to report language used in the conduct of religious services by all the various denominations. Prior to that census Lutheran Churches almost exclusively reported the only reference to foreign language and that was because many of the older synods included a national title in their name, for example the “Danish Church Association” or the “United Norwegian Church of America”. The 1890 census reported a total of 8,364 Lutheran “organizations” of which only 1,816 used the English language exclusively.<sup>4</sup> Non-Lutheran organizations reporting Danish and/or Danish-Norwegian or Norwegian-Danish organizations included the Regular Baptist (North) as well as the Methodist Episcopal Church. Forty-eight organizations were reported by the Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Wisconsin “Associations”<sup>5</sup> of the Baptist church while the Methodist Episcopal

Church listed 93 Norwegian and Danish organizations (all in eight Midwest states)<sup>6</sup> as well as 17 Northwest Norwegian and Danish missions<sup>7</sup> conducting work among foreign populations.<sup>8</sup>

Of the 212,230 total religious organizations reporting data for the 1906 census just over 11.5%, or 24,594 of those reported used a foreign language (separately or combined with English) in the conduct of worship. By 1916 this number increased to 26,239 organizations, which still represented approximately 11.5% of the total reporting. Approximately 40% of those reporting the use of a foreign language as part of the 1906 report were Lutheran. Of the 9,808 Lutheran congregations reporting the use of one or more foreign languages (many also reported English) there were 326 that reported the use of the Danish language, or about 1/3 of one percent or one in 300. Of those 326 reporting organizations, 297 used the Danish language exclusively. In addition there were 138 other churches of various denominations reporting the use of Danish, 61 worshipping exclusively in Danish. Of those 34 were Baptist, 10 Seventh-day Adventist 9 Methodist and 8 others. (See Chart 1 below) The average size of the Lutheran congregations using Danish was 96 while the average non-Lutheran Danish-speaking church had 84 members. In total the average congregation numbered 92.

These numbers were obviously much smaller than those of their Swedish and Norwegian "brothers" and especially that of their German neighbors. The migration from Denmark was much smaller than that of other countries. Most Danish immigrants came to America during the years 1869 to 1914, when it is documented that approximately 300,000 left Denmark with the goal of a "new life" in a "new world" across the Atlantic.<sup>9</sup> Many Danes quickly assimilated into the American culture while others became associated with their Norwegian brethren with whom they held a great commonality. The Union of Calmar (1397) had united all of Denmark, Norway (with Iceland), and Sweden (with Finland). This union would last with Sweden until 1524 when Gustav Vasa became King. The union with Norway, however, remained until 1814 when Denmark was forced to cede Norway to Sweden due to its losses in the Napoleonic Wars in accordance with the Treaty of Kiel.<sup>10</sup> However, when

Norway separated from Sweden in 1905, the Norwegians elected Carl, a Danish Prince, as their new King. Taking a Norwegian name Haakon VII ruled Norway for over 50 years and was succeeded by his son Olav (born Alexander). The Danes and Norwegians were closely linked not only linguistically but also by heritage and history. With this in mind it is no surprise that the census reports numerous congregations within the Norwegian synods using the Danish language exclusively as well as many using a combination Danish-Norwegian.<sup>11</sup> With the exception of the Lutheran church the only denomination to establish a truly “Danish” church organization was the Baptists.<sup>12</sup> The work in the Seventh-day Adventist, Methodist, and Free (Congregational) church was always Danish-Norwegian (or Norwegian-Danish, depending on which group constituted the majority).

The people of Denmark gained religious freedom by the “Constitutional Act of the Kingdom of Denmark”, (In Danish the *“Danmarks Riges Grundlov”*). This act, introduced on June 5, 1849 put an end to the absolute monarchy of the Country and also introduced religious freedom (or perhaps better referred to as “tolerance”).<sup>13</sup> Regardless of this “law”, religious persecution still existed and led to the emigration of many Baptists and even more so the adherents of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, commonly called Mormons. Denmark was second only to Great Britain in the number of Mormon proselytes to Utah. Mormon missionaries arrived in Denmark as early as 1850.<sup>14</sup> The Baptist faith had actually been introduced on Danish soil as early as 1839. Julius Kobner, a Danish Jew and associate of Johann Gerhard Oncken, known as the “father” of European Baptists first met with Danes holding Baptist views. The Baptist Union was formed in 1849 and was instrumental in obtaining religious freedom in Denmark. These early converts to the Baptist faith were also prime targets for the proselytizing of the early Mormons in Denmark.

Noted historian George T. Flom<sup>15</sup> maintained that the reasons for emigrating varied from country to country but in the case of Denmark included these eight primary influences, listed here in the order of importance: 1) the desire for material betterment and a freer, more independent life, 2) letters from relatives and friends

already in America, 3) Emigration Agents advertising, 4) Religious persecution, 5) Church Proselytism, 6) political oppression, 7) Military service, and 8) a desire for adventure. Influences 4 and 5 likely applied primarily to those of the Baptist and Mormon persuasion, and 6 and 7 to the situation in Southern Denmark and the changing borders with Germany (Schleswig-Holstein) between 1864 and 1920.

### CHART 1

#### 1906 United States of America Religious Bodies Census

(Congregations reporting the use of the Danish Language in the conduct of Worship Services)

Denomination	Number of Congregations	Danish Language Only	Total Membership
Seventh-Day Adventists	29	10	870
Baptist	50	34	3,581
Congregational	5	3	238
Friends	1		152
Independent	3	2	67
Latter Day Saints	3		2,529
Lutheran			
EL Synodical Conference of America	2	2	247
Norwegian ELCA	34	19	2,101
Eielsen's Synod	1	1	30
United Norwegian LCA	4	3	373
Danish Evangelical LCA	90	90	12,315
United Danish Evangelical LCA	195	182	16,195
Methodist	40	9	2,534
Moravian	2	2	110
Presbyterian	1		200
Episcopal	1		1,311
Salvation Army	1	1	16
Covenant	1		12
Free Mission	1		18
	464	358	42,899

These two charts gathered from the 1906 and 1916 Religious Bodies Census Reports detail the number of congregations and

membership of those congregations who report using Danish in worship. Included are the reporting congregations using only Danish or Danish along with another language, usually English.

## CHART 2

### 1916 United States of America Religious Bodies Census

(Congregations reporting the use of the Danish Language in the conduct of Worship Services)

Denomination	Number Of Congregations	Danish Language Only	Total Membership
Seventh-Day Adventists	32	4	1,636
Baptist	41	7	4,212
Congregational	4		247
Independent	3		138
Latter Day Saints	1		1,231
Lutheran			
General Synod	2		207
Norwegian Church, Synod for	17		1,549
United Norwegian Church	4	1	599
Danish Lutheran Church	99	88	14,439
United Danish Lutheran Church	189	112	17,046
Methodist	41		2,377
Moravian	1	1	459
Free Church	5		290
	439	213	44,430
Icelandic Synod	14	11	1,830

While many Danes did not leave the motherland for religious reasons, they were nonetheless pleased with the religious freedom they found in America. Waldemar C. Westergaard states from North Dakota in 1906 that “Though the state religion in Denmark is Lutheran, there is hardly a member of the settlement who how professes the old faith” and “...the immigrants have gone through their period of severe discipline in the catechism of the Danish Lutheran Church...and...many on their arrival express freely their dislike for the compulsory religious study” and “have never been in

any haste to join any new church organization in this country.”<sup>16</sup> He also indicates that while sects represented include Baptists, Presbyterians, Adventists, and Unitarians, most were not active members of any church body. It is generally accepted that as few as ten percent of the Danish immigrants joined ANY religious denomination. Based on the Religious Bodies census of 1906-1936 this would certainly appear to be accurate as this counts total members of “Danish” congregations, which of course would include children born in the United States as well as their Danish born parents.

The relationship between many Danes and their Norwegian “brothers” is also seen in the number of Danish pastors found within the ranks of the numerous Norwegian Lutheran synods. While the Norwegian-Danish Augustana Synod, founded in 1870 when the Scandinavian Augustana Conference split into Swedish and Norwegian-Danish groups, never had a single Danish pastor, the Norwegian-Danish Conference had eleven ministers born in Denmark. The Danes withdrew from that conference in 1884 to form a Danish Synod. Included among these Danes was the first president of the Conference, Claus L. Clausen. By 1903, even though The Norwegian Synod did not make a bid for the support of Danes, there were 24 Danish Pastors and twice as many Danish congregations within that Synod. Another eight Danish born ministers served in the smaller Norwegian synods, including the Hauge Synod as well as the United Church, the Lutheran Free Church and the Lutheran Brethren Synod.<sup>17</sup>

The Religious Bodies Census of 1916 was the second and last special census to report the use of foreign language in worship. Chart 2 indicates a small decrease in the number of congregations but a slight increase in membership continuing the use of the Danish language. English was gradually taking over in more and more of the congregations. The “Babel Proclamation”<sup>18</sup> issued on May 23, 1918 by Iowa Governor William L. Harding, outlawing the “public use of ALL foreign languages” added reinforcement to this situation. This was near the end of World War I when antagonism against Germans and their language was escalating. While this order was repealed on December 4, 1918 by the Governor’s written statement

that it was “no longer in force as an Executive order” it had already had a major impact on many foreign-born and foreign speaking residents of not only Iowa but also elsewhere. The Danish population felt the impact of this proclamation, as well. According to the census reports of 1890, 1900, and 1910 Iowa had more Danish-born population than any other state in the Union before California edged them out for that distinction beginning with the 1920 census.<sup>19</sup> The fourth article of Harding’s proclamation was perhaps the most “difficult to swallow” for the Danes. It read: “FOURTH. Let those who cannot speak or understand the English language conduct their religious worship in their homes.” As the 1916 census data listed below indicates there were still over 200 congregations using only the Danish language in worship in the United States and most likely most of them were the smaller rural congregations and with Iowa having more Danish-born residents than any state but perhaps California, it is likely that many would be impacted by Harding’s proclamation. At this point in time even the theological seminaries still conducted their training in the Danish-Norwegian language.

Years earlier Iowa was actively recruiting immigrants to the state when in 1870 the Board of Immigration published *Iowa: The Home for Immigrants*, which was published not alone in English but also German, Dutch, Swedish, and Danish. By 1900 there were German immigrants in every one of Iowa’s ninety-nine counties and they represented the largest immigrant group in the state.

Harding maintained that foreign language provided the “opportunity (for) the enemy to scatter propaganda.” He believed his “proclamation” was legal under the first amendment. Many states passed legislation establishing English as the official language but Harding quickly became the laughing stock of the nation when five farm wives in Scott County were arrested for speaking German during a party line telephone conversation. By 1923, the U.S. Supreme Court guaranteed the freedom to communicate in any language.

Gradually English became the language of “the people” and foreign language services continued to decrease. The Norwegian-Danish Conference of the Methodist Church was absorbed into the American Methodist Church in 1943.<sup>20</sup> The Danish Baptist General

Conference ceased to exist in 1958.<sup>21</sup> The Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church (the “Happy” Danes) became the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (AELC) in 1953 and the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church (the “Holy” Danes”) had already dropped the word Danish in 1946 and had become the United Evangelical Lutheran Church (UELC). The Norwegian-Danish Evangelical Free Church Association merged with the Swedish Evangelical Free Church in June 1950 and become the Evangelical Free Church In America.<sup>22</sup> No other denominations ever established “official” Scandinavian Conferences even though many conducted missionary work among these immigrants.



John G. Matteson  
*Courtesy of the author*

It is interesting to note that while Lutheran and Baptist Danes came from Denmark to the United States, the opposite was true of most other denominations. Almost single-handedly John G. Matteson was responsible for the establishment of the Scandinavian Seventh-Day Adventist movement not only on American soil but in Scandinavia as well. After working among many of the Danish and Norwegian immigrants in the Midwest and establishing a Danish

language church newspaper (1872) he traveled to Denmark where on May 30, 1880, the Danish Union Conference became the first self-supporting Adventist organization outside of the United States.<sup>23</sup> Also active in Denmark were the efforts of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints who sent missionaries to Denmark. Peter Hansen arrived in Copenhagen on May 25, 1850 and quickly began publishing translations of the Book of Mormon in the Danish language.

Today, the use of the Danish language is almost non-existent in worship. Other than an occasional service held either at Christmas or in connection with a “Danish” festival the language has become merely part of the Danish heritage in America. There are still, however, a few universities as well as other clubs and organizations that offer instruction in Danish.

The 1926 and 1936 Religious Bodies census no longer reported the use of foreign language but the word Danish remained in the descriptive titles of only three church bodies. These were the two branches of Danish Lutheranism, the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church and the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Norwegian-Danish Evangelical Free Church Association. As noted the DELC became the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (AELC) in 1953 and merged with three other Lutheran bodies to form the LCA (Lutheran Church in America) in 1962. The UDELC became the UELC in 1946 and merged with two other Lutheran bodies to form the ALC (American Lutheran Church) in 1960. A fourth Lutheran body joined the ALC in 1963. In 1988, the ALC and the LCA, along with the new AELC (made up primarily of former Lutheran Church Missouri Synod congregations who had left to LCMS over theological issues in the 1960’s) merged to become today’s ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). The Norwegian-Danish Free Church Association (officially organized in 1910 but loosely formed by associations established in the late nineteenth century, which held bonds of fellowship with the Congregational Church) merged with the Swedish Free Church in 1950 to become the Evangelical Free Church in America (EFC).

The Norwegian-Danish Conference of the Methodist church had merged in the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1943 and the Danish Baptist General Conference remained in existence until 1958<sup>24</sup>. These congregations were not reported in the census as separate denominations. The Danish Seventh-Day Adventists had never organized as an independent conference within their denomination however a loosely knit “group” had existed and listed 54 member churches in a report in their denominational newspaper, *Evangeliets Sendebud* (“*Evangelical Messenger*”) on November 30, 1910. (Volume 39, Number 47).<sup>25</sup> The work of other denominations was never

sufficient to merit a conference and merely existed for a period to time to minister to those Danish-speaking adherents to that faith. Those congregations were many of the first to assimilate into the English speaking church organizations.

There has long been discussion about which church/congregation can claim to be the oldest “Danish” congregation in the US. It is well documented the first Lutheran worship services (and Danish, as well) conducted in North America were led by Rev. Rasmus Jensen on the shores of Hudson Bay, near present day Churchill, Manitoba, Canada in the winter of 1619-1620 during the ill-fated Jens Munk expedition mentioned earlier. This, however, obviously did not result in any permanent Danish settlement on American soil.

Willerup United Methodist Church (Cambridge, Wisconsin) was organized in April 1851, (Christian B. Willerup had preached his first sermon in Cambridge in November 1850.) and remains the oldest Scandinavian Methodist church in the world. This congregation is near the Koshkonong settlement in South-Central Wisconsin and has always been heavily Norwegian; however, the founding Minister Willerup was born in Denmark and came under the influence of John and Charles Wesley in the 1840’s.

Many historians consider Emmaus Lutheran Church in Racine, Wisconsin to be the oldest Danish congregation in the United States but it was organized as the “First Scandinavian Evangelical Lutheran Church”. This congregation eventually joined the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 1897. Likely primarily Danish, it was in its early history a Scandinavian church. Other Lutheran churches lay claim to the title but it is difficult to officially “crown” any church with this distinction. The oldest Danish settlement in the United States is considered to be the one at Hartland, Wisconsin, where on May 5, 1867 the “Danish and German emigrants living in the vicinity of Hartland” gathered for the purpose of organizing a Lutheran congregation.<sup>26</sup> Also laying claim to this “title” is St. Peter’s Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sheffield, Illinois, organized on October 24, 1869. The church, now on the National Register of Historic Sites (1973) was built in 1880 but the congregation closed its door in 1950. First Trinity Lutheran Church in Indianapolis, Indiana was formed as Trinity Danish

Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1868 and claims to be the oldest Danish church in the US. As well, Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Manistee, Michigan (founded in 1868 and no longer an active congregation but still maintained as a museum) considers itself the oldest. Rasmus Anderson<sup>27</sup> actually claims that St. Marks Episcopal Church in Waupaca, Wisconsin, under the leadership of Martin Sorensen, son of Rasmus Sorensen, was the oldest Danish congregation but the first records of that congregation do NOT support a claim of a totally Danish membership. A history on St. Mark's online website states that Sorensen first officiated at the church in Waupaca on Pentecost Sunday, 1856 and that from 1856 to 1870 he "conducted Sunday afternoon services for the Danish." This might indicate a Danish "branch" of the church.

The Danish Baptists were perhaps the earliest to establish a congregation in the United States. Leaving Denmark due to religious persecution, they organized a congregation in Potter County, Pennsylvania in 1854. Within a few years the "call to the west" enticed most of these people to travel further and their journey took them to Wisconsin where they settled near present day Raymond and organized the first permanent Danish Baptist church in the United States on November 10, 1856. This church was a member of the Danish Baptist General Conference until 1914 when it joined with the American Baptist Conference and became an English-speaking church.<sup>28</sup>

The oldest Scandinavian congregation of the Seventh Day Adventist church is the Oakland congregation, located between Cambridge and Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin. Christian B. Willerup, the aforementioned Danish born pastor of a nearby Methodist church, first ministered to these people and they became known as Seventh Day Methodists for a time. However, in 1861 John G. Matteson was called to Oakland as pastor. He also organized the oldest Danish SDA congregation at Poy Sippi, Wisconsin in 1863.<sup>29</sup> The Exira (Iowa) SDA church was one of the largest "Danish" church within the denomination.<sup>30</sup>



Christian B. Willerup  
*Courtesy of the author*

One of the largest and most significant congregations of the Norwegian-Danish Free Church Association was Salem Evangelical Free Church in the Humboldt Park neighborhood of Chicago.<sup>31</sup> While this congregation was long a stronghold in the Norwegian community after it was organized in 1885 it actually had more Danish charter members than Norwegian.<sup>32</sup> This work was always more Norwegian than Danish and therefore difficult to separate. Eventually there would be approximately 80 Norwegian-Danish churches associated

with the Free Church prior to its merger with the Swedish branch in 1950.<sup>33</sup>

Even within the different Norwegian branches of the Lutheran church there were many Danish members as well as Pastors. The Danish born Claus Clausen is considered to be the “Father” of the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America. Other denominations also found leadership in men born in Denmark. Charles Anderson, born in Denmark in 1843 became a prominent leader in the early churches and history of what became the present day Covenant Church (known in the early days as the Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant). From 1928 until 1946 Copenhagen-born Thomas J. Bach served as Director of the Evangelical Alliance Mission (founded in 1890 as the Scandinavian Alliance Mission). The Evangelical Alliance Mission (TEAM) is headquartered in Wheaton, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago.<sup>34</sup>

Salvation Army Cragin Corps #16 in Chicago appears to have been the only Danish-speaking corps with this “denomination” and merged with the Norwegian-speaking Kedzie Avenue corps in

1950's. There were several prominent Danish leaders within the Salvation Army but very limited work was conducted in the Danish language.<sup>35</sup>

While the Norwegian-Danish Moravian church of Door County, Wisconsin and other varied locations were primarily Norwegian in membership the most prominent ministers within these churches was Danish born, including J.S. Groenfeldt who first came to the US (Ephraim, Wisconsin) in 1864 from Christianfeld, the Moravian community in Denmark. The other three pastors included his sons, Samuel and John Greenfield (he anglicized his name) and Christian Madsen.<sup>36</sup>

The sole Danish-speaking Friends (Quaker) meeting appears to be one at Springdale, Iowa. There was a Danish Lutheran church in nearby West Branch and a sizeable "Quaker" population in that area, including the family of Herbert W. Hoover, the 32<sup>nd</sup> President of the United States.<sup>37</sup>

There were several Danish speaking "wards" within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormon) but the move to the English language was promoted and encouraged by LDS leadership. As late as 1991 there was a Danish-Speaking ward within the Liberty Stake in Salt Lake City, Utah. Peak membership during the years after the war had reached 129 and in May 1991 membership still numbered 47. Since then the Danish-speaking ward has been absorbed into the English-speaking and no longer exists.<sup>38</sup>

A best guess would indicate that Golgotha (possibly also known as Calvary) Church in St. Paul, Minnesota is likely the Presbyterian congregation reporting the use of the Danish language. This congregation had ties with the Congregational Church and was served by several ministers trained at the seminary led by Danish-born Christian B. Trandberg in Chicago, where he trained numerous Danish-Norwegian pastors for early Congregational church which later became the foundation of the Norwegian-Danish Free Church Association.<sup>39</sup>

Many of these denominations founded schools for the purpose of training their young people for service to the church. Some of these educational institutions still exist today and among them are: The original Augsburg Seminary was founded in 1869 in Marshall,

Wisconsin by the Scandinavian Augustana Synod (later the Conference of the Norwegian-Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church of America). This school moved to Minneapolis in 1872 and although it trained Danish Pastors is historically looked upon as a Norwegian institution. As an institution of what many knew as the Lutheran Free Church (LFC) it merged with Luther Seminary in St. Paul in 1963, along with the LFC merger into the ALC.

The Norwegian-Danish Theological Seminary of the Methodist church was first established in 1875. This school would eventually find a home in 1884 on Sherman Avenue in Evanston, Illinois. When the Seminary merged into Garrett Theological Seminary the building continued to be used by Northwestern University. Today it stands as an office building. With the demise of the Swedish and Norwegian-Danish Seminaries in 1934 arose a new school called the Evanston Institute. That school evolved into Kendall College and relocated from Evanston to Goose Island neighborhood steps away from downtown Chicago in 2004. Its first president of the Institute was also the last President of the Norwegian-Danish Theological Seminary. Kendall College is renowned for his School of Culinary Arts. The work of the Norwegian-Danish Theological Seminary was absorbed into Garrett Theological Seminary on the campus of Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois.

Under the leadership of N. P. Jensen, the Dano-Norwegian Baptist Seminary of Morgan Park, Illinois was founded in 1884. This school was associated with the Divinity School of the University of Chicago. In approximately 1913 it separated and became an independent Danish Seminary located on Washington Ave. In the 1920's it became a department of Des Moines College but would eventually return to the Chicago area where is operated a few years as a department within Northern Baptist Seminary. The Danish work was gradually absorbed into that of the English. The seminary at that time was located at 3030 Washington Boulevard on the west side of Chicago but relocated in the 1960's and still exists today in Lombard, Illinois.<sup>40</sup>

Previous mention has been made of Peter Christian Trandberg and the Scandinavian students trained under his tutelage beginning in 1884 at the Chicago Theological Seminary (now a Seminary of the

United Church of Christ). CTS had been founded in 1855 to train pastors. Conflict between the school and Trandberg led to his leaving (1890) and establishing his own seminary, which he conducted until 1893 in Chicago where he trained no fewer than 24 Danish and Norwegian students. Several years later Danes and Norwegians within the Free Church Association established their own school, the Norwegian-Danish Bible Institute at Rushford, Minnesota in 1910. This school moved to Minneapolis 1916 and was renamed Trinity Seminary and Bible Institute in 1941 and became the school of the Norwegian-Danish Evangelical Free Church Association. In 1949 it merged with the Swedish Evangelical Free Church and transferred to Chicago eventually relocating to Bannockburn (Deerfield), Illinois in 1961 where it still exists today as Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

In 1901 the Danes in and around Hutchinson, Minnesota built Ansgar College but after several difficult years it ceased to function as a school. The college building sat empty for several years. It found new life when the Danish-Norwegian Seventh-Day Adventists began the search for a new location for a school to train workers for their church. They had previously established a Scandinavian department at Battle Creek, Michigan. This department transferred to Union College in Nebraska when it was founded in 1890 and there was also a Scandinavian department at Walla Walla College in Washington State. A desire to separate the foreign language work within the church led them to the now defunct Ansgar College property, which they purchased in 1906, and it became the Danish-Norwegian Theological Seminary. The Seminary opened on September 28, 1910. As the need for training in the Danish language diminished the Seminary merged with the state academy at Maplewood in 1928 and transferred to the facility in Hutchinson. At that time the executive Committee of the Minnesota Conference agreed to a special course of two years of work above the 12<sup>th</sup> grade for students of Danish or Norwegian parentage wishing to prepare themselves for work among the Danish-Norwegian Adventists.<sup>41</sup> The original college building was razed in 1980 and replaced by the new Maplewood Academy Administration building.

The Chapel of the new building is on the same site as the original college.

Former Danish-Lutheran colleges are better known in Danish circles and still exist today. Early education among the Danes was conducted at various Folk Schools established, primarily in the Midwest but also California. These would include schools at Elk Horn, Iowa, Ashland at Grant, Michigan, West Denmark in Wisconsin, Nysted, Nebraska, Danebod at Tyler, Minnesota, Kenmare, North Dakota, and Atterdag at Solvang California.<sup>42</sup> Trinity Seminary and Dana College grew out of the schools (particularly Elk Horn) when it was established in 1884. Dana still exists today in Blair, Nebraska, while Trinity Seminary merged with Wartburg Seminary, located in Dubuque, Iowa in 1956 as part of the merger of several Lutheran synods to form the new American Lutheran Church.



Old Main on the campus of Grand View College, Des Moines  
*Courtesy of Grand View College Danish Immigrant Archive*

A second Danish Lutheran College was founded in 1896 in Des Moines, Iowa. Grand View College many years the college existed as a two-year college but became a four-year institution in 1970. The Seminary was also part of merger in the early 1960's when the Lutheran Church in America was established and it became a part of Maywood Seminary, now the Lutheran School of Theology in the

Hyde Park area of Chicago. A short-lived seminary at West Denmark, near present day Luck, Wisconsin is a predecessor to the school in Des Moines.<sup>43</sup>

The details of the Religious Aspects of the Danish Immigrant during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century are wide and varied. It is hoped that this offers some insight into often times little known information about these emigrants from Denmark who came to America for many different reasons but found unbounded freedom in all aspects of their lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Kenyon, W.A. *The Journal of Jens Munk 1619-1620*, Royal Ontario Museum , Toronto, Canada, 1980, p. 25. See also Thorkild Hansen's *The Way to Hudson Bay*, Harcourt, Brace and World, New York, 1965.

<sup>2</sup> See article by Delbert Young in *The Beaver* (Canada's History Magazine) Winter 1973, Vol. 53, No. 3, pp. 9-15 and Young's book *Last Voyage of the Unicorn*, Clarke, Irwin & Company, Toronto, 1969.

<sup>3</sup> Religious Bodies: 1906, Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, Bulletin 103, E. Dana Durand, Director, Washington, D.C., 1910

<sup>4</sup> Information taken from Eleventh Census of the United States 1890 Volume IX Report on Statistics of Churches in the United States, Washington, D.C., 1894.

<sup>5</sup> These were listed as follows: Dane-Norwegian organizations in Iowa (9), Minnesota (11) and Wisconsin (11) as well as Danish organization in Nebraska (5) and Wisconsin (12). It should also be noted that both Kansas and South Dakota reported "Scandinavian" Baptist organizations, indicating the possibility of Danish congregations in those states, as well!

<sup>6</sup> 54 of these 93 were found in Minnesota (29) and Wisconsin (25) with the remainder as follows: Illinois (10), Iowa (10), Michigan (5), Nebraska (2), North Dakota (5) and South Dakota (7).

<sup>7</sup> Those reporting were Idaho (4), Oregon (5) and Washington (8).

<sup>8</sup> Both the Baptist and Methodist church denominations also reported German and Swedish organizations in much larger numbers than the Danish or Dane-Norwegian work.

<sup>9</sup> According to the 1920 Census there were just short of 297,000 emigrants from Denmark to the US in the hundred years between 1820 and 1920, barely 5,000 of those arriving before 1860 and the most arriving between 1880 and 1889 when the number totaled 85,342. See p. 324 "Immigrants and their Children", 1920 US Census Detailed Tables.

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<sup>10</sup> In return Denmark was to receive the Swedish holdings in Pomerania , but the treaty was never enforced and Pomerania passed to Prussia. Norway elected Christian Frederick of Denmark as their new King, however Charles XIII of Sweden, known as King Carl II of Norway, soon replaced him.

<sup>11</sup> See O.M. Norlie's book *History of the Norwegian People in America*, Minneapolis 1925 for more information. Norlie identifies more than 30 Danish-born Pastors serving churches within the various Norwegian synods.

<sup>12</sup> The Danish Baptist General Conference was organized in 1910 and disbanded in 1958. There were predecessor bodies as early as 1858 but they were not specifically Danish. See *Seventy-Five Years of Danish Baptist Missionary Work in America*, Valley Forge, PA. 1931

<sup>13</sup> An amendment to his act over on hundred years later in 1953 enabled Women to inherit the throne when there were no sons born to the King, thus allowing the then 13 year old Margrethe to become to heir apparent and eventual Queen.

<sup>14</sup> See Andrew Jenson's *The Scandinavian Mission* Salt Lake City 1908 and William Mulder's doctoral dissertation "*Homeward to Zion*" Minneapolis 1958.

<sup>15</sup> George T. Flom "The Danish Contingent in the Population of Iowa" in *The Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, Iowa City, Iowa, April 1906, Volume 4, Number 2. See also Flom's "The Scandinavian Contingent in the Population of Iowa" April 1905, Volume 3, Number 2.

<sup>16</sup> Westergaard, Waldemar C. *History of the Danish Settlement in Hill Township, Cass County, North Dakota*, in Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota, Bismarck, N.D., 1906.

<sup>17</sup> O. M. Norlie, *History of the Norwegian People in America*, Minneapolis , 1925 pp. 267-268

<sup>18</sup> Stephen J. Frese, *Divided by a Common Language: The Babel Proclamation and its Influence in Iowa History*, *The History Teacher*, November 2005 <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ht/39.1/frese.html>>

<sup>19</sup> An excellent account of the impact this proclamation had on the Danish population of Iowa can be found in Peter L. Petersen's "Language and Loyalty: Governor Harding and Iowa's Danish-Americans During World War I", *Annals of Iowa*, Third Series, Volume 42, Number 6, Fall, 1974, Des Moines, Iowa.

<sup>20</sup> This conference was always primarily Norwegian but several of the prominent leaders; in particular numerous editors of the Norwegian-Danish language Methodist church newspapers were Danish.

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<sup>21</sup> A total of 84 Danish Baptist churches were established in the United States (one was actually in Canada) between the years 1856 and 1914. Membership reached 5,317 in 1939 but eventually, with the English language becoming the language of the church, many of the churches left the conference, which had been formally organized in 1910, although there had been Scandinavian conferences since 1864. When the Danish General Conference disbanded in 1958 there were only 15 remaining congregations. The Baptists were the only denomination besides Lutheran that ever established a purely Danish organization in the United States.

<sup>22</sup> This denomination has long been one of the fastest growing churches in the US. At the time of the merger in 1950 there were 275 congregations. By 2006 that number had increased to 1,278 autonomous member congregations.

<sup>23</sup> For more on J.G. Matteson see "Gospel Viking" Adriel Chilson, Pacific Press, 1981 and "Sons of the North," Lewis H. Harrison, Pacific Press, 1942.

<sup>24</sup> By 1958 there were only 14 member churches left in the Danish Conference as many had disbanded or joined with English speaking conferences.

<sup>25</sup> This publication had begun in 1872 by John G. Matteson as *Advent Tidende* (Coming Times) and in 1884 became *Sandhedens Tidende* (Truth Times). Sometime around 1893 it merged with another Adventist newspaper *Evangeliets Sendebud* and was published under a combined title until 1902 when the *Sandedens Tidende* was dropped. The last publication was in June 1953. Matteson had originally edited and published the newspaper single handedly, even to the point of setting the type himself. This happened only after a great deal of persuasion to convince Ellen White of its need.

<sup>26</sup> "The Our Savior's Story" by the congregation. The church would eventually split into two factions, one Danish and one German.

<sup>27</sup> See Andersen, p. 105

<sup>28</sup> The church remains active today conducted a celebration in November 2006 commemorating their early "roots".

<sup>29</sup> This congregation disbanded in on December 1,1998 according to Jane Gerndt, Secretary of the Wisconsin Conference of SDA office via email, October 2 and 6, 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Exira, Iowa is part of the Shelby/Audubon, County "Danish" community in West Central Iowa. It is just east of Elk Horn, Iowa, home of The Danish Immigrant Museum. This area is the largest rural Danish community in the United States.

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<sup>31</sup> On June 3, 2003 the English speaking Salem Evangelical Free Church and Spanish speaking Iglesia Evangelica Salem, merged to become Good News Bible Church, continuing a ministry begun in Chicago in 1890.

<sup>32</sup> See 75<sup>th</sup> Centennial booklet Salem Free Church, 1959.

<sup>33</sup> According to Arnold Theodore Olson's *The Search for Identity*, the vote in 1950 was 73-5 in favor of the merger, indicating approximately that number of member church within the Norwegian-Danish Association.

<sup>34</sup> See J. Thomas Watson, *The Little General: The Story of T.J. Bach: Missionary Statesman*, Baker House Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1969.

<sup>35</sup> For more on the Scandinavian work of the Salvation Army see Edward Nelson and William A. Johnson listed below. It has been somewhat difficult to verify actual Danish work within the "Army". Information also includes correspondence with Sonja Sorensen of Evanston, Illinois.

<sup>36</sup> The son of Samuel and grandson of J.S., also named John S. Groenfeldt, was the president of the Northern Province of the Moravian church for many years, headquartered in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The Archives at the Reeves Library on the campus of Moravian College and Theological Seminary in Bethlehem is named in his honor.

<sup>37</sup> Correspondence with Esther Jensen, Iowa City, Iowa indicates that the Danish "Friends" may not have ever become part of an organized "meeting" so little if any documentation would be available but had recollection of Danish speaking Quakers in that area.

<sup>38</sup> Letter dated May 14, 1991 from William Orum Pedersen of Salt Lake City. Mr. Petersen was one of the first Danish LDS to arrive in America after the Second World War in 1946 and became the chairman of the emigrant committee and was called to the Presidency of the "Danish" branch. This branch was one of the last foreign language branches of the church in Utah. Recent communication from the Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints indicates there are no longer any Danish-speaking branches outside of Denmark.

<sup>39</sup> Martin Andreassen served as Pastor of Golgotha (perhaps known as Calvary) receiving his theological training under the tutelage of Trandberg. He would later serve as the President of the United Danish Lutheran Church. See Odegard, *With Singleness of Heart*, p. 457.

<sup>40</sup> The separation of the seminary from the undergraduate division resulted in the establishment of Judson College in Elgin, Illinois. During the early-mid 1990's the author worked in a complex next to the combined campus of Northern Baptist and the Seminary of the United Brethren Church (in Lombard, Illinois) and had the opportunity to peruse the library which included some helpful information but also established contact with the

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Colgate Library in Rochester, N.Y. were the archives of the Danish Baptist General Conference eventually found their home.

<sup>41</sup> Minutes of meeting of the Minnesota Conference Executive Committee, held at the conference office in St. Paul, Minnesota on May 30, 1928 as found in the archives at the Center for Adventist Research (formerly known as the Adventist Heritage Center) at the James White Library of Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

<sup>42</sup> There were also approximately six folk schools established in Canada, primarily in the 1920's and 30. See Rolf Buschardt Christensen's article in *Danish Emigration to Canada*, Denmark, 1991.

<sup>43</sup> See Thorvald Hansen's *A School in the Woods*, American Publishing Co. Askov, MN., 1977

# Re-writing the Danish American Dream? An Inquiry into Danish Enterprise Culture and Danish Attitudes toward Entrepreneurship

by Robert Smith and Helle Neergaard



*nce upon a time, long, long ago, many adventurous sons and daughters of Denmark went in search of a fairytale future that became the American Dream. They worked hard in the New World and sent money home to families left behind. In time, they became proud Americans melting into an ethnic cauldron that fed American Identity. As often happens in the fullness of time their amazing story became forgotten in their homeland. Now a new generation of Danes are breathing the spirit of a revived American Dream into a Denmark much in need of an Enterprise Culture.*

This research story which to us reads like a fairytale is the second-part of an exploration into Danish Enterprise Culture. It tells an oft forgotten tale, a Danish Success Story which we hope will one day be held even dearer by self-deprecating Danes everywhere. In telling this wondrous tale we are also serving a serious purpose in examining some socio-cultural and historical factors influencing the perceived low entrepreneurial drive of the Danish people, and perhaps also in the process helping to explain why traditionally Denmark does not have a vibrant Enterprise Culture. This work adopts a *Verstehen* based methodology because it considers both the historical and the social to determine the ideal typical social characteristics of Danes. The use of this imaginative investigative, socio-historical approach has its roots in the seminal work of the economist William Baumol<sup>1</sup> who used a similar approach to understand Entrepreneurship from a historical perspective in readings of Roman, Medieval and Chinese history. This study is not an exhaustive, comparative study of American and Danish cultures

but a limited scholarly inquiry. Nonetheless, it does re-examine the seldom told story that is the Danish-American Dream. The article extends the authors' research output into aspects of Danish Enterprise Culture.<sup>2</sup>

Traditionally Denmark has lacked a cohesive Enterprise Culture of its *own making*. To compound matters, we believe this has been exacerbated by the absence of a fully articulated home grown Danish Entrepreneurial Dream. These twin themes are evident to those familiar with Danish culture and history. We propose that these two facets of the Danish character, when combined with other socio-economic and cultural factors examined in this study, may explain the low collective entrepreneurial libido of the Danes. In conducting our research, we came across "*The Bridge*". We find it significant that in researching the titles of all articles which have appeared since its inauguration in 1978 only one article has specifically mentioned the word entrepreneur. This distinction goes to Henry Jorgensen, author of the article entitled "*Peter Larson—The Danish Immigrant Entrepreneur*."<sup>3</sup> Culturally, we find this fascinating because it suggests that as a collective body Danes do not appear to venerate the entrepreneur as a folk hero. Conversely, over the years, in excess of thirty articles have appeared in the same journal on the subject of migration.

It is also significant that America has a strong Enterprise Culture, and a vibrant Entrepreneurial Dream in the form of the American Dream. Moreover, historically and culturally America has developed a body of Entrepreneurial Mythology in the format of the Horatio Alger myths in which the poor-boy-makes-good. This body of Americanized-folklore is we believe a variant form of fairytale albeit that Robert Reich believes that this culture is on the wane.<sup>4</sup> Denmark is also famous for the fairytales of Hans Christian Andersen, but in his dark tales the poor-boy keeps his head down if he has any sense at all. Moreover according to contemporary writers such as Stenum,<sup>5</sup> Danes do not welcome migrants to the shores of Denmark. Consequentially, we argue that there are some significant differences between Danish and American entrepreneurial drives. This attitude of aversion is steeped in, and shaped by, history and tradition. It is accepted that this may be a culturally induced, socio-historical

manifestation because many modern Danes are beginning to admire their home grown entrepreneurs, some of whom are simultaneously *making-good* in America. Now a new generation of Danish entrepreneurs are emerging and along with this, the beginnings of a new Danish Enterprise Culture. This article examines why traditionally Denmark has lacked:

- A cohesive Enterprise Culture
- A home grown Entrepreneurial Dream
- A strong Entrepreneurial Drive

We challenge these propositions by suggesting that history is already in the process of being re-written. Nevertheless, in Denmark there is still a lack of attention given to “ordinary” entrepreneurs, because unlike Americans, Danes as a nation do not eulogise their entrepreneurs. In present day Denmark, ordinary entrepreneurs actually create more jobs than so-called technology and knowledge-based ventures. These remarkable people are often one person companies. This elevation of the entrepreneur to the status of being a hero and role model is necessary because Denmark is not viewed as being a nation of entrepreneurs. To appreciate why this is so, we peer through the mists of time and turn to history.

### **Denmark as seen through the mists of time**

This section considers why traditionally Denmark does not have a strong Enterprise Culture by concentrating upon two socio-historical aspects of the Danish history, using them as heuristic devices. These heuristics are (1) Religion, and (2) Emigration. The primary purpose of this socio-historical investigation is to use these heuristic devices to achieve a greater analytic understanding. These aspects of Danish cultural history provide a backcloth to understand the apparent Danish apathy towards the Entrepreneurial. The purpose of this section is thus to discuss the hypothesis that traditionally the Danes are regarded as a non-entrepreneurial people

This is achieved via interpretative readings of Danish history, culture and religion. From these readings it is possible to capture, or read out of the texts, an underlying spirit of enterprise.

It is necessary to first set the Danish attitude to entrepreneurship in its proper socio-historical perspective. Being a native of Denmark,

the author Helle Neergaard was aware of the traditional Danish attitude of ambivalence towards entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. We were perturbed when initially we failed to unearth examples of Danes who became famous in their Motherland as having made it big in America in true Algeresque style. Nor initially, were we able to find a significant body of venerating lore in Danish history linking Denmark to America. These misperceptions (or perhaps myth-perceptions) will be jointly addressed later in the article. We had been confident that research would throw up many such examples of Danes made-good in America to legitimise the inclusiveness of the model of success-making as articulated in Horatio Alger stories.

It certainly appears to us, that unlike many other European countries, in Denmark there is no accepted path to success and therefore it follows: No Danish Dream of success. In Denmark, the collected wisdom as passed down the generations is that if you are successful you had better keep your head down otherwise someone will point a finger at you and possibly invent stories about where you got your money. Consequentially, Denmark is ripe with riches, jealousy and envy. This perhaps explains why previous generations of Danes were very sceptical of Success Stories in general. Indeed, Denmark has been referred to as a sceptical barnyard. Moreover, the Protestant State of Denmark has a long literary history and a reputation of having a moralistic outlook as evidenced by the genre of *Danish Morality Tales* and *Morality Plays* for which the country is famed.

### **Setting Danish attitudes to entrepreneurship in socio-historical context**

No examination of early Danish history would be complete without reference to the Viking age. Although this was not exclusively a Danish phenomenon, collectively as a people the Norse were a very enterprising people whose exploits featured heavily in the annals of the histories of the age. The author Robert Smith<sup>6</sup> researched the Norse from the perspective of being an entrepreneurial race as all Scandinavian cultures produced more than their fair share of farmers, craftsmen and artisans, merchants traders and warriors

who engaged in a “rough commerce” with the known world. The seafaring Norsemen founded colonies in Britain, Ireland, Russia, France Iceland and Vinland, in what is now America. These they took by force of conquest, or claimed in the true spirit of exploration. However, ultimately, it was religion, and not the sword, that tamed the Pagan Norse and unified them with Western world. The role of the Church and of the Holy Roman Empire in bringing order to Dark Age Europe and the known world cannot be overstated. Papal edicts (and the threat of excommunication) held sway across many protean Nation States as a new age of civilisation dawned. Overtime, the exploits of the Vikings faded from living memory onto the pages of storybooks where they became heroes once again. Ordinary Danes returned to the more prosaic task of farming, ship building and of earning an honest living.

The role of the Church in shaping the Entrepreneurial outlook of a people cannot be underestimated. <sup>7</sup> For example, Historian Richard Pipes and Criminologist Pino Arlacchi independently examined the roles of early Church history in the formation of the Russian and Italian Peasant psyches. It could be argued that the “other worldly” doctrines of both the Russian Orthodox and Catholic Churches served to retard the latent Entrepreneurial propensity of their Peasantry when taken into consideration alongside the repressive power of the Church and State.

Medieval Denmark was in the whole a settled and prosperous Nation State despite the political and military dominance of Sweden. When change occurred (as is inevitable) it came again in the form of Religion and the Reformation as the preaching and doctrines of the Protestant Religion swept across Europe. It was the writings of Martin Luther (1483-1546), in neighbouring Germany, which took root in Denmark and led to the formation of the Lutheran Church. The overarching doctrine and theological message espoused by Luther was the cardinal doctrines of faith, repentance, holiness and love of God. Thus we appear to have a very different theological drive to that which we have come to associate with Ascetic Protestantism and the Protestant Work Ethic as articulated by Max Weber. As a result, Lutheran Religion can be very intense with many strict Lutherans known as ‘Black Bible’ individuals who are very

stern and unbending in their outlook upon life. Their theological message is that all we can expect is God's wrath. Conversely, ordinary Dane of Lutheran faith seeks God's love whilst fearing for the worst. A deep pessimism and a brooding darkness may therefore be an integral part of the Danish cultural psyche. Indeed, this spirit was summed up eloquently by John W. Larson who wrote that the Danes view the world "through a glass darkly."<sup>8</sup> The Lutheran Church is the State Religion and it is estimated that approximately 90 per cent of Danes are Lutherans, making it the predominant faith.

The Lutheran church is a Protestant sect founded upon the doctrine of Martin Luther. Since the publication of Max Weber's hugely influential work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*<sup>9</sup> we have come to associate Protestantism, and those of the Protestant Faith, as a vigorous strain of achievers. Indeed, many Protestant sects such as Puritans and Quakers made a significant impact upon the New World. However, not all Protestant sects follow the template of "this worldliness" so ably articulated by Weber. Minority religions in Denmark include Baptists, Catholics and Mormons.

Theologically, politically and demographically the Denmark of the 18th Century (1800-1900) was a well ordered stable industrious state. Geographically, its assets were primarily agrarian being comprised of rich farmlands and maritime in the form of easy access to the North Sea and the Baltic States. Denmark was therefore a stepping stone into Europe. Despite the presence of several large urban centers including Aarhus and the capital Copenhagen, Denmark was primarily a rural utopia. We believe that this factor, when taken into consideration with others, discussed below may help to explain the absence of a Danish entrepreneurial ideal.

### **Danish emigration to the New World**

Emigration plays a significant part in Entrepreneurial mythology. It is estimated that over 50 million Europeans migrated to the new world between the years 1814-1914. Of these a significant number emigrated to America. Legions of poor Scots, Irish, Poles, and Italians made the often perilous journey. However, it is estimated that between the years 1820-1850 only 2,000 Danes made the same

crossing. This is significant because the Danes did not achieve a numerical dominance in numbers as did the Scots and Irish. There are numerous studies of the phenomenon including the works of Frederick Hale and Hans Norman and Harald Runblom.<sup>10</sup> Early Danish migration to America consisted mainly of seamen, artisans and adventurers. The high cost of travel perhaps made emigration prohibitive for the poor of Denmark and indeed, it appears that many who emigrated from Denmark were what can be described as Bourgeoisie extraction e.g. teachers, preachers and tradesmen who could well afford the passage. Also, many Danish men travelled alone, later sending for their wife and family to join them. A significant number of Danish men married women from other ethnic origins. It is helpful to divide these Danish émigré's into three separate types because they formed very different communities:

- City dwellers
- Rural dwellers / Farmers
- Religious émigré's

This division helps explain the invisibility of Danes amongst the pantheon of American entrepreneurs, because, unlike the Irish, Italians, or Poles, they did not as a general rule always settle in ethnic enclaves. Nevertheless, Danish immigrants were hardworking individuals being very much in demand and respected. After 1850, Danish emigration increased. Approximately 20,000 Danes left Denmark between the years 1870 and 1895. The Danish-American historian J. R. Christianson<sup>11</sup> estimates that over 300,000 Danes emigrated in the years 1840–1914. Social conditions led to a moderate wave of immigration which reached its height between the years 1880–1920. The Danish owned ship, *Frederik VIII*, is credited with transporting successive waves of immigrants to America from Scandinavia. Christianson, using other historians such as George R. Nielsen, Philip S. Friedman, and Odd S. Lovoll as sources,<sup>12</sup> tells us Danes began to emigrate in significant numbers after Denmark suffered defeat by Bismarck's Prussia in 1864. In this period the majority of such immigrants came from urban backgrounds and naturally gravitated towards cities. It is helpful to discuss these different émigré communities to establish how they fared in the new world.

**City Dwellers:** Between the years 1895-1910, Danish immigrants settled in various cities in America, such as New York City, Chicago and Racine, Wisconsin. Danish Tradesmen in particular did so with the dream of establishing their own businesses and becoming independent. Many Danish immigrants were young, single, skilled, well-educated men. This created a gender imbalance and the need to look for a non Danish partner. Significantly, the Danes and Swedes shared a common heritage and intermingled. The Danes who settled in the ghettos of Chicago quickly assimilated and by as early as 1920 many had moved to the suburbs. North Avenue in Chicago became a Danish—Swedish commercial centre. Christianson narrates that many Danish men became carpenters, masons, painters, furniture makers, and contractors because these were the skills in demand. Some became small-scale entrepreneurs and shopkeepers and soon there developed a Scandinavian bourgeoisie of grocers, tobacconists, clothiers, hoteliers, publicans, and restaurateurs. Some enterprising Danes with rural roots relocated to the fringes of Chicago specialising in market gardening and dairying. Danish women became domestic maids or shop clerks. Christianson describes the formation of a Danish *Round Table* which led to the setting up of a social club, a library, an English-night school, and a mutual aid fund. Several Lutheran and Baptist Churches sprung up as did the fraternal Danish Brotherhood. A network of Danish self-help groups emerged including societies for gymnastics, cycling, football, hunting, fishing, sharp shooting, and theatre. A Scandinavian newspaper ran for 50 years until circulation declined. What Christianson describes, is effect the formation of a Danish-American Entrepreneurial community complete with an elite of artists, sculptors, journalists, clergymen and professionals. In this respect the Danes conformed to the Entrepreneurial Community model discussed by Diamond <sup>13</sup> as being a particularly American Institution. It would appear that in the process the émigré Danes became comfortable, model Americans. They lived the American dream but faded into the obscurity of middle class America. As a result few of their nationality became renowned as famous entrepreneurs or tycoons, unlike the Scots and Irish émigré's in America who produced many such cultural icons. Perhaps their

Danishness and their Lutheran faith dictated that they kept their heads down and their feet firmly planted on the ground? This wondrous story narrated by Christianson and others certainly casts doubt on the thesis that Danes are by nature a non-entrepreneurial race. Opportunity and context may therefore be a more accurate indicator of Entrepreneurial proclivity.

**Rural dwellers:** Christianson narrates that in the 1870's an agricultural depression led to many Danes of farming stock emigrating to the American heartland, particularly the Midwest. The states preferred by these immigrants were Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, North and South Dakota, Minnesota, Michigan and Wisconsin. These often entrepreneurial farmers settled in remote rural enclaves where they recreated "*Little Denmark's.*" Many in time became landowners, a feat which was impossible in Denmark because of the shortage of land. In their native Denmark farmers were held in bondage by major landowners. This arrangement was abandoned about 1850. Those Danes who sought to recreate the Danish rural idyll in the new world settled in communities such as Elk Horn and Kimballton in Iowa and Nysted and Dannebrog in Nebraska.

**Religious émigrés:** Large scale immigration began after the 1840's when many Danes of the Mormon faith chose to emigrate. Jens Patrick Wilde poignantly refers to these pilgrims as having "*bleeding feet, humble hearts*"<sup>14</sup>. An earlier wave of Norwegian Quakers had made the journey in 1825 as a flight from religious persecution. According to John H. Bille Danish Mormons emigrated for religious reasons.<sup>15</sup> This was not a flight from persecution but a gathering-in to "Zion" of co-religionists. These were predominantly rural folk. However, religious dissent was not a major contributory factor in Danish emigration. Many Baptists also emigrated to America from 1850-1870. These Danes enjoyed building churches identical to those in their homeland.

The major cause of emigration was an increase in the birth rate and the economic difficulties of a small country faced with a rapidly increasing population. Nielsen describes the religious aspects in which Danes differed from other Scandinavian immigrants by

joining American churches instead of Danish ones in America. Simonsen narrates the struggle of Danish churches in North America to maintain a sense of unity and Danishness in light of dwindling congregations.<sup>16</sup> Conversely Norwegian and Swedish American churches flourished. Bille argues that a common consensus amongst scholars of Danish history is that Danish Americans were unlike other Americans of Scandinavian descent. The latter congregated in enclaves with their own countrymen whilst the Danes assimilated more quickly into the social fabric of America. Many Danish men married non-Danish women and quickly became Americans. Furthermore, Nielsen and Simonsen argue that the Danes again differ from other Scandinavian immigrants by spreading over a wide area and thus hastening their assimilation. Their mother tongue experienced significant changes on the new continent. This is an interesting passage because to sum up (1) Many Danes quickly identified with being American; (2) the absence of a persecution complex perhaps denied the Danes the motivation which drove other outsider groups; (3) the Mormon Danes considered themselves as Mormons first and foremost.

From an analysis of the above factors it is obvious that, unlike other émigré ethnic groups, the Danes did not develop a critical mass and assimilated into the melting pot of America. This may explain the absence of a Danish entrepreneurial ideal. However, the absence of a body of Danish-American success stories is puzzling. It is to this that we now turn.

### **Danish-American success stories**

As stated above, prior to our research we were not aware of the identity of any famous Danish-American Entrepreneurs. A search of the internet located details of August and Ane Rasmussen. A fortuitous e-mail conversation with the Editor of this journal, Peter L. Petersen, proved to be a turning point because he provided the names of many entrepreneurial Danish Businessmen namely Peter Larson, Neils Poulsen, William Petersen, Lorentz Iversen, William S. Knudsen, Karl Mathiasen, and Eckardt Eskesen. As researchers we are frustrated at the difficulty in locating biographical information concerning their exploits. We believe that there is a need to collect

the remarkable stories of Enterprising Danish Americans to act as cultural role models and to make these stories available to scholars outside the Danish Cultural Community. Their micro-biographies are narrated below. The majority of the research was conducted on the internet often obtained from unreferenced articles.

**A love story:** August and Ane Rasmussen made the epic crossing in 1856 as pioneers.<sup>17</sup> August Rasmussen from the Parish of Sæby in West Zealand was raised in abject poverty but rebelled against the prevailing social conditions and the landed elite in rural Denmark which dictated that he would never be able to afford to buy land. For four years he and Ane worked hard to save for their passage to America. They arrived in Greenville, Michigan, with nothing but the clothes on their back and as a result of hard work bought a small holding. In doing so they started a process of chain migration from their parish which saw Greenville becoming a Danish American community. This aspect of Danes helping others of their kind is epitomised by the words of Sorenson who wrote of the Danish Community providing helping "*Hands across the Sea*".<sup>18</sup> As an old man August Rasmussen wrote his memoirs which were highly critical of the Denmark of his youth. They are not deeply dark tales but a lasting story of romance and adventure in the achievement of their Dreams. It is nevertheless an American Dream because it was not possible in parochial 19<sup>th</sup> Century Denmark for poor boys to live such dreams.

**A poor boy makes good:** The American-Danish entrepreneur Peter Larson whose life story as retold by Jorgensen reads stranger than fiction in true Algeresque style. Born Peder Larsen on 11, July, 1849 in the parish of Dreslette, on the isle of Fyn he spent his youth working on his father's farm and had little time for formal education. As Jorgensen narrates "This was at a time when opportunities for advancement in the old world were meagre and many young people migrated to America." So Peder set off in pursuit of his dream arriving in New Orleans with no money and no grasp of the English language—but he learned fast. He changed his name to Peter Larson and by dint of hard work hauled himself up the social ladder eventually becoming a contractor before wealth enabled him to become a railroad entrepreneur. He died in 1907 in

his prime at the head of a huge financial empire. Yet Jorgensen is correct to question why so few people in America or Denmark even speak his name. Jorgensen perhaps provides the answer in Larson's fanatical modesty and his avoidance of publicity. He considered himself to be of the common people. According to Jorgensen the rags to riches story of Peter Larson is one of a "Danish immigrant youth who met and seized opportunity in America."

**A man of Steel:** Niels Poulsen (1843-1913) is famous for helping to create the Hecla Architectural Iron Works which produced iron products used in the creation of several major buildings in New York City. A native of Denmark, Poulson was trained in Copenhagen as a mason-journeyman. He moved to New York City in 1864. Poulsen, like many émigrés from different cultures chose to Anglicize his surname which became Poulson. This is significant in that it perhaps served to eradicate his Danishness from the public memory. In time, Poulson became a famous American entrepreneur and endowed the American Scandinavian Foundation with well over half a million dollars.

**The Blacksmith who turned inventor:** Danish-American Entrepreneur and Blacksmith William Petersen inventor of the "Vise Grip" tool learned his trade in Denmark. In 1924 Petersen founded a small family business in DeWitt, Nebraska to manufacture his unique hand tool. He formed the Petersen Manufacturing Company which by the 1980s was producing between 40,000 and 50,000 tools a day.

**An Engineering Giant:** Lorentz Iversen was another Dane who rose to great heights in the world of American business. Under Iversen's leadership the Mesta Machine Company near Pittsburgh became one of the world's largest manufacturers of heavy machinery.

**A Titan in the automobile Industry:** William S. Knudsen, born Signius Wilhelm Poul Knudsen in his native Denmark emigrated to New York in 1900. Knudson is another nationally recognized Dane who rose to the leadership of General Motors in the 1930s and became one of the highest paid executives in the nation during the Great Depression. During World War II President Roosevelt appointed Knudsen as a lieutenant general of the Army in charge of defense production. Knudsen is widely recognized today as one of

the architects of the modern industrial economy. Knudsen's son Semon "Bunkie" Knudsen served as President of G.M.'s Pontiac and then Chevrolet divisions before eventually becoming President of the Ford Motor Company.

**Pioneering friends:** Karl Mathiasen and Eckardt Eskesen two Danish immigrants who formed a friendship created the New Jersey Terra Cotta Company which supplied building materials to contractors in the New York City region.

John Pearson narrates that the mother of the famous Oil Baron John Paul Getty was of Danish birth.<sup>19</sup> She played a significant part in his moral upbringing.

We find these skeletal biographies frustrating and believe that there is a real need to fill in the gaps before they pass from living memory.

Collectively, the factors discussed above may help to explain why Denmark and the Danes did not develop a healthy Enterprise Culture. From the above it can be argued that a combination of a poor theological driving force and the assimilation of the Danish émigrés into the American culture may have limited the Danish Entrepreneurial Spirit at a time when the American Entrepreneurial spirit was in the ascendancy. It can be seen that although Denmark is a proud example of an old world country who exported many of its sons and daughters to the dream that became America, there is little evidence that these sons returned to Denmark as Entrepreneurs. The research which went into the writing of this article led us to conclude that the Danish Entrepreneurial model is dissimilar to that of other countries possibly as a result of socio-cultural and historical factors. Significantly, no other Entrepreneurship researchers have appreciated the importance of this. Building upon this aperçus the following section considers the development of a protean Danish Entrepreneurial Dream and the influence of a reinvigorated American Dream upon this re-writing of Danish Entrepreneurial History.

### **Re-writing the Danish Entrepreneurial Dream**

Each era, or age, has its own defining spirit. And so it is with modern Denmark. It stands on the brink of a new golden age of

Entrepreneurship but may not be ready to accept the painful challenge of letting go of its past. Moreover, it has new problems of its own. The State is keen on equality as espoused by the social democratic movement. However, such liberal benefits also come with responsibilities and high taxation (this can be as high as 62% - with a VAT at 25%). For the ordinary Dane in the Street this is good news because the Danish state provides free education, health care, and a state pension you can actually live on. However, this near utopian state of affairs has the unintentional effect of creating a dependency culture which can stifle Entrepreneurial flair. When one takes cognisance of this dependency culture alongside the socio-cultural and historical factors discussed in the previous section then one can begin to appreciate the scale of the problem. It is not as simple as letting go of the past but requires building, or possibly re-writing a brighter future.

The latest theory is that Danish entrepreneurs are following *their* version of the American dream. According to the Danish author Tüchsen in his book *The American Dream*, it is a story about the bright future of Entrepreneurship in Denmark.<sup>20</sup> Tüchsen re-tells the stories of eight Danish entrepreneurs who have made it big in America. The entrepreneurs he discusses are: Dan Meiland (a Headhunter from Zehnder International); Henrik and Charlotte Jorst (of Skagen watches); Henrik Slipsager (of AMB Industries); Peter Martins (who runs the New York City Ballet); Lars Dalgaard (of IT business Success factors); Ole Henriksen (who runs a successful cosmetics business); and Lars Ulrich (of Metallica). Tüchsen firmly believes that the Danish have been hit by the US-fever and argues that the Danish dream needs to be positively cultivated in schools. Tüchsen espouses individuality, not equality and argues that to create the American dream in Denmark, the individual Dane needs freedom. Tüchsen urges Danes to believe in themselves and forget about their inherent problems with becoming a success. According to Tüchsen in America the cleverest children are encouraged to an extent unheard of in Denmark. Americans are also better at cultivating the abilities of these children through differentiated teaching. In Denmark this has also been implemented, but has yet to work. Danes need to back the best, but often the teachers hold back

the clever children—and often they are also mobbed by the other children, because it is not acceptable to be clever and to want to learn. In America you make your own rules, but in Denmark everything is too regulated. Denmark also needs to open its doors to educated immigrants—indeed Denmark should welcome them with open arms—just like America.

This article makes a further theoretical contribution in that it has discussed important cultural variables and unearthed a narrative crying out for re-telling. It is time to rewrite a forgotten heritage of Danish entrepreneurial endeavour. Stories, whether fairytales or factual, require to be retold again and again to retain their inspirational power. Danes need to re-write their place in history for the benefit of future generations. It is heartening that as well as Dan Meiland, Henrik and Charlotte Jorst, Henrik Slipsager, Peter Martins, Lars Dalgaard, Ole Henriksen and Lars Ulrich mentioned by Tüchsen a new breed of homegrown Danish entrepreneurs such as Thomas Adamsen, Lene Mønster, Maersk McKinsey-Møller and Lars Larsen are acting as realistic entrepreneurial role models for young Danes to emulate. Because of this the authors are heartened that perhaps the golden age of Danish Entrepreneurship is in the coming. We therefore question the hypothesis that traditionally Danes are regarded as being a non-entrepreneurial people and suggest instead that they are a hard working self-deprecating people averse to casting themselves as heroes or the modern day equivalent—entrepreneurs. As scholars we would appreciate your views on the subject.

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<sup>2</sup> Helle Neergaard and Robert Smith, "Images of a Woman's Entrepreneurship: Or the Antics of Entrepreneur Lene Mønster as portrayed on Danish television," Working paper, 2007; Helle Neergaard and Robert Smith, "Pilgrim: An alternative Entrepreneurial Fairytale from Denmark," Working paper in progress. These two papers examine the entrepreneurial antics and activities of Danish entrepreneurs Lene Mønster and Thomas Adamsen respectively.

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- <sup>6</sup> Robert Smith, "An unfinished tale: grounding enterprise discourse in the stories of the people," paper presented at the ESBRI seminar, Dalhammer, Sweden, June, 2004.
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- <sup>11</sup> J. R. Christianson, "Danes," *The Electronic Encyclopaedia of Chicago* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 2005), p.363.
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- <sup>15</sup> John H, Bille, J. H. (1971) "A history of the Danes in America" (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1971) Originally published in 1896.
- <sup>16</sup> Henrik Bredmose Simonsen, "Kampen om danskheden : tro og nationalitet i de danskekirkesamfund i Amerika (Aarhus: Aarhus universitetsforlag, 1990)
- <sup>17</sup> Their inspirational story can be read at [www.kalmus.dk/august/html](http://www.kalmus.dk/august/html).
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<sup>19</sup> John Pearson, *Painfully Rich: The Outrages Fortune and Misfortunes of the heirs of J, PaulGetty*, (London: Macmillan 1995).

<sup>20</sup> H. Tüchsen. *The American dream.*” Jyllands-Postens Forlag, 2005

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## A Review Essay

### Benedicte Wrensted's Indian Photographs

by Lea Rosson DeLong

Joanna Cohan Scherer. *A Danish Photographer of Idaho Indians*. Foreword by Bonnie C. Wuttunee-Wadsworth. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006. Pp. xiii, 157; index, bibliography, black and white illustrations (91 figure numbers).

Joanna Cohan Scherer resurrects the career of Benedicte Wrensted (1859-1949), a photographer who emigrated from Denmark in 1893 and set up her studio in Pocatello, Idaho, a town of about 4,500 population. Over the next seventeen years, Wrensted produced approximately one hundred seventy known photographs of Northern Shoshone, Bannock and Lemhi tribal members who lived on the nearby Fort Hall Indian Reservation, along with numerous pictures of the Euro-American citizens of Pocatello as well. Though several of Wrensted's photographs of the Sho-Ban (as the tribes refer to themselves) were well known and had been frequently published, it was not until Scherer's work that the identity of the photographer was known and, subsequently, her oeuvre began to be reconstructed and analyzed. The Sho-Ban were not as extensively photographed as other tribal peoples, so that Scherer's work on Wrensted not only brings recognition to this Danish immigrant female photographer, but also to the Indian nations, and particularly to this period of transition for the Sho-Ban.<sup>1</sup> As the Anthropologist/Illustrations Researcher for the Smithsonian Institution's *Handbook of North American Indians*, Scherer first noted the then-anonymous photographs of Wrensted around 1984 and began the process of recovering the identity of the photographer. In addition to the Indian photographs, Scherer also investigated the Euro-American subjects and was able to provide insight into this mixed Idaho community during the late nineteenth-early twentieth centuries. One conclusion that can be drawn from the author's extensive and very

thorough research is that Wrensted's main distinction is that she allowed her Indian subjects to define themselves in their photographs, with much the same autonomy and self-determination she afforded to her white subjects. In the history of photography of American Indians, Wrensted's practice of even-handedness and lack of manipulation is remarkable and rare.

Born in Hjørring, Wrensted was likely trained by her aunt, a professional photographer in Frederikshavn, before setting up her own studio in Horsens sometime before 1891. Scherer's work on this early part of Wrensted's career reveals how common it was for Danish women of the later nineteenth century to establish themselves as well-patronized and recognized photographers. Unmarried and widowed women in particular found a socially acceptable means of support through photography. Female photographers were so distinguished in Denmark that even the official photographer of the Danish Royal Court was a woman, Mary Steen (appointed in 1888)—and it was Steen who nominated Wrensted for membership in the Danish Photographic Association (1892). Searching deep into Danish archives, Scherer has located substantial information on Wrensted's years in Denmark, including photographs from her Horsens studio, and has revealed what seems to be an enlightened Danish environment for women seeking to practice a profession independently. When Wrensted emigrated from Denmark late in 1893, it was probably not for financial or similar reasons but, in what Scherer shows to be a common impetus, to join family who were already living in the United States, in her case, a brother in Pocatello, Idaho.<sup>2</sup>

Wrensted established her studio in Pocatello in 1895 and began competing with photographers already in town. She advertised consistently in the local newspaper and actively solicited business, as shown in an 1897 announcement. "Photographs: I am Prepared to Compete with all Comers in Workmanship, Artistic Finish and at Reasonable Prices. All work Guaranteed. I am Here to Please and Customers' Satisfaction is my aim. I am here to Stay, not for a few days, but to Remain with you. Patronize those who Patronize you. Miss B. Wrensted."<sup>3</sup> She was often commissioned to photograph civic organizations, such as the Pocatello Fire Department, and was

popular among the Euro-American citizens of the town for typical family portraits, a selection of which Scherer reproduces. Her success enabled her to furnish her studio with the backdrops and props common in the period (used for both white and Indian sitters), to add improvements such as an arc light (1907) for taking photographs at night, and even to enlarge her building to what the *Pocatello Tribune* called “a respectable business block”—known as the Wrensted Building.<sup>4</sup> Just as she had been taught her profession by her aunt in Denmark, Benedicte also trained her niece, Ella, who seems to have been responsible for much of the photography done outside the studio for this thriving business. In 1912, Wrensted closed her studio and moved with her niece to California where she lived for the rest of her life. Though she was a member of the Photographers’ Association of the Pacific Northwest, attended its conventions, and actively sought to increase her professional abilities and credentials, she appears to have ended her photography career with the move to California. Information on why she made this and other decisions as well as insights into her personal life and ambitions, artistic or otherwise, is lacking. With no diaries, letters, or other private papers to search, Scherer has relied on a broad range of other sources in her reconstruction of the photographer’s life and career, including members of Wrensted’s family.

Though her photographs present a collective image of white society in Pocatello, it is primarily the Indian photographs on which Wrensted’s reputation now rests. Most of the Indians lived on the Fort Hall Reservation, about ten miles from Pocatello, but Wrensted apparently did little or no photography on the reservation. Instead, the Sho-Ban came to her. They arrived at her studio not as subjects, but as customers, and they were depicted in much the same manner as her white customers. In contrast to most historic photographs of American Indians, the Sho-Ban themselves determined what they would wear, what they would hold, who would be in the picture, and all the elements that people who desire to have their picture made would decide.<sup>5</sup> Presumably, the Sho-Ban paid her for her work, so it seems safe to assume that Wrensted was, as advertised, “Here to Please” her Indian customers as completely as any others. She was not an ethnographer; she was a businesswoman who was as

eager for “Customers’ Satisfaction” from the Sho-Ban as she was from anyone else. She made little attempt to create a context for the Indians or to overtly comment on them culturally, socially, or ethnographically. She allowed them to do that for themselves. Ironically, considering how much photography has been used to define Indians in terms other than those determined by the Indians themselves, this equality of approach (based in commerce, it seems) is the great strength of her photographs.

Many of Wrensted’s Indian photographs found their way into state and national archives, but were largely anonymous until Scherer began her investigation. In addition to her documentary research, Scherer also involved present-day families, both giving and receiving information, in her quest to learn who exactly Wrensted had photographed. Some of these portraits (nearly all of Wrensted’s Indian photographic work is clearly of individuals) had descended through the Sho-Ban families, even when some of the specific names were no longer known. The rediscovery of Wrensted’s work has importance for the Sho-Ban partly because of the positive self-identify they contain. The director of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes Museum, Bonnie C. Wuttunee-Wadsworth (who wrote the foreword for the book), observed that previous photographs of these peoples (including those by William Henry Jackson) depicted them negatively. But Scherer found that Wrensted’s provoked a different reaction among tribal members today. “They proved neither to reflect a predatory motive on Wrensted’s part nor to have held negative connotations for the people photographed or for their descendants.”<sup>6</sup>

Theoretical issues are addressed (Scherer draws particularly on Susan Sontag’s largely condemnatory assessment of photography, *On Photography* of 1977) as are sociocultural conflicts and uses (or misuses) of photography as they have been applied to Native Americans. But it is the photographs themselves that are the most compelling aspect of this publication. Wrensted’s photographs present the Sho-Ban as a people in transition but retaining (or perhaps allowed to retain) a strong sense of individual, familial, and tribal pride. Most often, the sitters chose to dress traditionally, and their clothing and other objects, such as bandolier bags, provide a

rich source of information about these remarkably designed forms; in other portraits, they show themselves in European dress. In several intriguing instances, the sitters elected to have themselves photographed in the well-known “before and after” imagery, first wearing traditional attire and then also in European fashion, as if to document their intent to assimilate into the dominant society. The pejorative tone that usually accompanies these sorts of photographs is avoided by the fact that these were commissioned by the sitters themselves. Possibly Wrensted had a particular appeal for the Sho-Ban. As a Danish woman entering a post-conflict society, she could see them as clients and allow them their own personality. They were not and never had been “hostiles” to her, but they still remained different, as perhaps she herself was different.

The book is handsomely designed, using restrained tonalities, clear and readable titles and ample white space that encourages focus on the illustrations, which are generally arranged in sequences that make narrative sense. The assignment of illustration numbers causes considerable confusion, however, since a single number is sometimes given to more than one reproduction, and the ensuing large amount of object identification information is difficult to sort out. The book represents an important contribution to the histories of photography, of Danish emigration to the American West, of women photographers and businesswomen, and of the town of Pocatello. But its greatest legacy will be its restoration of the identity not only of the photographer, but also of her Sho-Ban subjects.

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<sup>1</sup> Beyond the work of Wrensted, Scherer, 54, has located only eighty-eight photographs of subjects that can be clearly identified as Sho-Ban. The other photographers of these peoples include William Henry Jackson, who depicted them in the 1870s, and De Lancey W. Gill and Wells M. Sawyer, who photographed for the Smithsonian Institution’s Bureau of American Ethnology in the 1890s.

<sup>2</sup> Scherer, 22-26, provides substantial information on the reasons for Danish emigration, the choice of destination, and practices once settled in the U.S., especially in regard to women. Wrensted was a founding member of the Pocatello (Idaho) chapter of the Danish Sisterhood of America and helped to help to establish a Danish Lutheran mission in the community. According to Scherer’s research, 126 photographers entered the U.S. from

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Denmark during the years 1868 and 1900. She also reports that 25 to 33 per cent of photographers in Denmark in the years 1880 to 1900 were women and that the 1900 census for Idaho, eleven per cent of the photographers in the state were women. With these kinds of statistics, Scherer, 51, laments the lack of research on these women.

<sup>3</sup> Scherer, 30. Scherer has reproduced a number of Wrensted's advertisements and includes also photographs of the exterior and interior of her studios.

<sup>4</sup> Scherer, 44.

<sup>5</sup> Wrensted had certain props, such as a blanket, that were used variously in several photographs, but is questionable the extent to which these were used to suggest "Indianness" or who decided when or how to use them. Some objects, such as a pipe bag, occur in more than one photograph, but it is not clear whether this belonged to Wrensted's studio or whether, more likely, it was an Indian possession that several individuals chose to include in their portraits.

<sup>6</sup> Scherer, 16.

## Reviews

Günter Grass. *Peeling the Onion*. New York: Harcourt, 2007. ISBN 978-0-15-101477-4. Pp. 425. \$26.00 hardcover.

*Peeling the Onion* is the intriguing name of the memoirs written by the celebrated German author, Günter Grass, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1999. His memoirs cover the twenty-year period from the outbreak of World War II in September 1939 until the publication of his best selling book, *The Tin Drum*, in 1959. In other words, the book begins in Danzig, where he was born and lived with his parents and sister, and it also ends in Danzig, where the novel, *The Tin Drum*, takes place.

When his memoirs were published in Germany, they caused uproar, as for the first time Günter Grass revealed that he had served in a Waffen SS unit at the end of the war. Until 2006 he had maintained that he had served in an anti-aircraft battery like so many other German teenagers. Now, towards the end of his life, he admits that he served in a dreaded elite outfit responsible for the many atrocities committed by the Nazis. Strangely, Grass does not explain why he kept this a secret until now.

Nearly one quarter of his memoirs are devoted to his time in uniform, first as a tank gunner in the Waffen SS and then as a POW in an American internment camp. He didn't see much action at the front, but he did witness the chaos and final collapse of Germany. He was seventeen years old at the time. He has not forgotten the hunger pains he had as a prisoner. In the internment camp, he tells us, he took cooking lessons, but it was all make-believe, as there was no food.

At the tender age of seventeen, he had already experienced war, imprisonment, and hunger. On top of that, he was confronted with the atrocities the Germans had committed in the Nazi internment and death camps. At first, he didn't believe the American claims about Auschwitz and brushed them off as propaganda. He could not believe that Germans would systematically commit genocide on such a grand scale. Over time, he realized the claims were true. He feels a great shame and tells how these experiences and events

changed his outlook on life. As he points out in his memoirs, he came to mistrust all ideologies and reject all faiths.

He was brought up a Roman Catholic. Politically, in 1939, there were only the Nazis in Germany, and anyone who opposed the Nazis was a traitor. The young Günter Grass was naturally a Nazi and willingly joined the Waffen SS when drafted. He was a good German and did what was required of Germans at the time.

In 1939, Danzig was a part of Germany.\* At the end of World War II in 1945, Danzig was incorporated into Poland and the German population was forcefully expelled. His parents and sister ended up in the Rhineland, while Günter Grass had been drafted and later turned up in an American POW camp in Southern Germany.

After his release, he settled in Düsseldorf, where he apprenticed as a stonemason. First he made gravestones for the local cemetery. Later he helped restore some beautiful facades of buildings. Finding work as a stonemason was not difficult. He talks of German cities being a pile of rubble, due to the indiscriminate carpet-bombing.

Like many others in the post-war world, he was attracted to Existentialism. It was fashionable. He read Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Satre, and Albert Camus. In keeping with this line of thought and worldview, Günter Grass says in his memoirs that he was a man whose life “proved devoid of any meaningful core.”

Yet, he became a critic as well as the conscience of post-war Germany. He kept reminding the Germans of their crimes against humanity. He opposed German rearmament in the 1950's and, after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, he spoke against the annexation of East Germany by West Germany. As an adult, he opposed both Communism and Fascism and became a Social Democrat like his father. He came from a working class family, both of his parents working hard to survive. His sister, whose aimless life irritated him,

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\* Editor's note: From 1919-39, Danzig was a self-governing Free City under a High Commissioner of the League of Nations and in loose association with the Republic of Poland, although the population of the city was overwhelmingly German. The Nazi party won the local elections in 1933, and when Hitler invaded Poland in 1939, he incorporated Danzig into Nazi Germany.

was a lost soul. First, she became a nun. Later, she left the convent and became a successful midwife, much in demand.

Grass was drawn to the powerful poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke as well as to the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen. Günter Grass came to know Denmark and the works of Hans Christian Andersen well. He illustrated a Danish volume of twenty-eight fairy tales by Andersen. Günter Grass chose the twenty-eight fairy tales, and the illustrations are all watercolors. Critics say his watercolors would undoubtedly be to the liking of Andersen.

For over fifty years, Günter Grass has spent each summer in a cottage on the Danish isle of Møn in the Baltic Sea. It was in Denmark, on the isle of Møn, that he wrote the first draft of his memoirs on an old Olivetti portable typewriter. Over the years, he has refused to acquire an electric typewriter and later a computer. His biggest problem is obtaining ribbons for his now obsolete typewriter.

The title of his memoirs, *Peeling the Onion*, refers to getting at the core of his life, which might involve some tears. But is he really getting to the core? In his book, he often admits that he has forgotten how this or that happened.

Moreover, the book being his memoirs, you would take it for granted that Günter Grass would write it in first person, but this is not the case. He switches back and forth between first person and third person. You would think that he would write it in first person, above all since his aim is to “peel the onion” and reveal the core. However, he starts his memoirs—yes, the opening sentence—by stating that “the temptation to camouflage oneself in the third person remains great.”

For the reader, this sudden switching to third person can be frustrating, not least because it often occurs in the same paragraph. It certainly gives the impression that he wants to distance himself from the actions of his youth.

Generally, he sticks to a chronological sequence of events. However, he points out that “sticking to the chronological course of events constrains me like a corset.”

Günter Grass is quite an artist. With his background as a stonemason, he could have become a sculptor. Many of his

sculptures can be seen at his museum in Lübeck. Before becoming a writer, he was a poet. He also became a social and political critic. But he is best known for his novels, most of which focus on the war and its effects on Germany and the German people.

While *Peeling the Onion* are the memoirs of a distinguished German writer, the book is also an account of conditions in Germany during and after the war, and how Germans had to come to terms with their history, but also to move on and “get a new life.” And this includes Günter Grass.

Rolf Buschardt Christensen



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