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THE BRIDGE and the NEWSLETTER are semi-annual publications of the Danish American Heritage 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

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issues of The Bridge have also contained Danish-American memoirs, essays, short stories, collections of letters, and historical documents.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-word author’s biography suitable for the journal’s “Contributors to This Issue” section.

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Editorial Statement

In the issue of The Bridge, we have an opportunity to look at Danish-American life both from the inside and from the outside.

The insider’s view appears in the first article, where Thorvald Hansen, with a precision and clarity of vision familiar to readers of his many past contributions, tells about the Danish community in Lansingburgh, New York, and what it was like to grow up there in the first half of the twentieth century.

Then, a young researcher from Denmark, Trine Tybjerg Holm, ventures into Iowa and California to record elements of Danish-American identity that she uncovers in Elk Horn, Kimballton, and Solvang. Her research was carried out ten years ago, and she feels that it might seem somewhat out of date today, but we think that readers of The Bridge will find it interesting and thoughtful.

Louis Christensen takes us back to the year 1848 to describe the American presidential election through the eyes of a Danish observer. This was also the year of the California Gold Rush, the Mexican-American War, and a wave of European revolutions that also affected Denmark, where absolute monarchy was overthrown and representative constitutional government established. This naturally led to a strong Danish interest in elections, including the colorful American elections of that era.

The Danish-American author, Carl Hansen (1860-1916), is no stranger to The Bridge, and this issue includes three more of his short stories, all originally published 101 years ago in the Danish language and now translated into English.

A couple of long review essays deal with books of unusual interest. Birgitte Christianson examines three books of Danish food, including two strikingly different Danish-American cookbooks and a third volume dealing with the history of Danish cookbooks from the beginning until today. J. R. Christianson examines Kathleen Stokker’s fascinating study of health care in the world of our ancestors, before anybody had ever heard of germs and when people had some very strange beliefs about the origins of illness.

The issue concludes with reviews of two books that follow the paths of Danes to distant shores. Rolf Buschardt Christensen deals with Argentina, where Danes have lived for 150 years without losing their sense of Danishness. Then comes a story of the Danish explorer, Vitus Bering, and his Finnish wife. Bering crossed the whole of Siberia and sailed into the fog of the northern Pacific to discover Alaska and the Bering Strait, adding those regions to the Russian Empire.
Contributors to This Issue

Thorvald Hansen is a prolific author of numerous books on Danish-American history and life, former archivist of the Danish Immigrant Archives—Grand View and editor of Church and Life (Kirke og Folk), and a frequent contributor to The Bridge.

Trine Tybjerg Holm finished her cand. mag. degree in Culture and Communication at The University of Southern Denmark March 2001 with the thesis, “What’s Danish? Danish is Home.” Since 2001, she has worked in Odense as leader of the Department of Adult Education (Folkeuniversitetet) in her alma mater.

Borge M. Christensen is a former member of the Board of Directors of the Danish American Heritage Society who has lived in many parts of the world as an executive for General Electric, and whose previous articles appeared in The Bridge in 1997 and 2001.

Louis Christensen holds the first Ph. D. in Music granted by University of Washington. He has taught at Pacific Lutheran University and is Professor Emeritus from Seattle University. Christensen has taught at University of Stockholm, been Visiting Professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and lectured at Basel, Copenhagen, and Aarhus.

Birgitte Christianson is a native of Copenhagen who grew up in California and is retired as Director of Development—Major Gifts at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. While studying at the University of Copenhagen, she lived with her grandmother and was inspired by the magic of her cooking, then developed her own kitchen skills with Julia Child’s guide to French cooking in hand, and now finds cooking inspiration through travel in many lands.

Rolf Buschardt Christensen has played a prominent role in Danish-Canadian organizations for over a quarter-century and in 2006 was dubbed Ridder af Dannebrog by Queen Margrethe II for his leadership. He is Press and International Relations Officer for the European Commission to Canada, serves as president of the Danish Canadian Conference, and is a frequent contributor to The Bridge.

J. R. Christianson is Research Professor of History at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, editor of The Bridge, and a member of the Board of Directors of the Danish American Heritage Society.
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The Way it Was

By
Thorvald Hansen

When New York is mentioned, it seems that thoughts inevitably turn to a very large city, tall buildings, and with sidewalks and streets crowded with unfriendly people. The latter is only partially true, but it fits the common understanding, or perhaps one should say, misunderstanding, of the city and, more importantly, the state.

City and State

New York City has been the gateway to America for many an immigrant. Early immigrants were processed and passed through Castle Garden, while those who came after 1892 gained entry to America through Ellis Island in the same New York City. The city, with a population of over seven million in the year 2000, is a world leader in business and finance, and cultural and multi-cultural activities. The harbor and the port of New York is said to be one of the finest in the world. The Kennedy Airport, which serves the city and the nation, is one of the world’s busiest. However, the city also has its seamy side. The sheer magnitude of the population insures this. Though the crime rate has declined in recent years, gangland crime is still associated with New York City. Extreme diversity of the population, slums and squalid living conditions continue to plague the city and give it an uncharitable reputation; a reputation that is not wholly deserved.

What must be recognized is the fact that there is much more to New York than a big city. Upstate New York, as the region beyond the big city is called, compares favorably with any state in the Union. There is a great deal of industry, not only in New York City, but in the numerous cities and innumerable small towns of the Hudson and Mohawk River valleys. Agriculture, dairying, and cattle raising complete the picture.

There are many scenic areas in the state, such as the Hudson River Valley, Niagara Falls, the Finger Lakes region, the Catskill Mountains, and the Adirondacks. The Adirondack Mountains, located in the northern part of the state, deserve a special mention. The Adirondack State Park was established in the nineteenth century as a both public and private preserve. It exceeds in area several of the National Parks combined. Within its borders there are a number of lakes and streams and some forty-six mountain peaks. The highest of these is Mount Marcy at 5,344 feet. To be sure, this is not nearly as high as the peaks in the West, but most Adirondack peaks are above the tree line and provide a recreation site second to none.
The source of the Hudson River is in the Adirondacks. The trails in the Adirondacks are a part of the Appalachian Trail, which stretches from Georgia to Mount Katahdin in Maine. To backpack in the Adirondacks and to hike the trails leading to the various peaks is an unforgettable experience.

Atop a peak in the Adirondacks

Troy

One of the cities in upstate New York, Troy is now a city of some 50,000 people. It is located on the east bank of the Hudson River, some 150 miles straight north of New York City. The state capital, Albany, is located on the west bank of the Hudson, some five miles south of Troy. The city is located at the confluence of the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers. The Erie Canal has its eastern terminus here. Opened in 1825, that canal and the Mohawk River, through a series of dams and locks, connect Lake Erie and the Great Lakes with the Hudson River and, ultimately, the Atlantic Ocean. The canal, in effect, made New York City the gateway to America, both in terms of commerce and in terms of immigrants. In the absence of adequate roads, thousands of immigrants traveled by boat up the Hudson and then westward by barges, pulled by mules on a towpath, through the Erie Canal, and then by lake steamers to such places as Detroit, Racine, and Chicago. The later advent of the railroad brought a halt to this kind of immigrant transportation.

Troy has no claim to fame other than being the home of Samuel Wilson, “Uncle Sam,” a supplier of beef to the armed forces in the
War of 1812. The beef was shipped in hogshead barrels that bore the label U.S. with the result that they quickly became known to contain "Uncle Sam's Beef." Uncle Sam Wilson is buried in an appropriately marked grave in the Oakwood Cemetery in Troy. Incidentally, Oakwood is one of the largest cemeteries in this country, stretching for over a mile in length and averaging more than a quarter mile in width. It is located on the hills above North Troy. The section of the city sometimes referred to as North Troy was, until 1901, the city of Lansingburgh, generally referred to as "the Burgh." The two cities were so immediately adjacent that today even most natives would not know where the dividing point was.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Troy was not without institutions devoted to education. In addition to its public schools, it was the home of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, one of the leading engineering schools in the country; Russell Sage College; and the Emma Willard School for girls. It was a thriving industrial city. Probably the foremost among the industries was the production of collars and shirts. It may seem strange in this day and age to mention collars and shirts separately, but the fact is that for two or three generations they were. Collars, to be attached to men's shirts with a specially made button, were invented and produced in Troy, hence the nickname of "collar city" for Troy. In an era when washing clothes was not as simple and thorough as it later became, the invention of a collar that could easily be changed was a boon to males everywhere. The majority of those employed in the shirt and collar industry were women. Some were even employed at home. I remember our neighbor lady as being one such. Every few days her supply of materials would be replenished and the completed items were hauled off. There were knitting mills, producing such things as long underwear and sweaters. There were some iron foundries, casting fire hydrants, manhole covers, large valves for water systems, and rail joints for railroad tracks. A brass foundry, whose product was church bells, existed across the river, in what was sometimes referred to as West Troy, though there were a number of smaller cities on the west bank of the Hudson, opposite Troy. It is interesting to note in this connection that virtually every issue of the Danish weekly, Dannevirk, carried an advertisement for Menealey church bells.

Since the middle of the last century Troy has declined in industry and accordingly in population. The shirt factories have long since moved to the South and by now have almost certainly joined the flight of clothing production to countries on the East or South coasts of Asia. There is no longer a market for long underwear and, therefore, many woolen mills have gone out of business. For one reason or another, industries that once flourished in Troy have either moved or are limping along at a shadow of their
former pace. As a result, Troy has declined in population, having lost some 15,000 in the last fifty years.

The “Burgh”

Lansingburgh, or the “Burgh,” as it is often known, was on the way to becoming a reality when a considerable piece of land was purchased by a man of Dutch descent, Abraham Jacob Lansing. The land was purchased with the intention that it be used for farming. However, Lansing soon realized that the soil was not well suited for farming and he foresaw it as having a brighter future as a trading center. He, therefore, hired a surveyor to lay the area out in building lots with streets and alleys and a public square.

One should here digress a bit to say a word about the Dutch influence in the Hudson River Valley. In 1609 an explorer, Hendrik Hudson, operating on behalf of the Dutch, sailed up the river, to which he gave his name, as far as Troy. He was in search of the fabled Northwest Passage to the Pacific and the Orient. Of course, he did not find it, but he did lay claim to the land for the Dutch. The city at the mouth of the Hudson, taken by the English in 1664 and renamed New York, had previously been held by the Dutch and was known as New Amsterdam. The Hudson Valley, therefore, is to this day replete with Dutch names and influence. Indeed, the county of which Troy is the center is named Rensselear, a Dutch name. Incidentally, a replica of Hudson’s ship, the “Half Moon,” was for many years preserved as an attraction above the west bank of the Hudson. Unfortunately, the ravages of time, weather, and vandalism have long since brought an end to the replica of the “Half Moon.”

At one time it was thought that Lansingburgh could become the county seat, but Troy had the advantage of being able to dock larger ships. Lansingburgh, however, rapidly became the destination for farmers from the east and north, who brought their goods to be shipped down the river to lucrative markets. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the population of Lansingburgh stood at 1,200. Abraham Jacob Lansing acquired a mansion for his family on the east bank of the river, a large home that still stands. Following Lansing’s death in 1791, his three sons continued his interest in the growth and development of the city.

Various industries, including shipbuilding, a rifle factory, a newer type nail shop, a gristmill, and a plant for making linseed oil from flax seed, soon claimed Lansingburgh as their address. Probably the dominant industry during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the Powers Oil Cloth Factory. Founded by William Powers in 1817, and later carried on by his widow and two sons, it became an industry of major significance in the history of Lansingburgh. The industry no longer exists, but the Powers name has survived, as in Powers Elementary School, which I attended,
Powers Park, and Powers Bank. With the passage of time, other industries came to be associated with the Burg, the most numerous of which were a number of small factories, producing brushes of all kinds, from clothing and hair brushes to tooth brushes. These small factories have long since been swallowed up in mergers or otherwise ceased to exist. As might be expected, prior to the advent of the supermarket, the retail trade was dominated by scores of small grocery stores or meat markets, and some times a combination of both. Given these developments, it is not surprising that Lansingburgh became a desirable place to settle and find employment. Until 1886, streets and avenues of the city were named for notable persons or places, but this system eventually gave way to the more practical method of numbering them. Thus it became much easier to locate Seventh Avenue and 110th Street, than the previous East and Catherine Streets. The prefix of 100 was added to the street numbers shortly after the merger with Troy to distinguish them from any similar streets in Troy.

The Coming of the Danes

I have long since tried to learn when and why the first Danes settled in Lansingburgh, but to date, my efforts have encountered a blank wall. Either no one presently living knows, nothing has been written, or I have looked in the wrong places. I can, therefore, only speculate as to the origin of the Danish community in Lansingburgh.

One possibility is that a Dane, or a Danish family, traveling westward by river steamer and the Erie Canal, would have to change from the former to the latter at Lansingburgh. While there, he may have discovered an industry in which he had been employed in Denmark, for example, ship building. He found such employment in Lansingburgh and, impressed by the community, not only settled there, but urged other Danes to do so. A more likely scenario is that the Danes who first settled in Lansingburgh were influenced by the Dutch connection to Denmark. It is well known that the Dutch were active in New Amsterdam and that there were Danes among them. What is not so well known is that, during the seventeenth century, there was a good deal of cooperation between Holland and Denmark, and the Danes borrowed freely from the culture of Holland. A prominent example of that is architectural design featuring the stepped gable. The stepped gable is quite common on Danish buildings and may be seen in America on “Old Main” at Grand View College, in Des Moines. So common is it among the Danes that it is often assumed to be a Danish architectural style. Actually, it was developed in Holland and later used by the Danes. Since there were Danes among the Dutch in New Amsterdam, and later New York City, it is quite conceivable that some of them, for whatever reason, journeyed north on the Hudson River and settled at Lansingburgh. Here, they found work,
built homes, established retail businesses, founded social organizations of one kind or other, set up mutual aid societies, and brought into being a Danish Lutheran Church.

The Danish Church

While nothing definite can be said as to when the Danish immigrants began to settle in Lansingburgh, we do know that by the 1870's enough had come so that they began to think in terms of a Danish church. There was already a congregation with a resident pastor at Perth Amboy, New Jersey, across from New York City. The pastor, A. L. J. Soholm, had only recently come there from the Midwest, where he had been a pastor of a Church Mission Society founded in 1872. Two years later, the name was changed to the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the purpose of which was to work among the Danish immigrants. There was then a national body committed to providing spiritual leadership to the Danish immigrants. A letter was sent to Pastor Soholm, inviting him to come to Lansingburgh to conduct services. He agreed to this and, some two or three days after Christmas, he arrived in the middle of the night in a blinding snowstorm. The next afternoon, a Sunday, a worship service, with communion, was held with twenty adults present. In the discussion that followed, Soholm agreed to come once each month. When next he came on February 7, 1874, a congregation was organized and given the name Immanuel Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church. At first, the services were held in homes of the members, but soon, a meeting place was found in a large room above a fire station. Meanwhile, Soholm had been replaced as pastor at Perth Amboy by Pastor Rasmus Andersen who, like Soholm was quite willing to serve the congregation at Lansingburgh. Incidentally, I discovered in Dannevirke that it was Andersen who officiated at the wedding of my paternal grandparents in March of 1883. Andersen resigned in June of that year, and the Immanuel congregation acquired its first resident pastor. The Rev. J. P. Lillosø came to Lansingburgh from Manistee, Michigan. The annual salary was to be $500. Late in that same year, the congregation was able to purchase what had been a Presbyterian chapel, about a mile from the firehouse and still within Lansingburgh. In 1887 a parsonage was built adjoining the church. Other pastors who served Immanuel during the waning years of the nineteenth century were Lars Hansen, Peter Eriksen, and Peter Gotke.

During those years, some dissatisfaction arose and a number of families withdrew from Immanuel. They organized Our Savior's Lutheran and built a church of their own. They were able to secure a pastor from the Norwegian Lutheran Synod. In 1898, Pastor Ole Jacobsen, who had emigrated from Denmark and served at Perth Amboy for ten years, became the pastor of the
Immanuel congregation. He was to serve there for thirty-two years until his retirement in 1930. More than any other, he left an indelible mark upon the congregation. The most significant accomplishment during his pastorate was the building of a new brick church and parsonage on Seventh Avenue in Lansingburgh. It is said that a major part of that project was carried out by volunteer work of the members. The new property was dedicated in March of 1915.

The new church and parsonage of the Danish Church in Troy (Lansingburgh)

A Ladies Aid Society had functioned in support of the Church for years. A Danish Sunday School had also long been part of the Immanuel picture. Under Jacobsen’s leadership, a youth group was organized. Late in Jacobsen’s term, the knotty problem of language transition began to be relevant. The transition to the English language was finally resolved during the pastorate of Jacobsen’s successor Rev. Holger P. Jorgensen. He served for eight years and was followed by pastors L. C. Bundgaard, James N. Lund, and Einar Andersen.

In 1960, after a two-year pastoral vacancy and with a declining membership, the congregation sought and was granted release from all ties to the former Danish Church. The congregation, in effect, dissolved, and a large portion of the remaining members joined the nearby English Lutheran Church of the Redeemer. After an eighty-six year history of serving the Danish immigrants and their successors, the Immanuel Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in Lansingburgh ceased to exist. There is a tendency in the church to think only in terms of the future and to forget that the church must also serve well in the present. This the Danish church did, and for this, there are many who remain grateful for their association with it.

Growing Up in the Burgh

To this point we have been concerned with the state of New York and some of its cities, as well as the organizations that
constitute the backdrop, or larger environment, into which I was born. We now come to a more personal part of the story of the way it was.

I was not born in the Burgh, but rather in a section of Troy that is quite far removed from the Burgh. It was completely by happenstance that I came to live there. In October of 1918, when I was twenty-one months old, the influenza epidemic, which had already taken thousands of lives in Europe, struck Troy on its way westward. Within the same week, both an uncle (my father’s brother) and my mother died. Consequently, my father and I moved into his ancestral home in the Burgh, where my paternal grandparents lived. I thus came to live in that same house for the next twenty-three years. So, though I was not born there, I did grow to adulthood in the Burgh. I have often marveled at the fact that my grandmother, at the age of sixty-six, took on the raising of a toddler and continued with it until her death at the age of eighty-two.

I can’t recall any significant event from my earliest years except that I had a bout with pneumonia and was smeared with goose grease. I recall that each time he came, the doctor gave me a penny. I recall also walking with my grandmother to the nearby hospital to have my tonsils and adenoids removed. I have limited, but pleasant, memories of my grandfather, who died when I was six. I remember one day following him when he was headed downtown. He did not know I was following because I was quite far behind. That escapade came close to ending in disaster when, in crossing a busy street, I was nearly run down.

I had perhaps learned a word or two of English before my mother died, but when I came under the care of my grandmother, Danish predominated. My father remarried in 1924, but since my newly acquired stepmother was not Danish, we spoke English when she was present. My grandmother could speak English, but not very well. Both my father and my stepmother worked, and therefore, during the day and later in Sunday School and confirmation class, Danish was the dominant language. At school, on the street and in the evenings, it was English.

There were several families with children on our block and, when I was old enough to be out of the back yard, I soon found a number of playmates. Some of them were of Danish descent, but they did not attend the Danish church or speak the language. The street in front of our house was paved in 1924 and, since there was not much traffic, we played on the sidewalks and street there. As we grew older, our play took us a bit farther away. Up until 1920, there had been a big amusement park with a track for horse racing within two or three hundred feet of our home. Several fires in the horse barns of the park and declining interest in the park activities led to its closing and the removal of all the equipment. Part of the park area had been laid out in building lots, and the rest got to be an
empty field. This we took full advantage of and played ball, cops
and robbers, cowboys and Indians, and games of all kinds. Here,
too, we built clubhouses of such materials as we could find. Slightly
to the east of our homes was a creek that descended from the
cemetery above. Here we sailed boats, explored and climbed the
hills, east of the tracks of the Boston and Maine Railroad. As we
could venture farther from home, we would climb the hills and try
fishing in the cemetery lakes, though I can’t recall anyone ever
catching a fish.

When we got to the stage in which we rode bicycles, there was
almost no limit as to where we might go, though riding a one speed
bike, which was the only kind there was in those days, was not
much fun going uphill. I once had a summer vacation job that
required me to ride and negotiate hills in many parts of the town.
The meager pay was hard earned. Later I had a job for after school
and Saturdays, working for a Danish butcher in his meat and
grocery store. Though the pay was a mere $2.00 per week, I
thoroughly enjoyed that work, plus the fact that the proprietor,
Anders Madsen, was a good and kind employer.

I was seventeen years old and a senior in high school when my
grandmother died. I knew very well, of course, that she was my
grandmother, but her death was to me the equivalent of losing a
mother. She had been stern at times, and she did not believe in
sparing the rod when I deserved it. From her, I learned something
about self-discipline and responsibility. From her, I learned to think
of the consequences of a contemplated action. From my Dad, I
learned to use a hammer, a saw, and wrenches and to take great
interest in machinery of all kinds. From my stepmother, who had not had the opportunity to attend high school, I learned to have an appreciation of education.

**The End of an Era**

In late June of 1935, I graduated from Lansingburgh High School. We were in the middle of the great Depression and the question was — “Now what?” Like countless others, I looked here and there for work, but all to no avail. In September, out of the blue, I got a job. My stepmother worked in a woolen mill, and there, she suddenly heard of a vacancy. She applied on my behalf, and the next day, I was at work.

It was a menial job in which my duties were to keep the women winders supplied with yarn and bobbins, move and open cases of yarn, pick up and bag the waste, and sweep the floor at quitting time. The pay was not great, but it did enable me to add to the family pot, which during the Depression was generally “running on empty.” My father was a trucker, and during those years, there was often no work to be had. The work in the mill, for my stepmother and I, did not pay very well, and there were often long periods when the mill would be closed for a time.

While I was employed in the mill, I regularly worked among the knitters and thus learned to operate knitting machines. The result was that when extra help was needed, I was employed as a knitter. This kind of work, which involved operating machines, was more to my liking, and the pay was better. When I was not employed at knitting, I was back at my regular job as bobbin boy, which was most of the time.

My six years in a woolen mill taught me many things. I learned something about people. I learned to sympathize with the blue-collar worker who constantly lived on the borderline of poverty. I learned something of the boredom and deadening effect of the same repetitious activity from hour to hour and from day to day.

By the end of the ‘thirties, the country was gearing up for war and the Depression was winding down. My father sold his truck and found work in the government arsenal in West Troy (Watervliet), and financially, things began to look a bit brighter. Early in 1941, I was examined for the draft, but was rejected for physical reasons. It, therefore, seemed to be the right time for me to quit my job and head off to college. Only shortly before, I had learned of Grand View College in Des Moines, and accordingly, on the evening of September 11, 1941, I headed for the railroad station and for what was to become a new and vastly different phase of my life. I left behind forever life the way it was.
Danishness is flourishing in the U.S.A. at the dawn of the twenty-first century, and it is not difficult to find this Danishness, or rather, to find what Americans consider to be Danishness. When the Danish media focus on Danishness in the U.S., they tend to highlight two areas: Solvang, California, the so-called “Danish Capital of America,” and the two “Danish Villages,” Elk Horn and Kimballton, Iowa. Today, Solvang has a population of around 5,000 and Elk Horn/Kimballton around 1,000. However, estimates have 1.5 million tourists visiting Solvang and 80,000 visiting Elk Horn/Kimballton annually. Dannebrog waves on high in both areas, while half-timbered buildings, windmills, storks, horse-drawn carriages, folk dancing, wienerbrød, and æbleskiver thrive in a common interpretation of the local perception of Denmark and Danishness.

This paper presents my work as of 2000 on a thesis at Syddansk University for a degree in Culture and Communication. At the time of writing, the thesis had been in the works for a year, and I aimed to complete it by mid-October 2000. Danishness and preservation of Danish culture in an American context are the subjects of my research and also of this paper. “Danishness” and “Danish culture” refer to the way these concepts are interpreted by Danish Americans today, and they form the basis of their unique self-realization and identity as Americans with a Danish background and Danish roots.

Besides the obvious reason of tourism, what were the driving forces behind the creation of these two copies of Denmark in California and Iowa? My thesis is that the heavy focus on Danish culture and a Danish image express an attempt by Danish Americans to display themselves as Americans with Danish roots in order to create an identity and a sense of feeling at home in an increasingly global and diffuse world.

Using this hypothesis as my point of departure, I proceeded in August and September of 1999 to undertake fieldwork in Elk Horn/Kimballton and Solvang with the aim of examining the preservation of Danishness in America in terms of Danish language, Danish national symbols, Danish Christmas traditions, and Danish...
The objective was to clarify the importance of these things for a Danish American identity and a sense of belonging and feeling at home in America.

I spent three weeks at Elk Horn/Kimballton and two weeks at Solvang, in both places staying in private homes. I conducted twenty-eight interviews with a total of forty-one first, second, and third generation Danish Americans. A first generation Danish American was defined as a person born in Denmark, a second generation as a person with Danish-born parents, and so on. The interviews and my personal notes and observations form the basis of my thesis and this paper’s conclusions.

The interviews conducted for this article referred only tangentially to the museum, a major institution for Danishness in North America.

The duality that I repeatedly met in conversations with Danish Americans is reflected in the title of this paper, “Denmark our heritage, America our home.” This is a duality in self-understanding, identity, and a sense of belonging. I will try to define this dual identity more precisely by presenting a few examples from my interviews in Elk Horn/Kimballton and Solvang.

Some might consider it impossible, but this paper treats the villages of Elk Horn and Kimballton as a single entity. These towns have a long, intense, and intertwined history of rivalry over Danish-American ethnicity, cultural background, and religion, which has been examined in detail by Jette Mackintosh and others. Over time, Kimballton and Elk Horn have both played significant roles for Danish immigrants and for the retention of contacts to Denmark and

Source: http://www.danishmuseum.org/AboutTheMuseum/AboutTheMuseum/AboutTheMuseumRedRoof.jpg, Used with permission

The Danish Immigrant Museum, Elk Horn, Iowa

The interviews conducted for this article referred only tangentially to the museum, a major institution for Danishness in North America.
Danish culture in the Midwest. The notion of treating the two towns as an entity might remain unacceptable to many of their citizens, but in fact, it is impossible to separate them when considering the retention of Danishness in the area. Kimballton is only half the size of Elk Horn and does not attract nearly as many tourists, but in my opinion it nevertheless contributes just as much to the Danishness of the area.

Three main themes summarize the results of my conversations with the forty-one Danish Americans and constitute the three key parts of my thesis:

1) Personal identity.
2) Domicile, landscape, and Danish national symbols.
3) Traditions and customs in Danish-American homes.

**Personal Identity**

The aim of the first theme is to identify what it means to be a Danish American: what makes up this special self-understanding and identity, and how it is preserved today. The issue of Danishness was the starting point for defining Danish-American identity. However, this concept is quite ambiguous, and many interviewees had difficulty in formulating just what Danishness meant to them. Very early in the interview process, it became clear that Danishness is an expansive concept that touches on objects, food, traditions, behavior, buildings, institutions, localities, and even a certain general awareness. In other words, Danishness can be totally concrete, but it can also be quite abstract in dealing with feelings, values, life style, and identity. On a more abstract level, it can be associated with political culture, home life, and the whole issue of roots.

With respect to political culture, Danish Americans agree that Danishness means to be left of center, which they see as something positive, both as a model of a well-functioning society, but also as the diametrically opposite, a limitation of personal and economic freedom. Statements by Danish Americans do not necessarily mean their own political views are left of center, but rather, that a majority of those interviewed saw Denmark as a leftist and socialistic society.

As far as culture in the home is concerned, Danishness is associated with the ability to create Danish *hygge* (coziness). Danishness is also associated with a certain behavior within the privacy of the home. Furthermore, Danishness is a special way of bringing up children, and a way of handling money. With respect to roots, Danishness is associated with having roots in another country far away, while simultaneously being completely without roots in the country where one lives.

The many different examples of what the interviewees associate with Danishness have shown me that Danish Americans possess the ability selectively to adopt personal characteristics that make them
Danish in addition to being American. Their cultural background and the fact that they reside among other Danish Americans in towns that try to look Danish provides them with the opportunity to adopt a Danish identity upon demand. This national identity is available to them whenever they feel a pressing need for it. Basically, they are Americans. However, when they want to stand out from the crowd, they produce a Danish national identity and their perception of the associated qualities. Danishness and a Danish American identity become ways for them to distinguish themselves from other Americans.

The Danish Language

The Danish language is the tool Danish Americans use to cultivate this Danish side of their identity. Language becomes the avenue for exerting their Danish identity and personality. Through language, Danish Americans can best show their affiliation with the old homeland, because fundamentally it is the Danish language that differentiates the two mini-Denmarks in the United States from the rest of the country. First generation Danish Americans use the Danish language to shift from one national identity and national affiliation to another. When first generation Danish Americans in Solvang get together as a group for a Danish luncheon, conversing in Danish and singing Danish songs, they create a space to display their Danishness and cultivate their original Danish background. The shared language becomes the basis for a shared national identity that also provides a sense of community.

Preservation of the Danish language differs significantly between the two areas. Obviously, unequal numbers of Danish speaking inhabitants in the two areas makes a difference that, in my view, stems from the different ages of the two areas. In Elk Horn/Kimballton, Danish serves primarily a nostalgic function for a population consisting mainly of descendants of early immigrants. Second, third, and fourth generation Danish Americans maintain their Danish background through songs and a few phrases such as “Tak for mad.” In this way, in both Elk Horn and Kimballton, the Danish language plays a role, which is not practical but is quite conscious, in maintaining the Danish culture. The fact that a few individuals in the community could actually speak Danish was presented as something quite exceptional, emphasizing that maintenance of Danish is the most important guarantee for the town’s Danishness. The more Danish speakers there are, the easier it is to maintain the authenticity of the area’s Danishness.

In Solvang, on the other hand, it is possible to meet large numbers of first generation Danish Americans aged fifty-five to eighty. Evidently, the language is not essential for preservation of Danishness in Solvang. They do not always speak Danish when they meet, and during interviews, I had to avoid switching to
English in order to keep them speaking Danish. In the first generation, preserving the Danish language is not necessarily considered to be essential for maintaining Danish culture. The obvious reason is that, for first generation immigrants, Danish is not in short supply, as it is in Elk Horn/Kimballton. Still feeling a close proximity to Denmark and Danish, Solvang’s first generation Danish Americans take their native language for granted. Therefore, for them it is not essential to preserve the language in the way that it is for a person of the third and fourth generation like Chris Lund, for example, who is much further removed, and for whom preservation of the Danish language is a prerequisite for maintenance of Danish culture. According to Chris Lund, the thing that is good and special about Solvang is precisely the fact that one hears Danish spoken. In his universe, Solvang will become less Danish when there are fewer people who speak the language.

**Domicile, Landscape, and Danish National Symbols**

The purpose of this theme is to examine the role of Danish national symbols in the creation of a Danish-like landscape in the United States as a collective assertion of a sense of home, national affiliation, and retention of Danish identity and roots. As used here, landscape refers to an environment or an image of the cultural contents of a landscape, such as houses, buildings, symbols, and other elements. It is not a landscape in the sense of a topographical area such as the Midwest with green fields, low hills, and a few trees on the horizon.

In the two Danish-American settlements, the elements that jointly shape the Danish landscape are essentially a compression of remembrances made up of what Danish Americans consider to be Danish national symbols. The most conspicuous are the Danish flag, half-timbered houses, windmills, village churches, and the stork. The Danish symbols have great importance and impact in Elk Horn/Kimballton as well as in Solvang. Immediately upon arrival, the visitor recognizes that these symbols stem from Denmark.

**Dannebrog**

There is not the slightest doubt that the Danish flag, *Dannebrog*, is the most significant and ubiquitous symbol of Danishness, both in Elk Horn/Kimballton and in Solvang. It catches the visitor’s eye along main streets, from windows and yards in both places. The red and white colors of the flag reappear in half-timbered houses and other buildings, on roofs, awnings, signs, and folk costumes as a mark of everything Danish. In both places, the *Dannebrog* is used alongside the American flag. On main streets, it flies side by side with the Stars and Stripes. In private gardens, they fly next to one another on separate poles. The flag plays an important role in the
Danish American self-image, symbolizing roots and associations in times past and times to come.

A Danish museum director, Inge Adriansen, has observed that the Dannebrog is the most important symbol of Danishness for all Danes regardless of social background or other differences. She adds that use of the Dannebrog can be an indicator of when a group considers itself to be a full member of Danish society. Clearly, most Danish Americans consider themselves to be part of a community that includes all other Danes, and they consider themselves part of that Danish society, regardless of the fact that they live in the United States and not in Denmark. The Danish flag can symbolize an affiliation with Denmark, and to some Danish Americans, it takes on an importance virtually equal to that of the American flag.

Chris Lund of Solvang, who was mentioned earlier, is an example of how the Danish flag is also seen as a symbol of “home” by a Danish American. “It is strange,” he said in a 1999 interview, “the Stars and Stripes is my flag, but Dannebrog is the flag of the heart, it is home. It is where the family came from, where the family lived.” Thus, to Chris Lund and many others like him, Denmark is seen as a kind of home place, and in this context, the Danish flag becomes an inevitable symbolic element of their image of a typical Danish village environment.

The Windmill

In both areas, the windmill is another strong and inevitable symbol of Denmark and Danishness. The windmill is ubiquitous in both places, even in private yards. The antique windmill in Elk Horn, which was imported from Nørre Snede on the Danish peninsula of Jutland in 1976, is an especially strong symbol of the Danishness of this entire area. The significance of the Elk Horn windmill lies in the perception of its authenticity based on documented evidence of its construction and operation in Denmark. Awareness of this gives the windmill a special historical significance to visitors as well as residents. Its very presence conveys a feeling of belonging to a special culture.

A third generation Danish American, Warren Jacobsen, was a driving force in the purchase of the mill, and he explains its importance to Elk Horn both psychologically, as providing a unifying focus for the village, and also as a seedbed for tourism:

When it came, it was built entirely by volunteers . . . so there was a real drawing together, working together, and that’s always good for a community. We’ve had several projects like that; they unite you and are good for us, and then of course as a result of the windmill being here, then little shops became successful and supplied jobs and were reason for tourists to come here and leave some money here and that’s the purpose, and as a result of the
mill, of course . . . the size of the real good restaurant, the Danish Inn, was increased . . . and then of course when The Danish American Heritage Society of America decided on a location for the museum, it was because of the windmill being here . . . so the windmill really put new life in the community.³

The windmill was not only of economic importance but also contributed to the coming together of the town’s residents while renewing their interest in their Danish history and origins. To outsiders, the accomplishment of getting the windmill to Elk Horn demonstrated the strong ties of its residents to their heritage and their willingness to work hard to maintain it. Lisa Steen Riggs, also of the third generation, stresses the windmill’s authenticity as a symbol of the residents’ feeling of kinship to Denmark:

That windmill is authentic, there is nothing superficial, nothing fake about it: it is a real thing. You are not gonna see that anywhere [else] in the United States, a real, actually imported Danish windmill . . . And people can say we are not Danish, but we are in – no, we are not right off the boat, we are not fresh immigrants, but we gotta keep it alive, and we may be screwing it up at different times . . . but still we are having fun with it and that’s a lot of it too, people are really enjoying it.³

Authenticity thus gives meaning to the lives of Danish Americans, because they come from the same place as the windmill,
but also because they chose the windmill as the area’s Danish landmark and its authenticity justifies the Danish image of the town. The windmill and the Danish language, taken together, guarantee the Danishness of the town: the more authentic their Danishness, the more Danish are the residents.

The Magical Landscape

Recent ordinances in Elk Horn and Solvang require that all business buildings display half-timbered elevations, i.e., be built in the so-called Danish style known as “Danish Provincial” or “Danish Architecture.” At Solvang, private homes also display half-timbered construction, albeit some only on the side facing the road. Over the years, half-timbering at Solvang acquired different colors ranging from black to brown, rust, pink, and mint green against many different background colors. However, to the critical eyes of a Danish visitor, in most places it is admittedly both attractive and recognizable. Consistent with the purpose of a visit to Solvang, occasionally it is quite possible for a brief moment to feel transferred to a Danish country idyll of a different age.

A first generation Danish American, Bent Pedersen, in his mid-fifties, says that it is important for Solvang to look like an old Danish village:

We try to maintain something—the old traditions, the old buildings, the kind of things that we had at one time—that may make you feel at ease, pleasant, cozy—whatever words come to mind and seem to fit, whatever you want—and that’s what you think about the old days, when it was so calm and quiet.
Bent seems to conjure up an almost magical image out of his longing for an old Danish landscape and his perception of what it once stood for: tranquility, old-fashioned *hygge*, tradition, and the idyll of village life, which old national symbols of Denmark helped to create. Clearly, a stylized image lies behind the attempt to recreate in Solvang the mood of a Denmark of bygone days that it would be difficult to find even in Denmark. Seeking to make this image come alive, Solvang becomes a fairytale town. At night, when thousands of lights frame all of Solvang with strings of small lamps lining the roofs and windows of every building, the magic of the town reveals itself for the wizardry it is, as it creates a mystical fantasy land, which grew out of that idea that this town’s inhabitants could bring a little Denmark to life in distant California.

**The Story of Danishness**

The early Danish immigrants left an agrarian society. Thus, the story of Danishness in the United States has its roots in peasant culture and farming. It is precisely the account of a Danish rural idyll that survived through generations, strengthened by the perfect background for recalling the story of old Denmark that was provided by Iowa and the other Midwestern farming states, which attracted large numbers of early immigrants.

The peasant culture symbolizes the authentic, genuine, and unspoiled Denmark. In the eyes of the Danish Americans, it shines with a romantic and idyllic aura. Repeatedly in our conversations, the interviewees returned to Denmark’s scenery. They all emphasized what they individually found fascinating and romantic about the Danish landscape: its forests, lakes, scattered islands, sparkling water, narrow lanes, fields of grain and charlock, and the flowers.

A better description is hard to find of Denmark as a decidedly holy and heavenly place than this comment by a third generation Danish American, Virginia Nielsen from Elk Horn: “you see, growing up the way we did with the Danish, and just knowing that it was a little country in—across the ocean—to us it almost became a holy place.” Only as an adult did the child, Virginia, get to visit her grandparents’ homeland. To her, the distance to Denmark and the stories about the small country on the far side of the ocean almost sanctified the country. Denmark became the Promised Land, Paradise, the Holy Land where all was pleasant and good. This was precisely the way that the United States looked to Virginia’s grandparents when they emigrated from Denmark more than a hundred years earlier. The only difference is that, while they sought out the Holy Land, Virginia has no desire to leave the United States. The myth of Paradise thrives best at a distance, and the romanticized, even sanctified view of the Danish landscape
naturally emerged out of the presumed nostalgia of the emigrant generation and was intensified by distance.

The Danish scholar of culture, Niels Kayser Nielsen, sees this construction of Danish-looking cultural landscapes as a symbolic foundation for Danish-American national identification, which creates environments where Danish Americans can identify themselves nationally with Denmark, their background, their Danish ancestors, and their fellow Danish Americans. It establishes bases where Danish Americans can cultivate Denmark as a place to live and acquire a sense of being a part of Denmark.

**Traditions and Customs in the Danish American Home**

Danish Americans cultivate Danishness inside the home as well as in public. Danish origins, roots, and affiliation are expressed through traditions of various kinds, including Danish cuisine and the unique custom of a Danish coffee table.

**The Christmas Tradition**

Many of the Danish traditions observed in Elk Horn/Kimballton and Solvang are associated with Danish holidays. They celebrate Mardi Gras (fastelavon), Easter, Midsummer Day, Martinmas Eve, Advent, and Christmas. However, Danish Christmas traditions appear to be the most durable and widespread. All forty-one persons interviewed mentioned Danish Christmas as the tradition they maintain with joy and persistence. All families agreed that they preserve the Danish Christmas. “Are there any other ways of celebrating Christmas?” (Er der andre måder at holde jul på?), asked Chris Lund during our conversation.

In both locations, the customary Christmas program is as follows: On December twenty-fourth, Christmas Eve begins with an afternoon service in the local church and singing of Danish hymns in English translation. Following church, the family sits down for the big Christmas dinner consisting of what in Denmark is also called traditional Christmas fare: Roast pork, duck, goose, or turkey with carameled potatoes, brown gravy, prunes, apples, sausage, and the rest. In most cases, the evening concludes by joining hands to walk around a Christmas tree decorated with Danish flags and braided hearts while singing “Nu er det jul igen” in Danish. Last, but not least, follows the distribution of gifts, although some families move this to December twenty-fifth.

In many Solvang homes, the Christmas lunch tradition survives as well. The fare remains much the same as the so-called traditional Christmas luncheon in Denmark of today. Herring, headcheese, liver pâté, and rullepølse are the basic ingredients in the Danish Christmas lunch tradition in America.
Danish Culinary Art

Overall, Danish Americans preserve Danish culinary art in their homes and in restaurants found in both locations. "I suppose food is one thing that will last longer than anything else," says Kimballton’s first generation Danish American, Nadjescha Overgaard. Tourists come in order to taste Danish food. At Solvang in particular, a Dane marvels at the impressive offering of Danish open-faced sandwiches, dishes like frikadeller with brown gravy and potatoes, and a delicatessen that carries Danish specialties like Havarti cheese.¹⁰

People like to talk about food, and most of the interviewees readily shared pleasant memories. A majority said that they regularly prepared Danish food, frikadeller in particular, though some of the informants limited it to entertaining holiday guests in authentic Danish style with the Christmas dishes mentioned earlier or a nicely set table of open-faced sandwiches with beer and aquavit.

Pursuing Danish cuisine in America inevitably creates interesting new combinations. For example, æbleskiver have taken on symbolic importance as something “genuinely Danish” and have been so far removed from their original context as to give culture shock to a Danish visitor. In Denmark, æbleskiver (small, round popover-like pancakes) with jam and sugar are served with afternoon coffee or tea, or with mulled wine (gløgg) during the Christmas season. In Solvang or Elk Horn, however, æbleskiver are served with medisterpølse sausage and jam under the name of “Danish Breakfast.” Of course, the inspiration for this combination has nothing to do with Denmark but stems from the typical American breakfast of pancakes with sausage or ham. The ingredients of æbleskiver and pancakes are related, and medisterpølse is a typical Danish form of sausage, so it was natural to combine...
them into an Americanized “Danish” breakfast. Both towns fully understand that this combination does not exist in Denmark, and that it is certainly not called “dansk morgenmad” (Danish breakfast). However, these “inaccurate” details are unimportant in comparison to the joy of knowing that, after all, there is something in their Danish traditions that can be preserved and adjusted to an American life style.

Niels Kayser Nielsen, the Aarhus cultural historian and anthropologist, sees Danish food as a sign of cultural identification and cultural memory, asserting that when the Danish Americans eat Danish food, they partake of their own life story and national past. When they eat ethnic food, they celebrate their roots and for a brief moment become a part of their own ancestral past as Danes. Undoubtedly, Danish food survives because it tastes good, but also because it allows Danish Americans to express the Danish portion of their personal identity when they feel the need to do so. As is the case with the language, food provides a shift of consciousness from one identity to another. Niels Kayser Nielsen claims that eating not only nurtures the body but also sustains the longing for a place to call home. Lisa Steen Riggs put it this way in describing Tivoli Days, a Danish festival in Elk Horn: “we get so many Danish emigrants to come; you know, they just want a taste of home.”

Eating Danish food, they literally taste their home country. I discovered this one afternoon in Elk Horn, when I had an open-faced sandwich with curried herring, accompanied by an Aalborg Jubilæumsnaps. The taste was heavenly. Suddenly, Denmark was very close.

The Coffee Table

The Danish coffee table, *kaffebordet*, is a unique element of Danish culinary art that survived for generations among the interviewees. In contrast to their understanding of Danish food and Christmas traditions, none of the interviewees realized that they were practicing a typical Danish custom, and none of them at any time consciously related the coffee table to their Danish roots.

At first, I did not take notice of the coffee table either. This was probably because the whole situation drew me so completely into my own Danish coffee culture that I was blinded to the uniquely Danish and quite un-American nature of the tradition. The coffee table typically consists of serving coffee, apart from a meal, with cake accompanied by tea breads, rolls, cookies, chocolates, and the like. In Solvang and Elk Horn/Kimballton, it was often served on Danish porcelain, such as a coffee set in the old Seagull (*mågestel*) or Blue Lace (*musselmalede*) pattern, which might be a family heirloom from early immigrants. Clearly, when entertaining guests in their homes, the coffee table is a way for Danish Americans to create Danish *hygge*. At the same time, it is a way to show that they
remember their heritage, Danish customs, and proper treatment of visitors. I do not know whether I would have been received in the same way if I had not come as a visiting researcher from Denmark with all the attendant curiosity which that aroused, but it is my distinct impression that setting a coffee table for guests, sometimes only with a single cookie or two, is an integral part of how Danish Americans entertain their guests.

Danish American preservation of Danish traditions stems from the fact that they lack an extensive history and deep roots in America. Therefore, they have a need to revive and maintain some of the traditions of their ancestral homeland, which they all consider as their heritage. Through traditions, they can maintain ties to their cultural background and at the same time choose to include or reject whatever suits their need to display their Danish identity.

The English historian, Erik Hobsbawm, has observed that traditions can act as a foundation for interpreting individual identity, and Danish traditions offer precisely this basis for Danish Americans to interpret their own identity as Americans with roots in another country. They use traditions to strengthen their affiliation with Denmark and thus maintain a mental connection with their background. In this way, they create a connection between an American present and a Danish past, and this strengthens their sense of having a home in the form of Denmark. The sociologist, Anthony D. Smith, observes that traditions must evoke a response if they are to survive as a part of a national culture. By this, he means that traditions must link into a much longer past that members of a cultural group regard as their heritage. That is the case for the Danish traditions practiced in America, and that is why they can survive.

**A Global Perspective?**

In summary, Danishness in Elk Horn/Kimballton and Solvang becomes a way for the interviewees to achieve several goals:

- build and cultivate a personal (Danish) identity.
- shape, establish, and manage their roots.
- create a connection with their heritage and ancestral land.
- establish a sense of belonging in a globalized world.
- cultivate Denmark as home in their own minds.

Stories of Danishness and Danish Americans, as they appear in my limited research, appear at first to point backward. They aim to preserve traditions and images of a Danish landscape from a bygone era. Yet, in some ways, these stories of Danishness may also point forward. In the ever larger global challenges of today, Danish Americans may have found a key to administering some future, multicultural identity, which in their case consists of seeing themselves as Americans with ties to Europe, based on their Danishness and Danish cultural background.
Through twenty-eight interviews, Danish Americans have shown me that Danishness can become part of a constructed identity. On a conscious level, it took the form of the various Danish traits that individual Americans adopted in emphasizing their Danish background and distancing themselves from Americans with other ethnic backgrounds. Danishness, however, also emerged as part of a constructed identity on the factual, external level in the symbols used to create Danishness and in the maintenance of traditions with roots reaching far back in time. In constructing their identity, they select the best from two cultures, integrate these elements into their everyday life and culture in America, and in this way establish their missing roots and create a connection to their family history.

The sociologist, Jean Baudrillard, described the United States as a realized utopia that represents the myth of wandering, mobility, and movement. Europe, on the other hand, represents rootedness and history. Sociologist Mike Featherstone contrasts the movement and mobility of global culture with the rootedness of local culture. In this context, the United States becomes the symbol of the global and Europe of the local. The question is whether Americans do not also belong in some way or other to Europe.

Of the present American population, the majority are descendants of Europeans. As far as Danish Americans go, the ones I interviewed all seem to have a sense of home associated with Denmark because it represents roots, ancestors, cultural heritage, and family history.

From this perspective, Danish Americans are simultaneously both global and local. They are global because, as Americans with Danish roots, they have some practice at being multicultural. As descendants of a wandering people, they have movement in their blood and thus the freedom that enables them to live, physically as well as mentally, in a global culture that constantly demands change, mobility, and movement. At the same time, a Danish local identity gives them rootedness. Their background and heritage gives them ties to a specific place and links them to a history represented by Denmark, and this establishes a sense of home in their minds.

 Seen from this perspective, Danish Americans appear as a group of people who are able to deal with a constantly growing global challenge in the form of mobility, increasing multiculturalism, and rootlessness, precisely because they are the descendants of immigrants and therefore possess a wandering myth, movement, and freedom as a part of their personal identity, but at the same time always have a lasting home within them in the form of an affiliation to Denmark.

Nobody expressed this better than Karen Korsgaard, a ninety-year old, first generation Danish American from Kimballton:
What’s Danish? Danish is home, something that feels good . . . I could travel all over America, or settle here or there, or all over the earth; Denmark would still be home. It feels like that: this is home. When I come home, it’s hard to say goodbye.15

Bibliography


In Danish, this paper is the product of a specialopgave for the degree of cand. mag. i overbygningsfaget Kultur og Formidling.

2 “Det er jo sært, for Stars and Stripes er jo mit flag, men Dannebrog det er jo hjerteflaget, det var jo hjemme, det var jo hvor familien er kommet fra, hvor familien har boet.” Chris Lund, interview in Danish, Solvang 1999.


4 The source of the image is http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.danishwindmill.com/tourist_info/IM000055.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.danishwindmill.com/tourist_info/windmill_information.asp&usg=__icFftoAhBzMknpVQeQg89Tnvpbs=&h=350&w=279&sz=20&hl=en&start=10&um=1&tbnid=lb9c4iIXQ5rzM:&tbnh=120&tbnw=96&prev=/images%3Fq%3Delk%2Bhorn%2Bwindmill%26hl%3Den%26client%3Dfirefox-a%26channel%3Ds%26rls%3Dorg.mozilla:en-US:official%26sa%3DN%26um%3D1, accessed 17.04.2009


6 “Vi prøver på at vedligeholde noget, de gamle traditioner, de gamle bygninger, sådan noget, som vi havde engang, som måske giver dig en følelse af at være en rølig, behagelig, hyggelig, alle de ord, som man måske kan komme i tanker om, som passer ind i, hvad man gerne vil, og det er, hvad man tænker på i gamle dage, hvor det var sådan stille og roligt.” Bent Pedersen, interview in Danish, Solvang 1999.

7 Virginia Nielsen, interview in English, Elk Horn 1999.

8 “Nu er det jul igen” (Christmas is here again) is a song in quick tempo often accompanied by quicker walking to the point of jogging around the tree.

9 Rullepølse is a kind of sausage consisting of tightly rolled beef, pork, or lamb flank, suet, seasoned with allspice, carnation, salt, potassium nitrate, pepper, and a small amount of fresh parsley held together with string, cured, boiled, and pressed into a rectangular shape. Thinly sliced, it finds frequent use in open-faced sandwiches.

10 Frikadelle is a popular Danish rissole.

11 Medisterpølse is a sausage of lean pork forcemeat and is much larger than the typical American pork link sausages served with breakfast.


13 Highly popular Danish aquavit, Aalborg Jubilæumsnaps is available in many North American liquor stores.

14 Musselmalet and mågestel are two traditional Danish porcelain patterns. The former is a pattern of the Royal Danish porcelain factory. It dates from 1775. Beginning in 1895, Bing & Grøndahl manufactured the latter. The large number of Danish porcelain coffee services in the collection of the Danish Immigrant Museum also attests to the popularity of the kaffebord tradition among Danish Americans.

15 Karen Korsgaard, interviewed in English, Kimballton 1999.
An American Presidential Election
In the Eyes of a European Observer

By
Louis Christensen

After “election fever” ran rampant in the United States throughout the year 2008 and Europe was also “running a temperature,” it might raise a few eyebrows to read what a European observer wrote home after having attended the presidential election in 1848.

He was an experienced traveler who had worked in several places and traveled around in Europe before he, at the age of twenty-nine, sailed to America in 1846 and stayed for six years. He was well versed in publishing as a writer and editor and wrote articles filled with observations from his extensive travels in the United States, which were published in Denmark on his return home in 1852.

The author was “Alex Felix,” a pseudonym for Hans Peder Christian Hansen, who was born in Copenhagen in 1817. His evaluations and his platform for observations give us a view of America’s past with fresh and sympathetic eyes. We learn at the same time how earlier types of governmental systems distinguished between aristocratic and republican. This is made clear in the very first sentence of the report. The writer’s native country of Denmark was still an absolute monarchy, but while he was in America, a new Danish constitution was adopted in 1849, with democratic elections, after a peaceful revolution that made the country a constitutional monarchy.

The preface to this collection of his travel descriptions ends with these two sentences: “All the many impressions that I have received during my lengthy stay in the United States I have written down in the following sketches and scenes. I hope that my countrymen will read them with interest.

“On the Ohio River, February 1851. Alex Felix.”

The American Eagle as created by the Danish immigrant artist, Christian Gullager (1759-1826), who also painted a famous portrait of George Washington.
The Presidential Election

On an earlier occasion, I have written that there is only one political party in America, the only one possible in a republic: the Democratic [in the original sense of the term, i.e. rule by the people]. It is a party that has many branches with the same political viewpoints. Nevertheless, they differ from each other on several points, which they defend in their various newspapers. They try to promote their opinions, views, and political creeds with the public through candidates whom they nominate for office in elections—first and foremost, the presidential election.

For me, politics have always been a cold deity, but it is impossible to live in the United States without coming into contact with politics in one way or another. However, I have not made a close study of it. I confess, with many apologies, that there are a thousand other things that interested me a whole lot more during my stay in America—things that I could not even have gotten into at all, were it not for the sensible and wise political system expressed in the American Declaration of Independence more than seventy years ago. This declaration was written with an openness and pride of which the world has few examples by men who called upon “the world’s most exalted judges as witnesses to the purity of their aims,” and it has been followed by their descendants ever since. The founders, in confidence of protection by divine providence, pledged “their lives, their property, and their holy honor,” guaranteeing that they would never fail the words of this document.

Long before the presidential election that took place in 1848, the various political parties were extremely active. The Whigs had nominated the victor of the Mexican War, General Zachary Taylor, as their candidate. The Democrats chose General Lewis Cass, an able statesman and former ambassador of the United States to the French Court. The Free Soilers (a democratic party, the main principle of which was the limitation of slavery and the prohibition

of it in new territories) had nominated Van Buren, who had been president a few years earlier [the eighth president, 1837-41]. “The National Reformers,” “The Land Reformers,” “The Natives,” and several other parties in the same category had not succeeded in putting up a candidate of their own and, therefore, had to cast their votes for one of the other parties.

For months, the newspapers had been covering the presidential election. The parties naturally emphasized and extolled the virtues of their own candidates and did everything possible to disparage those of their opponents. Every device was used in the contest. The most private circumstances and family life of opponents were scrutinized, if in this manner they could throw mud on his candidacy. Defamatory writing and brochures filled with invective and meanness toward all candidates were published. And a foreigner who had not earlier attended a presidential election might think that the three candidates for the highest position of honor in America were the biggest scoundrels you could find. But it was not enough that the press thus manipulated the masses. There were many other methods of similar kind. Mass meetings were arranged. At these, the party leaders appeared before audiences of a thousand or more, encouraged them to steadfastness, and described the blessings would flow to the entire Union and its people if their candidate was elected. On the whole, all available means were used to manipulate the crowd. And every one of the three parties already envisioned their candidate as the country’s next president.

Across the entire American nation, the same mood prevailed in all big cities. Spokesmen for the three parties traveled from place to place to recommend their candidates and besmirch those of the other parties. In the big cities, canvas posters had been strung across the main thoroughfares with the names of the presidential and vice-presidential candidates in big letters. Every evening, there were pompous meetings with resounding music and flags, and
banners were carried around with the names of the candidates in gold and silver. In small towns, people gathered around flaming tar pots and listened with cheers or jeers to the courageous fellow citizens who made speeches and added their voices in the election campaign.

James Polk, Democrat
Eleventh president, 1845-49

Zachary Taylor, Whig
Twelfth president, 1849-50

During the year in question [1848], James Polk was president. Like a couple of his predecessors, he was a Democrat (in America that is the party name in order to distinguish it from the Whigs and the other democratic parties mentioned earlier), and it was probable that the Whig candidate, General Taylor would be elected. Van Buren's party, the so-called Free Soilers, was in so small a minority that they could not win. The struggle was thus only between the Democrats and the Whigs, between adherents of Cass or Taylor. It was a mighty conflict, to be sure. A Democrat was the current president, and all government employees (60,000 persons) were members of this party. They had enjoyed their positions for four years—eight years for some of them—and no other country in the world pays government employees as much as the United States.

If Taylor were elected and the Whigs came to power, all of these 60,000 civil servants would lose their jobs (because the president fills all government jobs), and their positions would be taken over by people who belong to his party. But if Cass should be elected, they had hopes of remaining in their positions for another four years. This situation is one of the reasons that the presidential election creates such a storm.

Whatever one thinks of this party struggle, one must admire the composure with which Americans handle everything, once the election is decided. The government employees will leave their lucrative positions without demonstrations and protests but will give way to their happy successors. They knew when they came in that the entire pleasant situation might only last four years, and that they would have to be prepared to resign without a pension if the opposing party won. Before and during the election campaign,
however, they naturally fight tooth and nail for the election of a candidate who shares their political views. If they are unsuccessful, they will have to return to their earlier occupations, perhaps hoping that they might get another tour of duty in four years.

On the evening before the election on the seventh of November, the streets and alleys were unusually lively. [In New York,] old Tammany Hall, the Democratic headquarters, and Broadway House, the gathering place for the Whigs, were brightly illuminated. Speeches were made, there was drinking in the bars, and bets were made on either Cass or Taylor. These were not just small bets, either. Some estimate that millions changed hands in bets on presidential candidates. And all of New York was alive with people, from the most fashionable places to Five Points [a center of vice where three streets met]. Almost everyone had a glass in hand and was half drunk if not worse. They pounded the tables and shouted at each other, cursed, and drank toasts to their candidates. They defended their party as the only one worthy of a vote and belittled the other candidates. They wagered ten to one that this one or that candidate would win. They tripped over each other’s feet and finally staggered out the door to continue their political running berserk, somewhere else a few steps away. There were a lot of bloodied noses and foreheads as the night progressed. Supporters of different political parties began to “talk politics” as soon as they met in the streets.

Now, election day dawns. It is a cold but lovely day. In all precincts of the city, election urns have been placed for citizens to cast their ballots, and ward volunteers go to great lengths to get the
Irish and Germans, as well as native-born citizens from the lower classes, to vote for their candidate. (The foreign-born have to be American citizens, or else they cannot vote in the election. You can get two or three years in jail if you try to vote illegally). Neither money nor strong liquor is spared as means of persuasion, and many New Yorkers have a hard time resisting either one. Voting takes place from sunrise till sundown on the same day throughout the whole country. As the day progresses, excitement grows. It often happens that an election urn is tipped over in all the excitement, and then, the police quickly step in to arrest the troublemakers.

The liveliest activity is in the entertainment spots. All the bars are besieged by masses of people, and bets top each other as fast as the glasses are emptied. The bartenders are stakeholders, and the winners must naturally buy drinks the following day. As the clock approaches ten or eleven at night, it is interesting to walk around and observe the spectacle.

Until the last moment, the Democrats and Whigs had confidence in their chosen candidates. Not till they learned that the preliminary count showed a majority for Taylor in most New York precincts did the enthusiasm of the Democrats start to cool off. But that lasted only a moment, because New York alone could, of course, not decide the outcome. They hoped that Ohio, the entire South, and perhaps Pennsylvania would vote for Cass. Then everything would be fine for the Democrats, and victory would be theirs.

Tammany Hall was filled to the rafters. One speaker followed another, to the applause, laughter, and grunts of the audience. They were treated to all of the comments about freedom that invariably follow political demonstrations in a republic. And all the time, reports kept arriving about the results of ballot counts in the remaining precincts. “The Third Precinct has voted for Taylor,” came the announcement. A moment of silence spread over the great hall, because that precinct had always belonged to the Democrats, and no one had ever doubted that Cass would win big there.

Now, it was decided! New York City has voted for a Whig for president, and it looks like most counties in the state of New York have done the same. Soon, it became clear that that was precisely what had happened. Before the clock struck midnight, messages arrived by telegraph from most counties in the states of New York and New Jersey. Taylor was elected with a big majority in these states, but he was not president yet.

The hopes of the Democrats fell, but they did not give up yet. Then a new telegram arrived from Philadelphia, and two minutes later, from Boston—the Whigs were also victorious in those cities, which meant that the Whigs could also count on victories in
Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. That was a hard blow for the Democrats. Their most powerful speaker and leader now ascended the rostrum. His words were like fire, his opinions so extreme that only a sense of complete defeat could have shaped them, and his gestures were so violent that it looked like he had lost his mind. With bitter indignation, he attempted to impugn the most disgraceful motives to the Whigs. With passionate ardor, he predicted that the Union would perish and that the proud republic would be crushed and spread like chaff to the wind if this “bloodhound,” “this butcher of human beings,” this “vile sinner,” General Zachary Taylor, was elected president! Suddenly, the speaker stopped ranting. He had received a new telegram: the capital of Ohio, Cincinnati, had elected Taylor with a large majority. After announcing this result, the speaker immediately left the podium. He downed a large glass of cognac at the bar and hurried home. It was rumored that the defeat of the Democrats had cost him $20,000 in bets.

Then a drunken man ascended the podium and tried to start a speech. There was hissing, whistling, and yelling, and the fellow got down as quickly as he had come up. There was chaos everywhere. Everybody shouted at once, and there were constantly hurrahs for Cass and grunts of disgust for Taylor. Suddenly, the gaslights went out—and so did the hopes of the Democrats of winning the presidential election. The telegraph had brought messages from many other cities, and in most of them, the Whigs had won the majority of votes. A while later, Tammany Hall went dark and was deserted. Only at the bar, a few Democrats, under the influence of alcohol and wild imaginations, still insisted that Cass would surely become president, despite all signs to the contrary.

In the Whig headquarters at Broadway House, there was joy and celebration. Tar torches and tar pots were burning all around the building. The cheers came at short intervals from the crowd of gathered there, and the celebration continued far into the night.

Many days went by, however, until the final results were tabulated, for distances are great in the United States. At that time, the electrical telegraph had not yet spun its network so tightly over the whole country as it has today. But because the largest states voted for Taylor (and that was already known on election night), it mattered less if the western or southern states went for Cass.

The election of 1848 was a triumph for the Whigs and “Old Zach” (Americans always give nicknames to their favorites), and General Zachary Taylor had been elected president for the next four years.

My Nordic readers undoubtedly know that this honorable and highly esteemed man died in Washington in 1850. Vice-President
Millard Fillmore has now assumed the post of president of the United States.

Postscript

The election of November 1848 installed Zachary Taylor as the twelfth president of the United States. A total of 1,361,393 votes were cast for Taylor’s Whig party, 1,223,460 for Cass and his Democrats, and 291,501 for Martin van Buren and the Free Soil party. The total votes cast for all parties corresponded to thirteen percent of the country’s estimated total population of 21,475,000. By comparison, in the election of 2000, the votes cast for president corresponded to thirty-seven percent of the country’s total population.

A century and a half has gone by since the mid-nineteenth century election, but the vivid, in-depth observations of an alert and involved Danish visitor to United States still make history come alive and prompt contemporary readers to compare the processes then and now. It is natural to look for similarities and differences, the influence of evolving technology, changes in the involvement of the people, the role of the media. Through it all goes the thread of the idealism of the lofty statements and the realism of the rough and tumble diversity of opinions. Many of these factors have changed but little.
Three Short Stories by Carl Hansen

Translated from the Danish

By

J. R. Christianson

Translator's Note. The Danish-American author, Carl Hansen, was born in Jonstrup near Holbæk in 1860, emigrated to America in 1885, taught for a number of years at Danebod Folk School in Tyler, Minnesota, and died in Seattle in 1916.¹ Enok Mortensen once described him as follows:

“[He] had attended university classes in Denmark and studied at the state agricultural school. He knew something about pharmacology, a lot about veterinary medicine, and much about literature and philosophy . . . He was a popular teacher. Each Saturday he gave a lecture—often on classics of Danish literature, and the students sat spellbound as he read passages with almost professional histrionic artistry. Some of them wished that there were two Saturdays in a week so that they could listen to him more often. People from the community also prized not only his dramatic performance, but the practical advice he was able to give in times of illness, whether for a person or a pig.²

Carl Hansen certainly came thoroughly prepared to his job as folk schoolteacher at Danebod. He held the liberal arts degree of cand. phil. from the University of Copenhagen, where he had been inspired by the lectures of Georg Brandes (1842-1927), the renowned critic of the Modern Breakthrough of realism and naturalism in European literature. This led him to seek out the literary avant-garde, and Carl became friends with two of the leading Danish writers of the day: Jens Peter Jacobsen (1847-85) and Herman Bang (1857-1912).³ Bang was the bête noir of Danish literary life, and both authors were once considered scandalous, although they are now regarded as classical Danish authors. Carl Hansen shared Jacobsen's interest in science as well as literature and, like Bang, he also had interests in journalism and the theater.⁴ This was pretty fast company, and Carl wanted to keep up. He decided to pursue a doctoral degree in literature, following the path laid out by Brandes. For a time, he was living on the edge and reading the latest iconoclastic literature from Denmark and abroad, including Henrik Ibsen’s regular attacks on middle-class morality.

At a certain stage, however, Carl Hansen dropped out of the avant-garde and enrolled in Landbohøjskolen, the Danish College of Agriculture, to pursue a degree in veterinary science. He soon learned a lot about pharmacology and animal diseases but did not finish the degree.
The problem was that he was still infected with the “writer’s bug,” which he called digteritis (from digter, the Danish word for “poet”). Like Bang, he worked from time to time as a journalist and stage actor in Copenhagen, polishing the skills he would later use as a teacher, and he even went to Jutland for a time to serve as a private tutor on an estate.

What happened next is hard to say. Carl Hansen was bright, well educated, and had excellent connections, but, at the age of twenty-five, he still seemed to be drifting from one thing to another. Then, one day, his drifting took him down to Nyhavn, where all the steamship agents had their offices in Copenhagen. He bought a one-way ticket to America. On the eighth of March 1885, he registered his ticket with the authorities, gave cand. phil. as his occupation, and stated that Chicago in the state of Illinois was his destination. “I went to America,” he wrote, some years later, “but not because of my virtues . . . On the contrary, it was actually because I felt I was not doing anything in Denmark that I came here, where I believed there was something doing all the time.”

The life of Carl Hansen, Copenhagen avant-garde literary figure and would-be veterinarian, was coming to an end. The life of Carl Hansen, small-town Middle Western teacher, storyteller, and author was about to begin. For him, whether in Chicago or in some small prairie town, it seemed that in America, there would be something doing all the time.

He taught for a couple of years at Elk Horn Folk School, spent a short time as a student in the theological seminary in West Denmark, and in 1888 came with his bride to Tyler, a raw Danish colony started only three years earlier on the tall-grass prairies of Lincoln County, Minnesota. There, he made his home for twenty years, teaching at Danebod Folk School and struggling to earn a living for his family. “Hansen was forced to augment his small pay at the school in other ways,” wrote Enok Mortensen. “He served briefly as postmaster and for a time operated a pharmacy. He also wrote prodigiously. No other author has written better short stories characterizing the Danish immigrant, and his novel Præriefolk (Prairie Folk), which appeared in 1907, is based on his experiences in Tyler.” There, too, Carl Hansen gradually incurred the hostility of some of his neighbors, perhaps by portraying them a bit too realistically as characters in his stories.

After the heady days among the literati of Copenhagen, he must have felt like a fish out of water on the Minnesota plains. He continued to write and became very well known in the wider Danish-American community. In 1896, he and Oscar W. Lund founded the popular Christmas annual, Julegranen (The Christmas Tree). In 1908, however, Carl Hansen ran for probate judge in Tyler on the Democratic ticket and failed to carry even his own township or precinct.

Upon returning from an extended trip to Denmark in 1909, Carl Hansen found that he could no longer live in Tyler. The ill will of some people towards him, combined with the difficulty of earning a living there, compelled him to move. The Hansen family relocated to the Tacoma-Seattle area in 1910, and there, Carl Hansen died in 1916.
Donald K. Watkins, Rudolf J. Jensen, and David Iversen have all written about Carl Hansen in The Bridge and have translated some of his stories. Watkins saw him as a realistic portrayer of the human condition, sometimes with a sharp edge of irony and satire. Carl Hansen did have some of the bite of Ibsen, Brandes, and his old Copenhagen friends, and in a certain sense, his fiction is in the realistic tradition of the Modern Breakthrough.

Rudolf Jensen also put him in the tradition of realism. He compared Hansen’s fiction with that of Sophus K. Winther and found that, while both of them were on the side of the underdog, Winther preferred to portray the tension between “economic failure and personal accomplishment,” while Carl Hansen described “quite the opposite, i.e., the tension between material prosperity and its immediate potential to destroy individual ethical values.”

David Iversen saw him in a somewhat different light. In a 1994 essay, Iversen presented three of Carl Hansen’s Christmas stories and saw them all as realistic and positive in showing how the warmth and light of Christmas can form a “spiritual and physical link” between the Old World and the New, and how the light and warmth of the Christmas celebration can dispel the dark and cold of the season and of harsh living conditions. In his 2006 comparison of Carl Hansen with Hans Christian Andersen, Iversen found that both writers had a keen understanding of audience, a deft sparsity of style, and an irrepressible urge to write, as well as a keen understanding of the “folkloric concepts of ‘quest’ and ‘space,’” which he illustrated by comparing themes in three of Hansen’s stories with elements from the stories of Andersen.

Here are three more stories from the pen of Carl Hansen, the Danish-American realist who left a life among the Copenhagen avant-garde to eke out a meager living on the prairies of Minnesota. As Rudolf Jensen observed, he sometimes doubted the “wisdom of leaving the old country” and wondered whether the privations of pioneering on the prairie “would be rewarded by the success of the following generations,” but who never lost his sympathy for those in need.

The Parish Constable’s Boy

By
Carl Hansen

The parish constable swore that he had never known a boy like this one, and he had known a lot of boys.

Anders Christian had been his hired boy for seven months, and he had still not found an occasion to give him a whipping. The
cows had not gotten in to the field more than one time, and that was when the parish constable himself had taken on the responsibility of watching them while the boy rode down to town with a letter. And Anders Christian was never moody or sullen when there was an errand to run or some work that needed to be done after quitting time—far from it: he was always willing at any time to be right where there was need of him.

The parish constable was a tough boss, and hired help did not usually last very long at his farm, but Anders Christian held on to his job.

He rose through all the ranks: herd boy, top boy, farmhand, foreman. He became the constable’s right hand, and the farm was never run better than it was in the years when Anders Christian was in charge.

He also got fifty kroner more in wages than any other farmhand in the village, and the parish constable had more than hinted that he would not object to giving his eldest daughter, the one who limped and was a little simple-minded, to his able foreman.

So, it was a great shock in the constable’s farm and throughout the village when Anders Christian said he was quitting because he planned to go to America.

And it didn’t even help when he was offered an additional fifty kroner in wages.

He landed in America at a “bad time,” when shops were closing and factories shutting down, when banks were failing and the capitalists were hiding away their money in solid vaults.

But Anders Christian traveled out to a “thriving” town in the West and went from door to door, looking for work. He had not been in town forty-eight hours before he had a job.

In the dark basement of a big store, he struggled around with barrels of herring and syrup, cheese and raisins.

And the merchant noticed a real change in the condition of his wares. Since the Danish fellow arrived, nothing had spoiled in the basement, and everything was in its proper place down there.

In his steady, quiet way, Anders Christian went back and forth between the cellar and the yard, until one day, almost unnoticed, he slipped behind the counter, where customers flocked around him. The owner got into the habit of asking his advice about business matters, when some difficult matter needed to be decided or when a big deal needed to be made.

But when he had reached the position of “head clerk,” with a bigger salary than any other store clerk in town, he resigned.

He wanted to start his own store, he said.

“But, where? Where?” asked his employer.

“I can rent a building across the street,” said Anders Christian.

The merchant swung around in the office chair and groaned.
That evening, he called Anders Christian into the office, and the next day, the sign over the door was changed.

Before, it had said, “W. E. Dean.” Now, it said “W. E. Dean & Co.”

Anders Christian got married, but he did not write home and propose to the parish constable’s daughter. A tall, slender, and pretty Norwegian girl he had met in the store became his bride.

The business needed to expand. Herring and syrup, cheese and raisins were moved over to one side, while clothing and dry goods were arranged on the other shelves and counters.

Anders Christian kept moving around quietly as he always had, behind the counter and in the basement, but he kept track of everything, from the most expensive silk fabric to the tiniest spool of thread.

The building was enlarged. Branches were established on the edge of town and in neighboring towns.

His American partner gradually withdrew to a little private office, where he sat and twiddled his thumbs and stared in amazement.

Twice a year, Anders Christian went East on buying trips. Large sums of money were exchanged, but he never made a bad deal. The parish constable’s boy moved around the Stock Exchange or among the wholesale merchants of Chicago and New York as if he were born their equal.

Then, his political party put him up for City Mayor. He resisted for a long time, but when he finally agreed to run, he moved just as quietly as ever into the campaign and led his party, which had been in the minority in the past, to a stunning victory.

The evening he took over as Mayor, there was a celebration at City Hall, and the guest of honor was the parish constable’s boy.

He was escorted to his place at the head of the table by an elderly Senator, and in the speech held in his honor, it was said, among other things, “People like the new City Mayor are the kind of folks we need, here in the West. People who never hesitate in making a decision and never make a wrong one. People who do not race around from one thing to another but work steadily and sure towards a goal that they eventually reach.”

A torchlight parade escorted him to his home, and on the top step, he had to pause and receive a rousing cheer.

Then the crowd dispersed.

But the new City Mayor stayed there on the top step and looked out over the town—his town—with a quiet, satisfied smile.

He was thinking about the time when he was herd boy for the parish constable’s livestock.
There was great commotion in town when the rumor spread that Jens Hermansen had taken his own life. He had stood in his little shop and sold sugar and soap and matches that evening, and nobody had noticed anything out of the ordinary with him, and the next morning, he was hanging there in the back room between boxes of wares and barrels of salt and herring.

Nor could anybody understand why this respected and thoroughly honorable man had taken his own life.

Jens Hermansen’s honesty was proverbial in town. Slowly and carefully, he weighed out rice and coffee and raisins, he filled the petroleum bottle to the very top without spilling a drop, he gave change by first counting the coins twice from one hand to the other and then putting them in a row on the counter and counting them again with his index finger.

And if there were ever worms in the flour that was bought in his shop, or sand in the sugar, or stones in the currants, people could just bring them back and get a full refund or other wares in their place.

Jens Hermansen was a farmer’s son from Vendsyssel, north of the Limfjord in northern Jutland, and he had eventually inherited his father’s farm, a middle-sized farm with solid, old-fashioned buildings. He married a prosperous neighbor’s daughter, paid off his siblings’ parts of the inheritance, and sat there, debt-free, on his own farm.

But his house did not prosper, as you might have expected. Jens Hermansen was just not fit for farming. He had a businessman’s blood in his veins, and he went from market to market without really getting started in anything. Then, he traded the farm for a general store on the south side of the Limfjord, but he could not really settle into the monotonous life behind the counter, either. He had a feeling that he could get rich in one fell sweep by taking advantage of a situation when the right conditions came together all at once, or by grabbing hold when Lady Luck came knocking on his door. Because a wise man once told him that Lady Luck comes knocking just once on everybody’s door.

He bought some big tickets on the lottery, but his number never came in. He risked almost everything he owned when he
purchased a whole shipload of American corn that brought him many sleepless nights before he sold it without making a profit.

The general store went along at the usual pace and gave enough income to keep the family going. Meanwhile, Jens Hermansen became more and more nervous and on the lookout. He read the ads in all the big papers and went off all the time to Aalborg or Randers, sometimes to Copenhagen, occasionally to Sweden, and one time to Germany.

But whatever was being offered in the papers was no better and no more profitable than what he already had—in many cases, it was worse.

Money was what he thought about all the time. There was so much you could invest in and develop if you just had capital. Margarine factories were up and running now and returning great profits, or subdivisions on the outskirts of Copenhagen, or an iron forge in Sweden.

If you just had capital—and didn’t have all your money tied up in this damn general store that never produced more than the bare necessities of life. What if the whole thing should burn down? And we collected the insurance . . .

One dark night in July, as lightning flashed and thunder rolled, the general store of Jens Hermansen burned to the ground with all its inventory and stock of merchandise.

The hearing that followed demonstrated that Hermansen himself did everything that was humanly possible to put out the fire and save whatever could be rescued. He was burned on the hands and face, and for days afterwards, he went around the site, wringing his hands and complaining over his great loss.

Intelligent people who had an understanding of such things were of the opinion, however, that the loss had not been so great, because the house was old and the stock of wares had been allowed to run down quite a bit recently.

Hermansen sold the site with the charred remains and a few acres of land for a small sum and left for America.

But Lady Luck did not come knocking in a foreign land, either. Instead, there was hard work, frustration, sickness, and disappointments of many kinds. His wife never adjusted to the foreign surroundings, took ill, and died.

Eventually, however, he did find peace, after several years of drifting around, in a general store like the one he had owned in Denmark.

The children grew up. There were three of them, two sons and a daughter. The oldest son worked his way up to become manager of an iron foundry. The daughter married a wealthy farmer. The youngest son, Johannes, graduated from the best school in town, went on to the university, and came home three years later as a
certified dentist. Before long, he had many clients, more than he could handle, and more than he wanted to handle.

He became a member of the best clubs in town, including several secret societies, became a sportsman and hunter, kept of couple of expensive riding horses, and drove up the avenue in the evening behind the wheel of an expensive, dark red car.

And he began to feel, more and more, that he was not made to set false teeth in soft, wobbling, disgusting gums or to stand for hours over a stinking mouth full of black, rotting teeth.

He was young and talented, had a good education—and America was the land of opportunity.

So, one day, the rumor spread that a large, new life insurance company was about to open its headquarters in town, and that Dr. Hermansen would be its director. And the most elegant suite in town was rented and furnished expensively.

By the very next year, the company was doing so much business that it was absolutely necessary to put up a new building of its own, built of fine, white brick with six granite columns in front and a costly marble statue over the entrance, with solid, genuine mahogany furniture and room for forty assistants.

The typewriters clattered, the pens danced over the pages of long insurance policies, and in the basement was a fully equipped printing press, turning out circulars by the millions.

The director himself was seldom at home. In the summer, he traveled to Europe, where Paris was his favorite place, and in the winter, he was in Florida or California.

A couple of times a year, he appeared on the streets of the city, where everybody greeted him.

Because he was a benefactor of the city. He had given it a park and a library.

Once, when he returned from Europe, he was met at the station by a brass band, and a long procession followed him to the insurance building. That evening, he was honored with a torchlight parade, cheers, and a speech by the Mayor.

But old Hermansen did not join the procession, nor the torchlight parade. He stayed in his shop and weighed out rice and sugar and raisins, and he counted money twice from hand to hand and one more time along the counter, “so that nobody would get less than they had coming.” That evening, when his daughter came home beaming with joy over the honor that had been shown her brother, he waved her off and would not hear anything about it.

“Sins of the fathers,” he whispered, and drew his daughter close to him. “Don’t you know what has been written? The iniquity of the fathers, it says, shall be visited upon the children. Do you understand, Anna? If only it could be set right by one’s self giving just weight and measure for the rest of his life. If it could only be set right by that, I say. But that’s not enough. Pay close
attention, my child. Unto the third and fourth generation, it says. That would hit your children, too. Sins of the father, my child, sins of the fathers!"

A month later, he went out in the back room and hanged himself between the boxes and barrels, to the great astonishment of everybody who knew him. The astonishment grew into panic and fears that same evening, when rumors of fraud and deception began to circulate around the town.

The next day, it was in the newspapers. The big insurance company had never intended to insure the lives of its policyholders but rather, it concentrated on a sideline that nobody had paid any attention to. The director had sent several hundred clever young men out to all parts of the country to sell stock. Thousands of well-meaning people had bought stock in a company that did not even exist. The stock was not worth the paper it was printed on.

The expensive headquarters building had fooled the authorities. When the FBI got on the case, however, the fraud was discovered in a matter of weeks.

Director Hermansen was arrested in New York and brought home the day after his father was buried.

During the trial, it came out that two shady investors from Philadelphia had dreamed up the scheme, and then they had found the right front man in the young dentist.

The investors vanished, and the police never did find them. Director Hermansen was sentenced to seven years in prison. A large crowd watched when he was taken to the station with a policeman at each side. Only a month earlier, they had welcomed him with music and cheers, and now, he was sent packing as a condemned criminal.

The train rattled in under the glass roof. One policeman went ahead, then came the criminal, who turned on the steps of the car as if to speak, but the policeman behind him stretched out a hand to silence him.

The conductor waved, the engine gave a few puffs, and the long, yellow cars moved slowly down the bright tracks.

An old Irish delivery man stood and watched the train for a long time, and then turned around and said, slowly and seriously, to himself, “You can’t get something for nothing.”
I sat one evening in the home of a fine, old Danish pastor in Chicago.

The clock struck ten, and it was time to leave, but I was not allowed to go.

Because the pastor was in a mood to talk and talk.

They had all come to him, knocked on his door, all these failed geniuses, these individuals haunted by fate, these university graduates who never managed to find a position, these students who failed their exams, these artists who never became famous, these businessmen gone bankrupt. To him they came when there was no good advice, or help, or consolation, or escape to be found anywhere else.

The old pastor told about all of this.

Then the doorbell rang, and the pastor’s daughter went to the door.

It was a “soldier” of the Salvation Army with a letter.

An “officer” had found a Danish man in a “ten-cent lodging” on Clark Street. The man was dying and wanted to speak with a Danish pastor.

“Well, off I go. It would have been nice to go to bed, but ‘so geht’s in der Welt,’ as the Germans say, and that’s the life of a Danish pastor in a big city.”

“Can I come with you?”

“You? Of course you can. But I would have thought you’d rather go home to bed. You’ve looked a bit drowsy the last half hour or so.”

“Me? No, not at all. I haven’t been sleepy in the least. Just the opposite. I’d like to go with you.”

“Then come along, if you’re interested in that kind of things.”

The pastor already had his overcoat on and was standing in the hall. His daughter brought him a case with his communion set.

We stood for a long time on the corner and waited for the streetcar. In those days, they were still pulled by horses. When it finally came, it rattled wearily off through the gloomy streets in the direction of the Loop and the light of bars and nightspots of various kinds.

The streetcar came to the end of the line, and now, the lights were behind us. We wandered down Clark Street.
And we met all the terrors of the city. Drunk hooligans singing, others staggering in delirium, Blacks and whites, women with thick makeup—we met the most repulsive outcasts of a big city in all their sinister bleakness.

But we did not meet a single police officer. We struck matches to look for the number of the building and found it by sheer luck.

The sign over the door said “10, 15 & 25¢ Lodging.”

The stairway was dark, narrow, filthy, and stinking.

The proprietor was in bed, and his “assistant” was a huge, broad-shouldered Holsteiner with a blotchy, red face, an expert at swearing and bawling people out.

Those damn Salvation scum run and call for pastors and monks and rabbis as soon as one of our lodgers has a stomach ache,” he said, and fumbled around under the greasy desk for a light, which he turned on.

“I hope you’re not too high and mighty to go up yourselves and find the idiot you’re looking for.” He held out the light to us. “Two flights up on the left.”

I took the light and went ahead of the pastor, up the two flights of stairs. We agreed that these stairs had never been swept or washed.

Then, I opened the door on the left, and we peered into a long, murky room, so long that the far end was lost in darkness. Under the ceiling hung a single light that cast a pale, reddish glow over figures lying in rows along the floor, separated by an upright board between each sleeping place.

And in the doorway, we were met by a stronger wave of the same smell we knew from the stairway. The stink of unwashed bodies, wet clothing, alcohol breath, and all the diseases that plague humanity.

We began to make our way down the narrow aisle, which reminded you of the manure channel in a barn. Now and then, we stepped over a pair of legs that were longer than they had a right to be for ten cents a night.

Some rose up on an elbow and stared at the light. Others pulled up the blanket and hid their faces—maybe we were looking for them.

Then, the “officer” stepped out of the dark. He was a pale, little Swede with thin hair and a light beard, wearing the uniform of the Salvation Army.

“I’m glad you came so quickly,” he said. “He doesn’t have many hours left.”

He went ahead of us, farther into the darkness, and stopped by one of the sleeping stalls.

I held up the light and saw a face so waxen yellow, so deathly pale, and a pair of large, blank, dark eyes under swollen, pale red
eyelids. A thin, white hand with large veins and blue nails lay on the blanket.

Maybe he was already dead.

No. He opened the heavy eyelids, looked at us for a long time—and smiled.

But then his cough carried him away, the short, hollow cough of a sick chest that works its way through the body in sudden jerks against your will.

The pastor tried to go up and put his hand on the dying man’s forehead, but it was impossible for him to come to his side without stepping on one of his neighbors.

“We have to move him,” he said. “There must be a human bed somewhere in this colossal poorhouse.”

The officer and I went down to the Holsteiner, who cursed and swore and shouted that his “boss” would not allow crooks and vermin to lie down and die of typhus or the itch in the best beds in the “hotel.”

The officer did not listen. He pointed to a door.

“What’s behind that door?” he asked.

“That’s the boss’s own private parlor, and God help anybody who tries to go in there.”

The Salvation Army soldier opened the door and looked around.

“A nice, big, airy room,” he said. “We can use it. And here’s a telephone. Perfect! If you make any more trouble, we’ll phone the police station and have them send over five or six officers. So, let’s get a bed with good, clean linen and put it up in here.”

The German hissed, but he still helped us, and gradually, he even became a bit more helpful.

“Because, you know how it is,” he said. “We don’t want the cops coming around. Either you have to punch the cop in the nose or you’re hauled into court and fined.”

He put up an iron bed, got some fairly clean sheets and blankets, and made the bed.

We went back up the stairs. The pastor met us at the door.

“All set,” said the officer.

And we made our way down the narrow aisle, past the poor sleeping figures, until we came to our countryman.

We wrapped the blanket tightly around him, gently led him out between the rows of planks, and carried him down.

“Am I—heavy?” he asked.

Oh, no, he wasn’t heavy. I never thought a grown person could be so easy to carry. Nothing but skin and bones.

We laid him down carefully, and the pastor took out his chalice and paten, wine and wafers from the case.

And the parlor of the hotel’s proprietor became a church—a church filled with mighty, gripping solemnity.
When the service was over, the dying man put out his hand. The pastor took it with both of his hands.

“Is there anything you have on your heart? A greeting to your loved ones back home in Denmark or over here? If so, let us know. What is your name?”

“My name . . .” He said it. And we looked at each other in amazement, the pastor and I.

Because it was the name of one of Denmark’s most famous scholars, a teacher at one of the leading institutions of higher education. It was a name that was known and respected far beyond the borders of Denmark.

“Are you related to, or the son of . . .?”

“Yes, I’m the professor’s son. In my jacket—in the inside pocket—you can find letters and papers—if you need proof. But it makes no difference now—makes no difference—now, I’m going where it’s all the same, whether you’re the son of a professor or a poor beggar.”

And he told us the story of his life, in simple, straightforward, everyday terms—a story like hundreds of others.

He was a student, wanted to be an officer, but the family had produced many famous names in medicine and theology, and the father wanted him to carry on the tradition.

But the son did what he wanted to do. The only thing that appealed to him were the shiny buttons of a uniform.

He came to the Officers’ Academy, got his shiny buttons, and became a lieutenant in the Reserves.

Then came the turning point in his life.

One evening, he got into an argument with one of his superiors, and the argument ended in a fight.

But a soldier is not allowed to strike his superior. The punishment for that is hard and merciless.

It did not help that he was the son of a famous professor. He was punished, given a dishonorable discharge, and sent to America.

Sent to America! This officer who had never held a tool in his hands.

“And things went badly,” he said. “Of course, they went badly. I’ve been a waiter, barber, cook, streetcar conductor, and many other things. Mainly, though, I was unemployed, wandered the streets without a place to live, without food. Then, my lungs gave out—fortunately.”

The gray light of dawn began to spread into the room. The pastor and I sat in silence. The sick one coughed, weakly, without hope. A couple of drops of blood oozed out between his lips.”

The Salvation Army soldier came in with a young doctor, who felt his pulse, put the stethoscope to his chest, and wrote a prescription.
I went out with the doctor. “You can come up to my office and pick up the death certificate,” he said. “That will save time and inconvenience. He won’t live long. Pay? No, we don’t take anything in a case like this. Good morning.”

He went down the center of the stairs. Obviously, this was not the first time he had visited a “ten cent lodging.”

In the room, the pastor sat and hummed a hymn. The sick man’s pale gray face shown in the faint light. I went up and felt his thin hand, which was lying on the blanket. The nails were even more blue, the veins more prominent, but the hand was cold and limp. The pulse did not beat.

The man was dead.

Dead in a “ten cent lodging” on Clark Street.

We went out to the street. The air from Lake Michigan surrounded us, damp and raw. Countless chimneys pumped coal smoke into the heavy, wet air.

The pastor stopped. “I’ve often wondered,” he said, “what happened to all the shabby, unfortunate wretches who simply vanished, sank to the bottom, here in Chicago. All those who came and asked for help once or at most twice, and then disappeared without a trace, as if swallowed up by the earth. Now, I know.”

We wandered on, past the filthy, rotten buildings with some dive on the street level and a sign that read “10, 15 & 25¢ Lodging” above.

The same hovels, same dives, same signs, as far as the eye could see, and far, far beyond.

At the streetcar station, we said goodbye to each other. Each of us went his way.

But the memory of my countryman, the professor’s son, the officer, who died in a “ten cent lodging” has followed me through the years.

I know, of course. A soldier must never lay his hands on his superior. The punishment for that is hard and merciless.

For this man, it was a life sentence.

1 His parents had a small farm (bolsted), and his father was also a horse trader.
Jacobsen translated the writings of Charles Darwin into Danish and won his place in Danish literature with two sensational naturalistic novels, *Fru Marie Grubbe* (1876) and *Niels Lyhne* (1880). Bang achieved notoriety when his first novel, *Haabløse Slægter* (Families Without Hope, 1880), was condemned as decadent and banned in Denmark.

5 He sailed in mid-April on the Thingvalla Line’s new steamer, SS Hekla (II) and docked in New York on 1 May 1885. See the Norway Heritage website at http://www.norwayheritage.com, accessed 21 April 2009.

6 Quoted in Watkins 1979, 9.


8 Watkins 1979, 13-14.

9 Watkins 1979, 14-16.


11 Watkins 1979, 11.

12 Jensen 1979, 26.


14 Iversen 2006, 321.

15 Jensen 1979, 19.

16 Translated by J. R. Christianson from “Sognefogdens Dreng” in Carl Hansen, *Landsmænd: Fortællinger* (Cedar Falls IA: Dansk Boghandels Forlag, 1908), 81-84. The office of Parish Constable (sognefoged) was similar to that of Justice of the Peace in nineteenth-century America. It was generally held by a prosperous farmer in rural Denmark and conferred considerable prestige in the local community.

17 Translated by J. R. Christianson from “Fædres Synd” in Carl Hansen, *Landsmænd: Fortællinger* (Cedar Falls IA: Dansk Boghandels Forlag, 1908), 106-12. The text is Exodus 29: 5, “I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me,” see also Numbers 14: 18, and Jeremiah 32: 18.

Review Essay
Danish Cookbooks


Three recent books have appeared on Danish food and cooking, a subject dear to the hearts of Danes no matter where they live in the world. The books deal with Danish Cookbooks and cooking in very different ways, and, together, they provide good food for thought.

Stig Hansen’s beautifully illustrated book, *Cooking Danish: A Taste of Danmark* is the one that many will want for themselves and their family. It is written to be used in a North American kitchen and is a perfect snapshot of classic mid-twentieth century Danish food.

The author, Stig Hansen, calls himself “The Viking Chef.” He was born in Denmark and learned to be a professional chef in the Danish Merchant Marine, cooking on ships all over the world. He immigrated to the United States in 1976 and has worked in restaurants in California, Oregon, and Utah. As his wife Susan writes in her introduction, “Cooking Danish is his legacy to his family, his countrymen, and the rest of the world.”

The handsome book is written for cooks who live outside of Denmark and want to prepare Danish food. Short essays tell about the Danish Flag (*Dannebrog*), Danish sailing ships, and temperature and measurement conversions. Other essays introduce the recipe sections on the Danish smøråsbord and open faced sandwiches, Danish beer and how to brew it, bread and rolls, main dishes, and desserts and cookies. The recipes, chapter headings, and index are in English and Danish.

This is a book for those who wish to recreate the kind of ideal Danish food that reached its zenith in the 1950’s. Larsen even provides recipes for rye bread, beer, open-faced sandwich toppings, and specialty cheeses that are most often purchased in Denmark but are rarely available in the US.
Because he has cooked Danish food outside of Denmark, Hansen is able to write his recipes for the non-Danish kitchen. A random test of a few recipes shows them to be accurate and the results to be good. I did wonder, though, about the use of “bread flour,” rather than “all purpose” flour, in some of the pastry and cookie recipes. There are excellent color pictures of elaborate open-faced sandwiches, a twentieth-century Danish food tradition.

As a post-war Danish immigrant myself, I missed two common Danish recipes: the classic leverpostej made with pork liver (probably the most ubiquitous sandwich spread in Denmark) and kærnemælks koldskål, chilled buttermilk dessert soup. Larsen does include two recipes for pâté, but one is a terrine and the other is made with chicken liver. And his buttermilk soup recipe includes strawberries, an unusual fruit variation on the summer treat. In respect to frikadeller, by the way, Larsen calls them “meatballs”—but I’ll come back to that later.

Anyone who wishes to enjoy classic Danish food at home in North America will find excellent recipes, good directions, and beautiful photographs as a guide in Stig Larsen’s Cooking Danish.

Carol Gold is professor of history at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and her Danish Cookbooks: Domesticity and National Identity, 1616-1901 is a scholarly book, now in paperback, that uses social class analysis to describe the evolution of Danish identity through the study of Danish cookbooks. Gold is “concerned with some of the most obvious changes in Danish cookbooks—the growth of a bourgeois consciousness, the analogous development of domesticity, and the evolution of nationalism and a specific Danish national identity.” The book is cleverly served up as a series of “courses” with the Table of Contents labeled “Menu” and the chapter headings “Appetizer,” “First Course,” and so on. Her sources are cookbooks printed in Denmark from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries. The frontispieces of seven cookbooks of major interest are beautifully reproduced in the “Appetizer” section. The book has several color illustrations of Danish food prepared in North America, as well graphs and maps. Endnotes provide insight into her sources, and there is an extensive bibliography.

That Danish society changed over time is evident in the scope of the cookbooks analyzed by Gold. She divides the cookbooks in her study chronologically into three groups according to the audience to which they are addressed. From 1616 to about 1750, cookbooks tended to be written by male authors for large, wealthy, and sophisticated households with experienced professional cooks. The food was prepared for upper class or noble tables. The recipes were
cosmopolitan and expanded the possibilities for menus and ingredients available to large sophisticated households.

In the mid-eighteenth century, the audience for cookbooks shifted to housewives and their housekeepers, and the authors, by that time, were both men and women. These “extremely didactic” books contained not only recipes with specific instructions, but also set standards on how to manage servants and run a proper house. The readers were learning to mimic the upper classes and were becoming the new urban bourgeoisie.

By the mid-nineteenth century, cookbook authors were mostly women, addressing themselves to other women and assuming the readers already had some knowledge of cooking and taking care of their homes and families. These books were written for the practical housewife who was comfortable in the kitchen, and for readers in both the city and the country. In this period, when the Danish constitution was written and democracy emerged, Gold sees Danish national identity and food customs merge.

Professor Gold points out that literacy and arithmetic was high in Denmark among men and women as early as the seventeenth century because these skills were taught as part of the curriculum for Lutheran Confirmation. Denmark was early to mandate education for all children, so there was a large audience for these books.

An especially interesting “Course” in the book, chapter 6, traces the introduction and acceptance of the potato into Danish cooking. The potato became a symbol for Danish food, helping to forge a national identity. “What would be left of Denmark without potatoes?” was a tongue-in-cheek question on the Aalborg Aquavit website in 2005. To this day, the first Danish-grown new potatoes of the year command sky-high prices and make front-page news in the Danish papers. They are considered by Danes to be the best in the world. Introduced to Denmark from the new world in the eighteenth century, potatoes were, at first, slow to take hold, but over the course of the nineteenth century, the easy-to-grow potato soon dominated the rural diet in Denmark as the “staple warm food around which meals were prepared.” Gold links the rise of the independent farmer within the political system and the spread of folk culture including the potato with the symbol of Danishness. Potatoes started appearing in Danish cookbooks in the mid-nineteenth century with careful directions for storing and preparation (a 1855 cookbook devoted seven pages to the potato). By the end of the nineteenth century, potatoes were assumed to be part of the typical Danish diet, rural and urban, a symbol of nationalism. The potato became as Danish as Dannebrog.

Professor Gold explores the evolution of typical Danish recipes over the course of three hundred years. She sees some recipes to have changed very little, like beef à la mode and marinated herring. Her examples for herring are confusing because she includes
different types of herring recipes in one example: marinated fried herring, boiled herring, and raw marinated herring. These are three distinct ways of preparing the fish. Gold notes that other popular dishes, like frikadeller and rødgrød, have seen substantial variations over the years. But there is some confusion in her account, because she compares recipes for kødboller (meatballs) and frikadeller (rissoles) in one analysis, and to this day, those dishes are two different ways to prepare forcemeat.

A number of old recipes are included, and they have been translated into English, but the original Danish is not provided, except in a few places. This raises questions about the translations that could affect Gold’s conclusions. For example, in the section about potato preparation, Gold explains that a large number of potato recipes in early cookbooks refer to thawing the potatoes before cooking, and she explains that potatoes “were generally stored outside or in root cellars over the winter, where they might well have frozen.”(p. 169). But as Gold points out, early cookbooks made great efforts to give instructions for proper storage of potatoes. Danes were used to storing other root vegetables over the winter. Why would Danish cookbook authors assume that the potatoes were frozen before use? Gold’s misunderstanding seems to come from a faulty translation of toede from the Carl Muller 1785 cookbook: the word does not mean “thawed” but is rather an archaic Danish form of “washed”. The potato recipes should read “well washed” not “well thawed.” Therefore, Gold’s explanation about frozen potatoes is moot.

There are other translation issues. The recipe for “Another Good Dish” on page 37 should read “add 5 or 6 eggs” and not “add eggs or not.” On page 108, Gold provides a list of the top 10 Danish meals, according to a 1999 Politiken article. But hakkebøf and frikadeller, as they are served in Denmark, are not really what the American reader thinks of as “hamburgers” and “meatballs” (meatballs are kødboller in Danish). Maybe you could call them “ground beef patties” and “forcemeat rissoles,” but frikadeller, like hygge, may be one of those Danish concepts that cannot be translated. Finally, gryderet is a “casserole” or “one-pot meal” and not just “stew.” Hamburgerryg is cured pork loin, similar to what some call Canadian bacon, and certainly not a “pork cutlet.” Some might consider these to be minor points, but food and recipes are central to the overall thesis of the book, so it is necessary to have accurate translations of food terms, cuts of meat, and methods of preparation.

Professor Gold concludes that “the so-called separate spheres of the private (home, kitchen) and the public (politics, nation) were indeed not so very separate, after all” in Denmark, and that, in the nineteenth century, food became a national symbol for Danes, just
Finally, the charming *Holm Family Cookbook* is an American cookbook produced by a California family who descend from mid-nineteenth century Danish settlers in the Livermore area, east of San Francisco. The Holm family motto is “Some eat to live, we live to eat.” This book was a family project, self-published, spearheaded by Tilli Calhoun and Patsy Neely and their daughters, along with many other recipe contributors. They hired designer Carol Salvin, who put together the delightful book of family history, including snapshots, a family tree, pictures, remembrances, anecdotes, and sidebar stories about the settlement of Danes in Livermore. This book does not profess to be a Danish cookbook, but the recipes “reveal a Danish ancestry, a rural Western upbringing, and the evolution of American meal preparation in the last century.”

There is a brief introduction about the early Danish settlement of the Gold-Rush era in the Livermore–Alameda County area. Most of them came from Schleswig-Holstein (Sønderjylland). The Holm family’s story in the area begins in the 1860’s with “Grandma Holm,” born Ida Jessen and Grandpa Carl Holm, who immigrated in 1869. They established and inspired the Holm family tradition for entertaining and the love of food.

This is an American cookbook with a few direct traces to Danish roots. From Breakfast Casserole, Lemon-Drop Shooters, Tamale Pie, and Texas Sheet Cake, its recipes illustrate the multicultural twenty-first century world we live in. But there are a few Danish recipes like *asier*, “risengrad” (sic), *flødeboller*, *frikadeller*, and *brunede kartofler*. Some of these are old recipes attributed to family members, and the names of a few others would not even be recognized as Danish (“Skninnies,” for example, are Danish pancakes). Some recipes seem to have been picked up after trips to Denmark by family members (*smørrebrød* and *julegaas*). A recipe note sometimes reveals old food customs. For example, the recipe for *brunede kartofler* notes that Grandma Holm served them with green kale (recipe not included).

There are some interesting stories and charming pictures of Christmas customs and family celebrations from the Danish American community around Livermore. The Dania Society and Dania Hall were evidently a center for Danish community life well into the 1960’s. Although the Danish family is now intermarried with the spectrum of ethnicities in California, the Holm family still associates food and fellowship with their Danish roots. One contributor, Kim Bonde, describes herself as “double-Danish, as both sides of my family are Danish,” so that must be unusual in the community nowadays.
This cookbook tells the story of an American family that has retained the traditional Danish love of entertaining associated with good food, even though hardly any of the food they serve is the "traditional" Danish food described in Gold or Larsen’s books. In a sense, that may be the most Danish part of all. Danish food in Denmark today still includes the traditional frikadeller and leverpostej, while restaurants like NOMA in Copenhagen win Michelin stars with innovative Danish cuisine, but ethnic foods like, pizza, sushi, and, yes, tamales are on tables in Denmark today, as well.

Birgitte Christianson
Review Essay
Folk Lore and Folk Medicine


The Danish archaeologist and head of the National Museum in Copenhagen, J. J. A. Worsaae (1821-1885), grew up in Vejle. As a boy, he loved to hike out to the famous royal burial mounds at Jelling, where King Gorm and Queen Thyra lay entombed, and where their son, King Harald Bluetooth, erected the largest rune stone in all of Scandinavia to proclaim that he was the monarch who won all of Denmark and Norway and made the Danes into Christians.

These were the biggest and most famous prehistoric mounds in Denmark, but hundreds of other mounds from the Stone Age, Bronze Age, and Viking Age dotted the countryside around Vejle. They lined the ancient route of travel called the hærvej that ran along the edge of the heaths of central Jutland. Even as a young schoolboy, Worsaae wanted to dig into these mounds and see what was in them. However, the local farmers were not always cooperative, and the mounds lay on their land.

"Despite the fact that the farmers were pretty regular church-goers, even where there were bad pastors," Worsaae wrote in his memoirs, "superstition had a wide playing field. Especially the older generation: They were afraid of the trolls who were said to live in the old mounds, where they sometimes held feasts while the mound itself rose on fiery red pillars. Therefore, quite a few farmers
did not dare to dig or allow digging in the mounds, because the
trolls could easily take their revenge upon them and their animals.1

Prehistoric artifacts were known to be buried in the mounds, but
many things also turned up when the fields were plowed in springtime. The rural population stood in awe of these objects.
"Prehistoric stone axes were thought to have fallen to earth during
thunder storms, and people believed that they possessed certain
good qualities, such as protection against lightning strikes, the
bewitching of milk, and all kinds of witchcraft," wrote Worsaae:2
Beliefs like these did not make it easy to be an archaeologist in his
day.

These beliefs were not gone when my grandfather was growing
up on a farm not far from Vejle.3 He was born in 1867 in Aast,
Lindeballe Parish, on a farm that lay between the dark Aast Wood to
the north and the endless moors and heaths of central Jutland
spreading far to the west. There were many burial mounds in the
vicinity, including a cluster of them, not far from the farm, called “æ
Firhyw” (Four Mounds) in the local dialect. The story is that two
girls from the neighboring farm of Amlund, Ann and Maren, were
out on the heath in bright daylight and saw one of these mounds rise
into the air on flaming pillars. These girls were adults when my
grandfather was young. The Amlund folks also said that, when they
were gathering hay in a certain meadow on the heath, they could
hear the “Bjerremænd” (Mound Folk) making a terrible racket and
slamming the lids of their huge storage trunks.4 My grandfather
would have heard these tales as a boy. There were also stories about
the ghost that haunted one of the Gjødsbøl farms, just down the
lane. The ghost appeared as a huge man in a slouch hat, doomed to
wander at night because he had stolen land by moving boundary
stones.5

After stories like these, I don’t think my grandfather liked to
walk those country lanes after dark. He must have heard plenty of
stories about Hans Amlund, the “wise man” who could stop
runaway horses by looking at them and could cure both people and
animals that were sick. Hans Amlund (1809-1901) was one of those
rare mortals who also had the power to counteract the mischief of
witches and trolls. He had a room at Vester Amlund farm where he
kept little bags of curative herbs, roots, and twigs gathered by
moonlight on special nights.

One time, to treat a sick sow, he fed her milk with scrapings
from the only flyverøn in Aast Wood, from a twig gathered at
midnight on Midsummer Eve or Walburgis Night.6 Everybody
knew that a flyverøn was a rowan tree growing out of the stump of a
dead tree, and that evil had no power over a tree not rooted in the
ground, so the wood of a flyverøn had special powers over witchcraft
and evil spells.7 But it took somebody with the secret knowledge of
a Hans Amlund to manipulate these occult powers.
Once, a man came to him with a badly wounded hand. Hans Amlund washed the wound thoroughly and bandaged it, then took a wooden stick, bandaged the stick as well, smeared some salve on it, and told the man to keep applying the salve to the stick. Next, he cut another stick, bandaged it, and took it into his little room, where the wounded man saw all kinds of bandaged sticks hanging on the wall. By keeping an eye on these sticks, Hans Amlund could see how well a wound was healing. He said that putting salve on the stick was as good as putting it on the hand.

I wonder whether my grandfather ever got to see that magical little room at Vester Amlund. Hans Amlund and his brother, Niels Amlund, both married sisters of my grandfather’s grandfather, so they were my grandfather’s great-uncles. Hans Amlund was alive and well when my grandfather was a boy, and he remained active for a long time after my grandfather left for America.

Hans Amlund’s sister, Ann Trøglborg (1816-1907), was even more renowned for her curative powers. As late as the 1970’s, some older Danish family members could still remember stories about her. She and her brother, Hans, had learned their healing and occult arts from their mother, Ane Johanne Hansdatter (1780-1847). Ane Johanne had learned from her father, Hans Pedersen Smed (1736-1820). He was the one who brought the family from western Jutland to Lindeballe Parish and purchased Amlund farm in the 1790’s, at a time when folk healers were under pressure to be licensed under the Quacksalver Law of 1794. Perhaps he felt safer from the authorities in a parish where the old minister himself, Pastor Ancher Laugesen Borch (1717-95), had a reputation for possessing occult powers.

Hans Pedersen Smed brought his large library to Amlund. He could read Danish, German, English, and French. Among his books, there must have been some that helped him gain a reputation as a capable farmer and inform his wide practice as a healer. Worsaae may have considered the farmers of the Vejle area to be
superstitious, but farmers like Hans Smed and his descendants were not ignorant.

When Hans Pedersen Smed’s granddaughter, Ann, was a young woman, she came to work on the farm of her uncle at Trøglborg in Ringive Parish, stayed to make her home there, and married her cousin. She was a tall, stout woman who wore an old-fashioned hat and a lace collar, and she carried a large staff. She rode with a man’s saddle, rather than sidesaddle like most women, and sometimes, she galloped through the streets of Vejle at breakneck speed. Ann drove her own cattle from Trøglborg to Vorbasse Market, where livestock merchants from as far away as Schleswig knew her as a shrewd bargainer with an impressive capacity for the strong coffee-snaps they drank to seal the agreement. Trøglborg prospered and grew into a large farm under her care.

Pastor Kau reported that her house smelled like an apothecary, but when he came to visit, he might see a book of sermons, not a Cyprianus, lying open on the table. He described her as a pious woman with a tremendous memory. A “Cyprianus” was the Black Book, a book or manuscript full of magical incantations and traditional healing lore.

In those days, mothers took care of most family health-care needs, but there were some things that an ordinary housewife could not deal with. In those cases, rural people generally sought out a local healer like Ann Trøglborg or Hans Amlund. Patients came to visit Ann Trøglborg every week, and she never charged for treatment, although she did accept gifts if people brought something for her.

Ann Trøglborg was well known for treating snakebite, skin rashes, broken bones, and wounds infected with blood poisoning. She had an array of pots and jars containing herbs, salves, and ointments that she had prepared herself, as well as foul-tasting tinctures in various colors. While she was treating a patient, she mumbled mysterious formulae and made ritualistic movements over the injured area. Sometimes, she prescribed little rituals, like the time she gave a patient some ointment to smear on neck boils and also advised him to go to a nearby stream before sunrise on a Thursday morning, find a small stone, and throw it over his head into the water. That should help, she said.

Snakebites were not uncommon in those days. The bite of an adder (“hugorm,” *viperus berus*) was extremely painful and could be fatal. When Ann died in 1907, her snakebite cure was the only part of all her lore that her son decided to preserve. He destroyed all the rest.

Sometimes, I have also wondered whether my grandfather’s becoming a dentist and two of his nephews becoming physicians
was influenced in any way by these “wise men” and “wise women” in our Danish family background. Folk healers like Ann Trøglborg and Hans Amlund possessed solid empirical knowledge of the healing art. Was there any carryover from their interest in healing to that of more recent times?

Of course, the traditional tales and lore of the countryside were not the only things my grandfather learned as he was growing up in Lindeballe and Give Parishes during the 1870’s and 1880’s. He went to school like all Danish boys and girls, and Danish public schools were some of the best in Europe. My grandfather also attended Askov folk school before he emigrated at the age of twenty-one in 1888, though his professional education had to wait until after he had arrived in America.

At Askov, he came in contact with a real scientist in Poul la Cour, who had a physics degree from the University of Copenhagen and turned his back on a distinguished career in meteorology to teach at Askov. He was a popular teacher, a tireless experimenter, and an inspiration to the boys, who all admired him. Poul la Cour is remembered today primarily for his pioneering experiments with wind power, but he had a versatile scientific mind and taught a variety of subjects. I still have my grandfather’s notebook from his lectures on anatomy.

Besides lecturing on anatomy and many other subjects, Poul la Cour was the gymnastics instructor at Askov, and my grandfather loved gymnastics. Askov promoted a system of gymnastics based on teamwork and development of “the whole and undivided person,” rather than competitive gymnastics or military drill. Poul la Cour emphasized the link between anatomy and gymnastics, presenting anatomy in a way that made it useful to gymnastics instructors.14

Poul la Cour was a Grundtvigian Lutheran as well as a scientist. As a Christian teacher in the age of Charles Darwin, he felt compelled to confront questions of evolution and human spirituality, even in lectures on a scientific subject like anatomy. A Danish authority named Lange had developed a physiological theory of emotional responses and linked it to an argument that the soul was also merely an emotional response. My grandfather’s notebook shows that la Cour explained this theory at some length, showing how it related to common emotions like sorrow, fear, excitement, and shyness, and then went on to refute it, using scientific arguments but also incorporating literary references from Ludvig Holberg’s plays, Old Norse sagas, and Scandinavian folk tales to illustrate his points.

These lecture notes reflect a worldview and cultural horizons that were far removed from the views of people steeped in traditional lore like Ann Trøglborg or Hans Amlund. The world of tradition was giving way to the world of science, books, and reading
in rural Denmark during those decades of the late nineteenth century. At Askov, my grandfather began to move beyond his ancestral heritage and step out into a wide world that would take him from Jutland to Copenhagen and far beyond, into the wide spaces and dazzling cultural choices of the New World.

Six years before my grandfather emigrated from Denmark in 1888, a German physician in Berlin named Robert Koch proved the germ theory of disease in his laboratory. Kathleen Stokker has shown how Koch’s discovery of the tuberculosis bacillus began to revolutionize health care, and she has reconstructed a fascinating picture of how people in the Nordic lands dealt with ill health before they ever knew there were such things as germs.

If you are want to know how our ancestors dealt with the aches and pains of everyday life, who they went to in times of physical need, and how they explained the things that affect the body, you need to get your hands on Stokker’s fascinating book. Do not be put off by the word “Norwegian” in the title. Stokker approaches her subject with a wide knowledge of the history of medicine and puts her story into a broad international context. Moreover, the traditional health care provided by Danish folk healers like Ann Trøglborg and Hans Amlund was so similar to Norwegian traditional practices that her book will transport you into the world of your own Danish forebears—for better or worse, I might add, because health care among our ancestors was not always a pretty picture.

Stokker’s book is well illustrated, thoroughly documented, and a pleasure to read. The author was a chemistry major before turning to Scandinavian studies in graduate school, and she has an excellent background in the scientific as well as the cultural side of the subject. In the preface, she tells us that her own great-great-grandmother was a folk healer who was born in Norway in 1827 and emigrated to America in 1855, where she continued to practice traditional healing among her immigrant neighbors in Freeborn County, Minnesota.

The book is divided into ten chapters. The introductory chapter on “Healing the People” presents an overview of health care among ordinary people in Scandinavia in the era before the germ theory. Housewives took care of most ailments, men generally treated outdoor injuries, and a blacksmith or folk healer was called upon in more serious cases. All of them drew on a wealth of empirical lore, to which the folk healers added their magical formulae. Unfortunately, the value of cleanliness was not recognized, either among ordinary people and folk healers or even among professional physicians and midwives. People did value good health, however, and used many means to achieve it, including herbal tinctures in alcohol, mineral purgatives, bloodletting to draw illness out of the
body, cod-liver oil to combat rickets, milk as a universal medicine, and sugar or salt to draw out the liquid and starve bacteria in wounds.

Early Scandinavian immigrants to America were hit by typhoid, cholera, measles, and malaria. Doctors were just as rare in America as in the Old Country, and many of them were quacks with little education behind their fancy scrolls from diploma mills. However, there was plenty of patent medicine in America.

In Chapter Two, Stokker tells the stories of well-known folk healers in Norway, including Mor Sæther (1793-1851), who was Henrik Ibsen’s landlady for a time and whose medicines were used by many famous figures of the day. Another was Anne Brandfjeld (1815-1905), who treated rickets and scrofula with success and had two children with the goldsmith who made the King of Norway’s crown. Finally, there was Ivar Ringestad (1812-92), who brought his healing lore to America, where his brother-in-law was a prominent clergyman, Nils O. Brandt, and his daughter married the first president of St. Olaf College.

“The Pastor as Doctor” is the title of Chapter Three. Stokker points out that the Christian church has been involved in health care since the days of the medieval monasteries. King Christian V’s Norwegian Law of 1687 charged ministers to visit the sick, treat them if possible, and supervise the work of midwives. Many pastors and pastor’s wives were consulted on health issues, and there was generally a medical handbook or two in the parsonage library. Stokker points out that the “exceptional skill with words, intimate knowledge of sacred objects and spaces, and unquestioned authority” of the clergy led to a myth among lay people that ascribed occult powers acquired at the university in Wittenberg to some clergymen, perhaps even the possession of a Black Book of magical formulae going back to ancient Egypt. Just such a myth attached to Pastor Ancher Laugesen Borch of Lindeballe, and to many another learned Danish pastor in days gone by.

Chapter Four concentrates on these legends of the Black Book as a source of mystical, magical medicine. The Black Book was said to be the sixth and seventh books of Moses, omitted from Luther’s Bible, while others ascribed it to a mysterious author named Cyprianus, a Dane, or perhaps a medieval nun. The book existed in many forms, generally hand-written, though one version was published in Chicago in 1892 under the title of Oldtidens Sortebog (The Ancient Black Book). A copy of the Black Book passed down in the Amlund family, and Stokker examined some of the 150 or so that survive in Norway today, as well as a few copies brought to America by immigrants.

The Black Book generally contained formulae for dealing with ringworm, scabies, warts, snake and dog bites, sprains, rickets, colds, earache, hernia, fever, gangrene, epilepsy, and a variety of
other afflictions. Some remedies applied sympathetic magic, others used transference cures such as taking the illness out of the victim and putting it into a piece of yarn. Hans Amlund’s bandaged sticks were an example of a transference cure. Other Black Book formulae were used to stop bleeding, protect animals, or freeze thieves in their tracks. They were often used in conjunction with homemade medicines that contained frightening and disgusting ingredients. Rituals of various kinds were also associated with these curative methods, such as pilgrimages to sacred springs—there were holy springs in every part of Denmark—and offerings to the nisse or the old troll who lived in the nearest prehistoric mound. Sometimes a trollkat made of rags, fingernails, hair, and a few drops of blood was employed in transference magic. By the twentieth century, however, descendants of the old healers had grown wary of these old books and objects. Stokker interviewed one family in Moorhead, Minnesota, who burned their ancestral Norwegian Black Book as late as 1952.

During the course of the nineteenth century, home health-care books became very popular, and they are the subject of Chapter Five. They were in a tradition going all the way back to the ancient Greek physician and botanist, Dioscorides. A Dane named Henrik Harpstrøm brought this tradition to Scandinavia around the year 1200 AD. He also introduced the Viking herb, angelica, to European pharmacology as a remedy to ward off poison and cure rheumatism and consumption. Angelica tasted so good that French monks used it to flavor their Chartreuse and Benedictine liqueurs, and it is used for this purpose to this day. Printed Danish “doctor books” went back to works by Christiern Pedersen, published in 1532, and to Henrik Smid’s tremendously popular En skøn lystig ny Urtegaard (A Fair Joyous New Herb Garden) in six volumes from 1535-57.

By the nineteenth century, home health manuals had begun to emphasize the value of home-grown herbs and berries, including elderberry, to promote good health, and the use of bleeding, blistering by means of mustard plasters, plus a great variety of purgatives to drive out disease.

After Robert Koch’s sensational discovery of the tuberculosis bacillus, however, all of this began to change rapidly. Før Doktoren kommer (Before the Doctor Arrives), published in the Dano-Norwegian language in Decorah, Iowa, in 1892, explained the germ theory of disease. From that time on, home health-care books began to take a theoretical rather than a practical approach, describing how the body functioned and the need for clean air, sunlight, and pure water, but always ending with an emphasis on the need for professional health care by trained nurses and physicians.

In Chapter Six, Stokker turns to childbirth. Scandinavian and Scandinavian-American women delivered each other’s babies until the early twentieth century, sometimes assisted by a local midwife.
They drew upon a wealth of traditional aids. Pouches of chamomile soaked in warm milk were applied after birth to reduce the mother’s swelling and inflammation, and other effective herbal treatments were used. However, women also drank aquavit to ease birth pangs, and when neighboring women came by with rich food for the new mother, she treated them to a dram and took one herself. This was a practice the doctors did not like, nor did they approve of the prevailing standards of cleanliness, or lack thereof, among midwives and mothers alike. They wanted these rural women to stay in bed for nine days after childbirth, but who had time for that? The growing influence of professional midwives and physicians led inexorably to a long, drawn-out culture clash between traditional ways and the precepts of modern authorities.

Among women, everybody knew that the umbilical cord had to be cut properly or the child would not “be right,” and the placenta had to be marked with a cross and buried or it would return as a ghost. The baby was swaddled for six months to make it easier to care for and prevent trolls from snatching it and substituting a changeling. A cross or silver coin was sewn into the infant’s baptismal gown to protect against trolls as well, and the baptismal water was kept for use on skin rashes and warts. Naming customs were followed faithfully, generally naming a child for one of its grandparents to prevent the dead from returning to “claim the name” and sicken the child. In time, however, things began to change. Gradual improvements in hygiene and general health led to less frequent puerperal fever and a decline in the appallingly high rates of infant mortality.

The common disease of rickets, caused by Vitamin D deficiency, is the subject of Chapter Seven. All kinds of traditional remedies and magical formulae did little to eliminate it, and the theory persisted that children with rickets were changelings left by the trolls in return for a healthy, stolen baby. Finally, Nordic fishermen discovered that cod-liver oil was the answer. When I was growing up in Minnesota, we received a spoonful of cod-liver oil and another of wheat germ after breakfast, all winter long, just before we headed off to school.

Many a Danish household had a bottle of aquavit sitting on or near the stove in years gone by, and it frequently contained a sprig of caraway or infusions of health-giving herbs. Danish authors have described hundreds of recipes for herbal blends in aquavit. The bottle might be a klukflaske in the shape of an hourglass to make a gurgling sound when it poured, or even a snapsegris in the shape of a jolly pig. Stokker deals with alcohol as both medicine and scourge in Chapter Eight.

In Viking times and later, øl (ale) was seen as a gift of the gods, consecrated to them by saying the word, skål, before drinking, and consumed in their honor at Yule, betrothals, christenings, and
funerals. Its associations with good health carried over to distilled aquavit and were strengthened by the custom of infusing medicinal herbs, which also contributed to the color and taste. Aquavit was sometimes poured into rich, hot coffee for what was considered a healthy and bracing drink. Saint John’s Wort (*perikum*), once sacred to the god, Balder, made a famous universal curative in aquavit with its red juice and yellow flowers. Wormwood in aquavit for stomachache was also popular and had a delightful aroma if a sprig of mint was added. Stokker explains the chemistry behind the effects of these and other folk cures. In America, she tells us, Scandinavian immigrants often turned to patent medicines like Angostura or Dr. Hostetter’s Bitters, which were also herbal infusions in alcohol.

By the mid-nineteenth century, however, alcohol abuse in the Scandinavian countries and among immigrants in America had reached such a stage as to change the attitude of many people towards alcohol. Many came to see it as a plague upon society, rather than a gift of the gods and source of health.

The letting and staunching of blood is the focus of Stokker’s Chapter Nine. Everybody in nineteenth-century Scandinavia and America believed in the therapeutic value of bloodletting, which they saw as a natural cleansing process like menstruation. Sometimes, mistaken theories could have disastrous results. Dr. Benjamin Rush of colonial Philadelphia taught that twenty of the body’s twenty-five pounds of blood could safely be drained, but the body actually contains only around ten pounds (just over ten pints). When Rush’s theory was applied to President George Washington, he was drained of nine pints, and it killed him.

More commonly, gentler methods of bloodletting were used, such as “cupping” or leeching. Fat Swedish leeches were placed on the ailing area. Their saliva contains a local anesthetic, so the process is painless, and the leech drops off after it has drawn around an ounce of blood. Stokker claims that modern plastic surgeons have actually rediscovered the healing value of leeches. In the past, people kept them in jars of marsh water and sometimes even brought them along to America. Still, some Scandinavians in those days preferred a more substantial bleeding as a spring tonic. They snipped a vein in the ankle and sat with their foot in warm water until they fainted, when their caregiver would place a silver coin over the cut and bandage it; the patient generally claimed to feel “much better” when he or she revived.

Staunching the flow of blood following childbirth or serious accidents with an axe or scythe was quite another matter. People used vinegar, aquavit, or other substances in a styptic compress. In other cases, cobwebs, camphor, pepper, yarrow, lyng heather, tree fungus, or other natural sources of tannins and resins were applied to constrict blood vessels and stop the bleeding.
Stokker emphasizes the solid scientific value of empirical knowledge passed on by traditional Scandinavian healers. She also comments on the psychological effect of the confidence and trust that many healers inspired in their patients. Perhaps this explains a situation that has mystified modern researchers, who found that Sami (Lapp) healers in the far north of Norway can still staunch the flow of blood by muttering incantations over the afflicted person.

In her concluding chapter, Stokker recorded a number of home cures that she had collected from Norwegian and Norwegian-American informants as she was researching and writing her book. She concluded by summarizing her research in terms that apply to health care today. Self-care and home-based first aid are still important, and perhaps they are becoming even more so as HMOs promote them in order to reduce costs. Modern medical science is taking a new look at traditional remedies, including “interest in medicinal herbs, the belief that a glass of red wine promotes health, and some mothers’ preference for childbirth assisted by a midwife at home. Doctors are finding new uses for leeches and bloodletting, and nutritionists are recommending increased levels of Vitamin D.”

Finally, Stokker asks a series of important questions for health care in an increasingly global, multicultural world: “How does a society provide health care to those who can’t afford to pay for it? To what extent is health care the individual’s own responsibility? Should the patient’s social class determine the quality of the basic health care received? . . . How does faith—whether in the religious sense or in the health care provider—relate to recovery? Should medical education include alternative notions and methods of healing? . . . How do beliefs and experiences from the homeland influence an immigrant’s use and perception of medical care in the new land?”

These and other questions offer plenty of food for thought to the reader of this important, fascinating, and innovative book. All this comes together with a fascinating peek into the world of our ancestors. Don’t miss it.

J. R. Christianson
It could also grow from a crevice in a wall or church tower or a pollarded willow or poplar. A “white pin” of rowan wood held in the mouth made one invisible. These beliefs were very ancient. A tale from Vikings times told how a rowan growing out of a cliff had saved the life of the god, Thor, when a Giantess nearly drowned him. Archaeologists have found evidence of belief in the magical power of rowan wood going all the way back to the Bronze Age. See the websites <http://www.skovognatur.dk/Lokalt/Soehoejlandet/Oplev/Traeer_fortaled_historier/Flyveroen.htm> and <http://da.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flyver%C3%B8n>, accessed 27 February 2008.

8 Birgitte Rørbye, Kloge folk og skidtfolk: Kvaksalveriets epoke i Danmark (Copenhagen: Politikens Forlag, 1976), 121-22. For many examples of traditional healing lore from Denmark and the other Nordic countries, see the long section on “Healers and Wise Folk” in Reimund Kvideland and Henning K. Sehmdorf, eds., Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legend (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 127-55.


11 Her pastor for many years was Hans Kau, who knew her well and wrote about her in Kau, “Ann’ Trøglborg,” 75-95.

12 Kau, “Ann’ Trøglborg,” 85. See 84-90 for more of her treatments.


Interest in the immigration, history, and fate of the Danes in Argentina has greatly increased in Denmark with the publication of two books on the topic in 2007. This interest is above all due to the fact that Danes immediately compare the Danish settlers in Argentina with the Moslem immigrants in today’s Denmark. Indeed, the two books are already being used in schools in Denmark to get students thinking and discussing immigrant issues. The comparison can be made, as the Danes did not assimilate readily in Argentina, taking three to four generations to integrate, unlike Danish immigrants to the United States and Canada.

The two books are written by “Danes,” one born in Argentina, the other in Turkey. 

*Indvandrernes Paradis* (The Immigrants’ Paradise) was written by Adil Erdem, a Kurd, born in Turkey in 1964, who came to Denmark in 1982. His book reveals how Danes in Argentina behaved very much like Moslems today in Denmark, in regard to the host population, integration and values.

The other book, *Danskere som indvandrere — Det dansk-argentsins eksempel* (Danes as Immigrants—The Danish-Argentine Example), was written by Erik Dybdal Møller, who was born in Necochea in Argentina, where his father was a Danish Lutheran pastor. Later, Møller studied theology at the University of Århus in Denmark. Not surprisingly, his master’s thesis dealt with the Danes in Argentina. Currently, he is pastor at St. Paul’s Church in Århus. In 1990-1992, he was pastor in Necochea, his birthplace. The book is about Danish immigrants in Argentina, their immigration, history, and integration into Argentinean society. At the same time, it is a very personal account, with many references to his own experiences in Argentina.

Nearly 13,000 Danes immigrated to Argentina in the period 1860-1930. The vast majority were farmers, while others were laborers, artisans, and skilled workers. Nearly all settled on the Pampas, the great prairie west and south of Buenos Aires.

In area, Argentina is the eighth-largest country in the world, much larger than Britain, France, Germany, Spain and Italy put together. Well over ninety percent of Argentina’s population is of European origin, with the Spanish and Italians dominating. The population is overwhelmingly Catholic and, even though there is complete freedom of religion in Argentina, Catholicism does enjoy a privileged status and receives preferential treatment.

From 1860 to 1930, Argentina was truly a land of opportunity, above all for Danish farmers, workers and day laborers. Whereas it was nearly impossible in Denmark in the nineteenth century for
most young men to acquire a farm, the land in Argentina was free, and there was lots of it on the vast Pampas—it just required hard work, and then a good living was nearly guaranteed.

The first Danish settlement was established at Tandil, on the Pampas south of Buenos Aires. Tandil had been founded in connection with a fort, which was built to help protect the settlers from attack by the native Indians.

A major promoter of Danish immigration to Argentina was Juan Fugl. He was born on the island of Lolland in Denmark and was baptized Hans Christensen Fugl. He grew up on a smallholding and later became a schoolteacher. Juan Fugl arrived in Tandil in 1847. It wasn’t long before he got involved in the town council, and he was the driving force in establishing a school. He was also successful in other ways.

On a visit to Denmark, he told his family, neighbors, and friends about the great opportunities in Argentina. On his return to Argentina, he brought back nineteen immigrants, mostly farmers and skilled workers. They in turn wrote back and told of unlimited opportunities—above all that it was easy to get one’s own farm. This initiated the start of Danish immigration to Argentina. The Danes who arrived in Tandil would work at first for other Danes, before setting out on their own. Later Danish immigrants settled in Necochea and Tres Arroyos.

The years 1880-1929 were a period of economic prosperity for Argentina. Foreign investments were high, led primarily by Britain. Immigrants from Europe poured into the country and opened up the Pampas for settlement, led above all by Italians and Spaniards. The economic boom was mainly due to export-led growth, particularly the export of beef and wheat. By 1929, Argentina had the world’s fourth highest per capita Gross Domestic Product. These years of prosperity, however, ended when the New York stock market crashed in 1929, triggering a worldwide depression. The crash also ended the period of mass immigration from Europe. Both politically and economically, Argentina went into a tailspin from which the country has never fully recovered.

The large influx of European immigrants influenced the country’s demographics and culture. From about the year 1900, Argentineans began to identify more with Europe and the United States than the rest of Latin America.

When the Danish colony had grown to a certain size and it was time to call a minister, the first person to fill this call was Pastor Oscar Meulengracht, who spoke no Spanish upon his arrival. He can be seen as a Grundtvigian, as he emphasized the Danish language, Danish culture, and history. The succeeding pastor was indeed a Grundtvigian, having been trained as such. According to Erik Dybdal Møller, this helped maintain the Danish language as the main language in the home until the third and fourth generation.
As the third and fourth generation are now much better at Spanish than Danish, a certain amount of assimilation has gradually taken place. However, the Danes still find it difficult to convert to Catholicism.

The Danes in Argentina are very much aware of the fact that they are Protestants, their forefathers having protested against the Roman Catholic Church. What the Danes found objectionable in particular, according to Erik Dybdal Møller, was the Church Service in Latin (not Spanish); the role, power and infallibility of the Pope; the worship of the Virgin Mary; the funeral services with open coffin, as well as the large aboveground mausoleums in the cemeteries.

Due to the emphasis on being Danes, the Danish Lutherans were not in a hurry to link up with the German and Swedish Lutherans in Argentina, nor British Protestants. At the same time as the Danes shunned collaboration with other Protestants, the Danish colonists strongly felt that their religion and their culture was superior to that of their Catholic neighbors. While feeling superior to the native Indians and Catholics in general, the Danes were in turn referred to as Los Gringos, an offensive term for newcomers to Argentina who were not of Spanish or Italian background.

Møller is well placed to write Danes As Immigrants, as he lived in Argentina as a boy and later served as a minister there—combining his call with research on the Danish community. He was sent to Necochea by DKU (Dansk Kirke i Udlandet), the official organization supporting Danish Lutheran Churches abroad, now enlarged and changed to DSUK (De Danske Sømands- og Udlandskirker). DSUK presently supports the Danish Lutheran congregations in Buenos Aires, Necochea, Tandil and Tres Arroyos. The current minister in Necochea, Pastor Steen Lerfeldt, is from Denmark. Moreover, Danish cultural personalities, religious leaders as well as politicians, visit the Danish communities in Argentina on a regular basis. In recent years, visitors have included Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen, former Prime Minister Poul Schlüter, and Bishop Jan Lindhardt.

Unfortunately, Danes As Immigrants is not well written. The language of Erik Dybdal Møller does not flow. At times he has problems expressing himself. He is repetitive. The book could have used some editing. Instead of getting the book published by a small publishing house in Western Jutland, he should have approached one of the large book publishers in Copenhagen, who would have helped him with editing, photos, an index, and marketing.

What, nevertheless, makes Erik Dybdal Møller’s book fascinating is that it is a story of immigration, so well known in the case of the United States and Canada. But in Argentina, the circumstances were different. It is a Spanish-speaking country with a Latin culture, and it is primarily Catholic. The fact that few of the
other settlers were Northern European or Protestant made an indisputable difference. It is taking much longer for the Danes to integrate into Argentinean society. While the Danish immigrants are mainly Spanish speaking now, and see themselves as Argentineans, most of the people of Danish background in Argentina still hang on to their Protestant faith.

The book, which has not been translated into English, divulges a dramatic and particular immigrant story, far from the newcomers’ home country. It is a story which resonates in the Denmark of today, and one that Danish communities in the United States and Canada will find highly intriguing.

Rolf Buschardt Christensen


They called him “the Russian Columbus,” but maybe it should be “the Danish Columbus,” because Vitus Bering (1681-1741) was born and raised in the Danish town of Horsens, and he was as Danish as anybody could be.

Peter the Great was Tsar of Russia in those days, and there were still many blank spots on the map of the world. Young Vitus Bering, who had already sailed to India and back, signed on in Amsterdam to join the Russian Navy. The year was 1703, and he was twenty-two years old.

The biggest blank on the map was the North Pacific. A new map of Asia, made by the best cartographer of France in 1700, showed the Middle East, India, the Molucca Straits, the Spice Islands, and even the interior of Siberia in stunning detail. When it came to the northern end of Japan, however, there was nothing but a mysterious, imaginative coastline that projected far to the east, out into the Pacific Ocean. Beyond that was *terra incognita*. Siberia dissolved into a shadowy *Mer d’Amour* or Ocean of Love, with the comment, “One still does not know where this point of land ends and whether it does not connect to some other continent.”

Nobody in the wide world of European exploration knew what lay in those regions. If there was a land bridge, then Asia and America were connected. If not, there had to be a strait of flowing water between them, and then, it should be possible to sail from the Arctic coast of Siberia all the way to China and India. Peter the Great needed to know if there was a northern route to Asia that
Russia could control. In 1724, he organized a large-scale expedition of exploration, and Captain Bering, now a hardened veteran of twenty years in Russian service, was put in command.

It took years just to cross Siberia. There were no roads, so you traveled by water. The immense Siberian rivers all flowed north, but they meandered along the way, so you could portage from one river system to the next and gradually make your way eastwards, spending winters in the immense log fortresses that marked key points along the way or venturing on through the snows in a horse-drawn sleigh. It took until 1727 for Captain Bering to reach the miserable outpost of Okhotsk, north of Japan, where his men built a ship, Fortuna. Bering sailed her to the eastern shore of the Kamchatka peninsula, where he built another ship, St. Gabriel, and headed north until he saw the coastline of Siberia fall far away to the west. This proved that Siberia and North America were not connected. Captain Bering had discovered what we know today as Bering Strait.

It took forever for the news to reach St. Petersburg, even with the Siberian pony express, but it took even longer for Bering himself to return. When he finally arrived back in the Russian capital in 1730, he was hailed as a hero. Tsar Peter was dead, but his niece, Empress Anna, organized a second expedition on a huge scale, sending out ethnographers, topographers, cartographers, botanists, zoologists, and other experts from the new Russian Academy of Sciences, as well as soldiers, sailors, shipwrights, and all the men needed to build and man the ships. Over three thousand people were involved in one way or another in the Great Northern Expedition under the overall command of two Danes and a Russian:
Captain Vitus Jonassen Bering and his lieutenants, Martin Spangberg (born 1696 in Ribe) and Aleksei Chirikov.

As part of the plan, Bering in 1735 sent two ships northwards from Iakutsk on the Lena River under the command of a Norwegian, Lieutenant Peter Lassenius. Their orders were to sail the Lena to its mouth in the Arctic Ocean and then sail eastwards along the northern coast of Siberia to Bering Strait and on to Okhotsk. Pack ice blocked the route, however, as soon as they hit the Arctic Ocean, and they died of scurvy near the mouth of the Lena.

Meanwhile, other members of the expedition explored the trade routes leading from Siberia into China, while Bering and his principal lieutenants proceeded to Okhotsk. Bering’s wife, Anna Christina, soon followed with the two youngest Bering children, while two older sons stayed behind in boarding school.

In 1738, an expedition under the command of Martin Spangberg explored the route from Okhotsk to Japan and the Kurile Islands, opening a new artery of trade for Russia. Then, under Bering’s direct command, two new, two-masted brigs, St. Peter and St. Paul, were built and sailed round to the eastern shore of Kamchatka, where Bering founded the port of Petropavlovsk at Avacha Bay in 1740. This became the launching site for voyages of exploration into the icy, fog-bound seas and islands of the North Pacific.

Bering was in command of the St. Peter and Chirikov of the St. Paul when the two ships set out from Petropavlovsk in June of 1741. They soon lost sight of each other in dense fog. Both ships continued to sail east. Chirikov began to discover some of the Aleutian Islands in mid-July, but then, he headed back to Petropavlovsk before the winter storms reached full fury. Meanwhile, Bering was cruising along the immense mountains of the Alaskan mainland. He continued to explore, late into the season, before finally heading back for Petropavlovsk in the teeth of ferocious gales. He never made it. Bering’s ship was forced to put in to Bering Island, where the St. Peter was beaten to pieces and the captain slowly died of heart failure, while many of his crew succumbed to scurvy. Next summer, survivors on the island built a small boat out of wrecked timber and finally reached Petropavlovsk in August of 1742, bringing along splendid sea otter pelts that helped to touch off the Russian rush to claim and settle Alaska.

This book focuses on a cache of sixteen letters written by Vitus and Anna Christina Bering in the barren far-eastern outpost of Okhotsk during the winter of 1740. These letters to friends, family members, and their sons left Okhotsk in the saddle bags of an imperial courier on 5 February 1740, were carried across the immensity of Siberia, and reached St. Petersburg by 2 September 1740, along with official reports from Bering and Spangberg, written in Russian by their secretaries. All sixteen letters are printed in full in the German original and in English translation. They are
fascinating reading, giving a clear picture of Anna Christina’s gushing, emotional personality and Vitus Bering’s pious, precise, and authoritative tone.

After Bering’s death, all of their possessions, including furniture, household furnishings, linen, porcelain, silver, clothing, a gold watch, and huge troves of valuable Siberian furs, were carefully inventoried and transported in the winter of 1741-42 by the widow with her two children, servants, and an escort of five soldiers, all the way from Okhotsk to St. Petersburg in seven sleighs. The inventory gives what the authors call “a family portrait: an isolated fragment of European culture . . . on the shore of an unknown sea.” They add, “We may imagine Bering dressed in various combinations of the garments listed: velour trousers, black silk stockings, white stockings, buckles with inlaid crystals, maybe even the sword with the silver-wrought sword belt, and . . . a wig from the vast collection.” Even when sailing to his death on the fog-bound seas, a captain has to look his best, and Bering certainly did. History, too, has painted a flattering portrait of this brave, intelligent, and indomitable Danish explorer.

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