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The Bridge and the Newsletter are semi-annual publications of the Society. Manuscripts dealing with the Danish immigrant experience in North America are invited. Address submissions to Peter L. Petersen, Editor of The Bridge, 1407 Twenty-Sixth Street, Canyon, TX 79015. E-mail repete71@hotmail.com

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Ames, Iowa (ISSN 0741-1200)
Editorial Statement

The articles in this issue of *The Bridge* touch on a wide variety of topics, ranging from Cold War diplomacy to fairy tales, to immigrant autobiographies, to a frontier lawman and to how The Danish Immigrant Museum manages its collections.

Anders Bærholm Frikke used a grant from the DAHS Bodtker Fund to support his research at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. and other government repositories on diplomatic relations following World War II between the United States and Denmark.

The names of Hans Christian Andersen and Horatio Alger, Jr. seldom appear in the same sentence, but two scholars, Helle Neegaard from Denmark and Robert Smith from Scotland, compare and contrast the impact the writings of these two famous authors had on the entrepreneurial spirit of Denmark and the United States.

Julie K. Allen examines the autobiographies of three Danish Americans—Carl Christian Jensen, Thomas Miller (T.M.) Nielsen, and Karl Jørgensen—written during the period between the two World Wars, a time of nativism and Americanization, and describes how each writer sought to “explain the phenomenon of the Danish-American and show Danes to be the stuff of which good Americans are made.”

Johan Windmüller revisits the story of Chris Madsen and raises some interesting questions about this Danish immigrant who became a celebrated American soldier and peace officer. Sometimes things are not as they first appear, according to the author.

Angela Stanford explains how artifacts are managed at The Danish Immigrant Museum. With 40,000 items in the collection, it is not as easy as one might think.

Don’t forget to read J. R. Christianson’s review of another fine book by Odd S. Lovoll.

For the convenience of our readers and researchers interested in the Danish American experience, an index to all issues of *The Bridge* is now available on the DAHS website.
Contributors to This Issue

Julie K. Allen is an assistant professor of Scandinavian Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The great-great-granddaughter of a Danish immigrant from Bornholm, she grew up in Hawaii, earned her B. A. at Brigham Young University, and her M.A. and Ph.D. in Germanic Language and Literature at Harvard University. She teaches courses on Scandinavian history, Søren Kiergaard, Scandinavian Heritage in America, Hans Christian Andersen, and advanced Danish language. In addition to her interest in Scandinavian American culture, she has published articles about Georg Brandes, Franziska zu Reventlow, and Peter Christian Kierkegaard.

Anders Kristian Bærholm Frikke earned a Masters degree in history and Danish literature from the University of Southern Denmark in Odense in 2006. He also studied at Ohio University for two years. He is a recipient of a Bodtker Grant from the Danish American Heritage Society for research in the United States and has published several articles on Danish-American relations during the Cold War. Currently he is an associate professor at Middelfart Gymnasium and Højere Forberedelseseksamen. He lives in Odense.

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

Helle Neergaard currently holds an Associate Professorship in Entrepreneurship at the Aarhus School of Business, Aarhus
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Angela Stanford has a Bachelor of Arts Degree in History from Graceland University in Lamoni, Iowa, and a Master of Arts Degree in Historical Administration from Eastern Illinois University in Charleston. She has been active in the museum field for ten years and has been the Collections Manager and Registrar at The Danish Immigrant Museum for three and a half years. Angela lives with her husband, Matthew, in Shelby, Iowa. When not at the museum, she enjoys bicycling, gardening, and spending time with her dogs.

John Robert Christianson has written or translated twelve books, including a biography of Tycho Brahe, and more than 100 articles on various aspects of Scandinavian and Scandinavian-American history. He was editor of The Bridge from 1999 to 2002. He divides his residency between Minneapolis and Decorah, Iowa.
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One of the most emotionally charged issues related to American immigration, past and present is the question of how quickly and completely immigrants should be expected to assimilate into mainstream American culture. Throughout the nineteenth century, the prevailing attitude in America was that assimilation of immigrants would happen naturally and gradually, but the first decades of the twentieth century saw the rise of nativism and a much more aggressive approach to the Americanization of immigrants. While these trends peaked during World War I, their reverberations continued to impact immigrant groups throughout America throughout the decades preceding World War II. One group that found itself unexpectedly, considering its members’ high levels of English mastery and American citizenship, singled out for criticism during this period was Danish-Americans, who responded to the impugning of their loyalty to their adopted homeland by accelerating the pace and fervor of their Americanization throughout the 1920s and 30s.

Nowhere is this attitude more apparent than in Danish-American autobiographical texts from the interwar period. Nativism during and after World War I heightened and focused the self-perception and self-representation of Danish immigrants to the U.S. Several autobiographies by Danish-Americans from this period attempt to explain the phenomenon of the Danish-American and show Danes to be the stuff of which good Americans are made. Each author traces his individual transformation from immigrant to Danish-American, following the pattern established by the Danish-born photojournalist Jacob A. Riis’ 1901 autobiography The Making of an American. The final chapter of Riis’ book, entitled “The American Made,” concludes with Riis’ account of seeing the American flag on a ship in a Danish harbor and realizing “that it was my flag; that my children’s home was mine, indeed; that I also had become an
American in truth.” Writing at the turn of the century, Riis depicts this change as a natural, almost unconscious evolution, but the interwar autobiographers document a much more deliberate metamorphosis, demonstrating their eagerness to prove Theodore Roosevelt’s alleged comment to Riis, “Your countrymen are among the best Americans.”

Autobiographical constructions of Danish-American identity afforded immigrants the opportunity to explore the dualistic nature of their cultural identity and determine their relationship both to the old country and to their new home, navigating between what John Bodnar and Werner Sollors have identified as “descent—loyalty to an ancestral heritage—and consent—a need to show loyalty to new cultures and political structures.” Danish-American literature, fiction and non-fiction, allowed members of the far-flung immigrant community to express the group’s divided self-consciousness, caught between loyalty to its ancestral heritage and to its chosen future, and suggest means of reconciling both traditions. More specifically, autobiographical texts gave Danish-Americans an opportunity to construct and legitimize their cultural identity within the American socio-political system, a task that became particularly pressing in the 1920s and 30s.

The construction of a peculiarly Danish-American cultural identity is the theme of three autobiographical texts by Danish-Americans from the interwar period: Carl Christian Jensen’s An American Saga (1927), Thomas Miller (T.M.) Nielsen’s How a Dane Became an American (1935), and Karl Jørgensen’s Dansk Amerika (1930). All three texts describe the events of the author’s own life while also attempting to systematize the evolution of the ideal Danish-American, in terms of cultural acclimatization, language usage, religious affiliation, and the choice of marriage partner. Although they share a common purpose, they direct themselves at different audiences. The first two texts, written in English and published by American publishing houses, illustrate and advocate the total integration of Danish immigrants into American culture, while the third text, written in Danish and published in Denmark, serves as an explanation to Danes in the home country of how Danish immigration to America shapes both the immigrant and the country
he has adopted, to the ultimate benefit of both parties. Despite the differences between them, all three texts emphasize that an individual’s desire to become an American outweighs all other considerations, that the process of becoming an American is a matter of will, and that early twentieth-century Danish-Americans possessed this determination in rich measure.

Before turning to the autobiographies themselves, however, it is important to explore the cultural climate in America, particularly as related to the issue of Danish immigration and assimilation. In general terms, efforts by Danish-Americans in the interwar period to use autobiography as a means of documenting their ethnic group’s dedication to American ideals are responding to the overall climate of distrust of foreign-born Americans at the time. Political rhetoric at the highest levels of American government supported the total assimilation of immigrants. In a speech delivered on May 10, 1915, President Woodrow Wilson stated, “America does not consist of national groups. A man who thinks of himself as belonging to a particular national group in America has not yet become an American, and the man who goes among you to trade upon your nationality is no worthy son to live under the stars and stripes.”9 Later the same year, on October 12, former President Theodore Roosevelt polemicized, “The foreign-born population of this country must be an Americanized population. [. . .] It must talk the language of native-born fellow citizens, it must possess American citizenship and American ideals. [. . .] It must stand firm by the oath of allegiance in word and deed and show that in every fact it has renounced allegiance to every prince, potentate or foreign government.”10 Such blanket pronouncements of the inadmissibility of foreign identity in America created an expectation that becoming an American meant renouncing one’s previous identity, as the title of T. M. Nielsen’s autobiography, How a Dane became an American, makes explicit.

However, a more specific catalyst for the pronounced efforts of Danes in particular to market their Americanness may well have been a speech given on July 4, 1918, by Iowa Governor William Lloyd Harding, in which he accused Iowa’s Danish-Americans of gross ingratitude toward America for speaking Danish in their
churches and schools. He then went on to malign the Danish-Americans for their supposed unworthiness for the blessings America had bestowed upon them, stating “Now, think of a man who was brought from the filth of Denmark and placed on a farm for which he was paid perhaps $3 an acre. Ye gods and fishes, what Iowa has done for him he can never repay.” Although the governor later denied his provocative and offensive pronouncements, the tone of his speech was in keeping with his record of antipathy toward foreign-born Americans, an attitude exemplified by his decision to ban the public use, including personal conversations on trains and over the telephone, of all foreign languages in Iowa for the duration of World War I. This policy came under fire from many of his constituents, but aroused the particular ire of Iowa’s admittedly small Danish-American community, which not only tended to live in heavily Danish communities but also nurtured resentment over the repression of Danish in the German-occupied duchy of Slesvig. Governor Harding’s infamous July 4 remarks prompted many angry letters to the editor of the Des Moines Review, including a statement from the Danish-American theologian Peder Sørensen (P. S.) Vig, usually a moderate on the language issue, who argued that

Citizenship, true loyalty and the speaking of any certain language do not absolutely go together. If so were the case there could be no American speaking traitors nor many true patriots speaking a foreign tongue. But we all know that there are many of both classes and only too many of the first. Patriotism and loyalty are not matters of the lip, but of the heart, otherwise a parrot might be patriotic, and a stammerer dying for his country a filthy slacker only, according to the logic of fanaticism.

Although Danish-Americans took Wilson’s and Roosevelt’s counsel seriously and strove to prove themselves truly Americanized, they differentiated between linguistic ability and political loyalty, as Vig’s letter illustrates.

For Danish-Americans in the early twentieth century, becoming American mandated patriotism and loyalty to America, but not necessarily the renunciation of all connections to Danish culture. J. R.
Christianson summarizes this position as the Scandinavian-American press of the time presented it, namely that the oath taken at the time of naturalization unconditionally transferred political loyalty from the homeland to the United States, but that this oath did not surrender the right to utilize a mother tongue in daily speech or to preserve rapport with the homeland culture through the maintenance of ethnic societies. In other words, civic obligation was one thing and cultural orientation another.\textsuperscript{15}

In terms of civic obligation, Danes were eager to demonstrate their allegiance to the United States; Vig’s impassioned defense of an ideological rather than linguistic basis for patriotism and Americanism is validated, for Danish-Americans, at least, by the statistics for Danish-Americans serving in the U.S. military during World War I. Although Swedish-Americans were generally pro-German, most Danes were fiercely anti-German and ready to fight on the American side. In July 1918, when Governor Harding made his infamous comments, over 30,000 Danish-Americans were serving in the United States Armed Forces.\textsuperscript{16} In fact, Danish-Americans’ loyalty to their new homeland was so strong that it occasionally baffled their Danish countrymen. J. E. Bøggild, keynote speaker at the 1915 Danish National Celebration in Chicago wondered, “What are the enchanting characteristics of this land that bind all those that have once settled here? For it is the case that America exercises a witchcraft over all those that come under its influence.”\textsuperscript{17}

Governor Harding’s attack on Iowa’s Danish-Americans was therefore all the more disconcerting for its unexpectedness, given the Danish immigrant community’s exemplary track record for rapid and thorough assimilation into American society. Long before World War I-related pressures of nativism and Americanization exerted themselves, Danish-Americans had demonstrated an exceptional willingness to become linguistically and officially a part of American society. The majority of Danish immigrants regarded learning and speaking English, often at the expense of Danish, as essential in making the transition to their new home.\textsuperscript{18} The United States Census of Population, which tracks the ability of immigrants to speak English, reported in 1911 that 97 percent of Danish immigrants...
spoke English, compared to 53 percent for other ethnic groups. By 1930, 99 percent of Danish-Americans could speak English.\textsuperscript{19} Similarly, by 1930, seventy-five percent of nearly 180,000 Danish-born Americans had been naturalized, the highest percentage of any national group in the United States.\textsuperscript{20}

Scholars have suggested a wide range of factors to account for the Danes’ eagerness to become fully American, ranging from a general lack of national pride among Danes in the aftermath of Denmark’s humiliating military defeat by Germany in 1864 to the Danish immigrants’ single-minded focus on achieving economic success. The most widely accepted explanation for the generally more rapid assimilation of Danish immigrants than other ethnic groups, including their Swedish or Norwegian counterparts, centers on the fact that the settlement practices of Danish immigrants on the whole privileged individual assimilation over cultural conservation. Since Danish immigration to America began in earnest several decades later than from Germany, Sweden, and Norway, there were few Danish outposts on the frontier; instead, Danes often helped stabilize existing settlements. By the time large numbers of Danes were arriving regularly in America toward the end of the nineteenth century, the railroads made travel swift and safe, eliminating the need to travel in groups for safety crossing the plains. As a result, Danes often immigrated as individuals and blended into established communities. The high proportion of single men within Danish immigrant groups resulted in many of them marrying outside the Danish-American community. According to a study conducted in Chicago between 1880 and 1900, 27 percent of Danes married outside their ethnic group, in contrast to 19 percent of Swedes and only 8 percent of Norwegians.\textsuperscript{21}

In \textit{The Danish Americans}, George Nielsen suggests that these immigration patterns resulted in relatively few centralized Danish settlements that could attract later immigrants.\textsuperscript{22} In contrast to Swedes and Norwegians, who congregated in a few states, Danes spread out throughout the northern United States, in a swath stretching from Massachusetts to California. In 1890, when fifty percent of Norwegian immigrants to the United States were located in Minnesota and Wisconsin, the largest Danish settlement at the
same time (in Iowa) contained only 11.7 percent of Danish immigrants. These numbers seem to demonstrate that individual survival took precedence over community building, although Henrik Bredmose Simonsen, in his study of the Danish Lutheran communities in the U.S., argues that many attempts were made to establish Danish colonies that would preserve Danish culture and traditions, as well as providing an infrastructure of support for new immigrants from Denmark.

Another central factor in the dispersal and subsequent assimilation of Danish immigrants was the Danes’ lack of a unifying religious organization, such as the Swedish Augustan Synod. Instead, tension between the Grundtvigian and Inner Mission camps within the Danish state church persisted among Danish immigrant groups in America and caused deep divisions within the immigrant community, both in terms of religious practice and attitude toward the preservation of Danish cultural and linguistic identity, which the Grundtvigians promoted, while the Inner Mission adherents focused more on bringing their Christian message to as many of their neighbors, regardless of ethnic background, as possible. Nielsen argues that the viability of Danish-American institutions was tenuous from the beginning due to the small size and loose organization of Danish families and societies, but also because of the prevalence of strife and divisiveness within the Danish-American community. The solution that many Danes chose to this discord within the immigrant group was “dispersal, separation from the Danish community, and a more rewarding fellowship within American institutions.” Whatever their specific individual reasons, the majority of Danish immigrants opted to become part of the society they encountered in America, rather than establishing one of their own, and this tendency intensified as Danish immigration to the U.S. tapered off in the years following World War I and the implementation of strict immigration quotas.

Each of the major waves of Danish immigration to the U.S. has a particular character that reflects the way the immigrants viewed themselves and their relationship to America. Anne Lisbeth Olsen and Niels Peter Stilling classify Danish immigration into five general periods: 1) from 1820 to 1850, individual Danes, primarily men,
scouted out the situation and fanned the desire to emigrate among those back home; 2) from 1850 to 1870, families and groups of Mormons emigrated and settled near each other in western America; 3) from 1870 to 1895, massive emigration by young, single Danes from famine-stricken rural areas seeking work was the norm; 4) from 1895 to 1910, dissatisfied city-dwellers sought independence in America; 5) from 1910 to 1930, emigration by the lower classes was replaced by the “know-how emigration” of specialized laborers. After 1930, Danish emigration decreased to a trickle of individuals who did not share a common purpose in setting out for America. The earliest Danish immigrants shared in the thrill of discovering a pristine land, while those who came in the peak years, between 1850 and 1914, struggled to survive in that wilderness and to found communities. Later immigrants came to a largely settled country where they often had Danish connections to help them get started, but also faced the danger of replicating Danish social and ideological divisions within the immigrant communities. By the time Danish immigration subsided, coinciding more or less exactly with the resurgence of nativism in America, Danish-Americans were no longer strangers in their adopted country; for better or worse, they were a part of American society. The challenge they faced now was determining the nature of their identity as Danish-Americans, a question that required conscious negotiation between the demands of the old world and the new.

When large-scale Danish immigration to the United States began in the mid-nineteenth century, Danes enjoyed relatively easy access to American society because of their similarities to the dominant Anglo-Protestant ethnic and religious groups. Like many of the earliest immigrants, most Danes sought religious freedom and economic opportunity in the new world. Nielsen asserts that “in nearly every way, including their values and the desire for economic success, the Danes fit the American system.” In general, Danes matched the Caucasian, Protestant profile of prosperous Americans, and although they experienced individually the abuse that all “greenhorns” encountered, as a group they merged smoothly into most American communities. In some cases, their Americanization was so ingrained that many Danish immigrants around the turn of
the century referred to themselves as “Danish-born Americans,” almost as if to imply they had always been Americans despite being born in Denmark.

In the absence of readily apparent ethnic or religious differences from their American neighbors, the greatest and often most obvious obstacle to Danish assimilation was language. In light of the controversy surrounding Governor Harding’s foreign language ban July 4th speech, it is not surprising that the role of language in shaping Danish-American identity was constantly an issue of debate. In making the transition from homesick newcomer to naturalized citizen, Danish-Americans continually struggled to define their linguistic identity. Despite a desire to learn English, many Danes struggled with mastering English pronunciation and felt unable to express their thoughts accurately in the new language. Yet although the Danish language represented a link to the homeland, it did not always provide a bond with other Danish immigrants, since many Danish immigrants spoke regional dialects rather than standard Danish and thus did not share a common vernacular with their countrymen. In fact, speakers of more pronounced dialects of Danish were often ridiculed by other Danes to the point that many Danish communities moved away from the use of Danish entirely to ensure peace. First- and second-generation Danish-Americans also disagreed about the role of Danish, both in private and public settings. The American-born children of Danish immigrants considered themselves first and foremost Americans and were often embarrassed by their parents’ dependence on a foreign tongue and refused to speak it. As the numeric balance of Danish-Americans swung in favor of American-born, the connection to the home country represented by the Danish language became increasingly tenuous. Moreover, although a few Danish-American newspapers survived well into the twentieth century, the diminutive size of the Danish-American community limited its ability to support its own presses, as larger ethnic groups like the Swedes and Norwegians could. Linguistic similarities between written Danish and Norwegian led to some joint publications and organizations, but such cooperative efforts often led to the subsuming of Danish-American identity under the rubric
of Scandinavian-American, a label which first emerged from the commingling of Danes, Swedes, and Norwegians on the American side of the Atlantic.\textsuperscript{32}

In the evolution of a collective Danish-American identity, therefore, 1930 stands out as a watershed year in terms of both the number and cultural orientation of Danish-Americans. On one hand, quota restrictions put in place during the 1920s, in conjunction with the tightening of the labor market as result of the onset of the Great Depression, caused a dramatic drop in emigration from Denmark: in contrast to the 32,430 Danes who immigrated between 1921 and 1930, only 2,559 Danes immigrated between 1931 and 1940.\textsuperscript{33} On the other, 1930 marks the numeric peak of the Danish-American community: in 1930, 179,474 Americans were Danish-born and another 320,410 had one or two Danish parents, totaling 529,142 Danish-Americans.\textsuperscript{34} At the same time, however, circulation figures for Danish-American newspapers in 1930 reached a new low of 37,800. Only one out of five first-generation Danes and one out of twelve American-born Danes subscribed to a Danish-American newspaper, which Nielsen interprets to mean that “the language was not being used and the papers intended to provide cohesiveness to the community were not being read.”\textsuperscript{35} In other words, although the Danish-American community in 1930 was the largest it would ever be, the interest of Danish-Americans in retaining strong linguistic and social ties as a cohesive immigrant community was in sharp decline, reflecting a strong internal motivation among Danish-Americans to create a cultural identity for themselves as full-fledged Americans within the American cultural and social framework.

Abandoning their emotional attachment to Danish culture and traditions was, however, one thing that the Danish-American community could not and would not do. In interwar America, the retention of Danish customs and traditions had become a sociopsychological issue for many Danish-Americans that was instrumental in their perception of their own cultural identity. The America they so wholeheartedly embraced was in many ways a Danish America, for it was colored by their inherited cultural preconceptions and beliefs, regardless of the language they spoke. Erling Duus captures this attitude in his description of his
grandparents in his 1971 memoir *Danish-American Journey*: “Of course, they learned to speak good English and they lived in an American world that they became somewhat at home in, but the spiritual center of their lives was Danish America.” Max Henius, the founder of the annual Rebildfest celebrating July 4th in Denmark, expressed the emotional loyalty Danish-Americans felt towards their cultural home thus:

> The love for the land of our birth is not lessened because we have stopped being Danes, in the sense of citizenship. [. . .] But we *will* not and *cannot* destroy the relationship of blood. During our fight for existence and our striving to obtain favorable economic conditions, we keep in our hearts our Danish language and our Danish memories and protect our inherited culture each in his own way and according to his own abilities. 37

As Henius argues, it would have been asking the impossible for Danish-Americans to attempt to erase their memories and their blood ties to Denmark. The traditions they cherished with the heightened fervor of exiles were far more than relics of the past; they were essential ingredients in the evolving cultural identity of Danish-Americans. Despite the fear of hyphenated cultural identities that persisted in America even after the fiercest nativism subsided in the 1920s, Danish-Americans tried to navigate between proving their wholehearted commitment to an American way of life and retaining a sense of their Danishness within that new American identity.

The three autobiographical texts from the interwar period analyzed in the following pages demonstrate precisely this careful negotiation of competing and often conflicting demands posed by each distinct cultural identity. In the texts, three primary areas emerge as essential to the construction of a successful Danish-American identity: the choice of language, religion, and a marriage partner. Written by men whose professional careers had little involvement with literature, none of the texts is a literary masterpiece, but the stories each tells ring true, repeating common themes of poverty and hardship in Denmark, initial obstacles to economic success in America, and the challenging but rewarding process of forging an American identity. More than their
similarities, however, it is the differences between the texts that expose the conscious effort involved in becoming a Danish-American and give these autobiographical texts surplus value as cultural-historical documents.

The most flamboyant of the three autobiographies is Carl Christian Jensen’s *An American Saga*. In keeping with its rather grandiose title, Jensen’s account of his life glorifies the individual and his quest for self in the tradition of the Nordic heroic sagas. Though he dwells at length on his adventures as a peasant and a sailor, Jensen is primarily concerned with presenting for an English-speaking audience his own transformation into an American. To begin this journey, Jensen goes to great lengths to make images of Denmark—sketches of curious individuals like the drunken “peat hag” and the sorrowful junk man amidst a collage of swampy marshes, sand dunes, and raging ocean—accessible to American readers. The novel is extremely introverted, written in rather stiff, literary English mixed with occasional slang in an overly poetic style that at times resembles stream-of-consciousness writing, but is also fanciful and idealistic by turns. Overall, *An American Saga* is a conspicuously non-political portrait of one man’s discovery of himself in America.

Jensen’s writing is crammed with careful detail and excessive metaphors intended, at first, to ease the reader into the foreign environment of his childhood. In the first chapter, the autobiographical narrator describes “the Old Country,” which remains nameless. Instead of building on labels and stereotypes,
Jensen tries to evoke images of places and people that will provide the reader with a mental picture of the country of his birth. He uses a few Danish words such as “Kridt-piben” (the chalk pipe), but he makes only oblique references to the geography of his childhood home. Instead, he begins his tale with an atmosphere: “In a dingy room, over a shop where a man made wooden shoes, I grew aware of myself.”38 His own ostensibly blank consciousness represents the reader’s, as he pieces each scrap of information into a larger picture of his childhood.

Jensen demonstrates how he became aware of his cultural identity as a result of the physical surroundings that he so painstakingly portrays. He describes the “narrow cobbled-stoned street, where the heather farmers passed with their slow-moving teams of oxen and their wagons loaded with sun-dried peat.” He sketches his grandfather, “a man huge of frame and sturdy as an old oak. He was six feet six, with a back broad and sinewy, and with large, hairy fists. He was of a melancholy, brooding temperament, his mind burning like glowing embers that could flare into white heat.”39 He mentions his mother and her sisters—“tall, husky, bright-eyed women, very noisy, quick to laugh, and quicker still to show anger.”40 The narrator introduces an endless parade of colorful characters, succeeded by an array of adventures that would put any dime-novel hero to shame.

Jensen explains his desire to come to America as an instinctive response to a call from the past and the future. In Denmark, he is torn between his love of nature and his love of modern machinery, but he sees in America the possibility for the fulfillment of both desires:

The old Viking spirit drove me over the seas to skim the surface of nature—a warm, romantic rover. The new scientific spirit drew me down into the heart of nature to watch its hidden forces—a cool, realistic adventurer. Both of these, the old and the new, focused my eyes on America, the land of Columbus, Leif Ericson, Indians, and romance, which I read about at sea; and the land of skyscrapers, bridges, air railroads, and realism, which I had seen on my shore leaves.41
In the protagonist’s starry-eyed dreams, America appears as the land of destiny, and even before he leaves Denmark, Jensen acquires the symbol of his new identity in a tattoo of an American and a Danish flag. In a symbolic gesture appropriate to the saga, the boat that carries him west is the *Hellig Olav*, named for the legendary Norwegian king, and his last sight of his old country is Kronborg Castle, home of Denmark’s sleeping defender Holger Danske. Thus, the great heroes of the Nordic past accompany Jensen on his venture into the unknown.

Language is the greatest challenge Jensen faces upon arrival in America. He celebrates his immediate rebirth as an American, but his second childhood is determined by his inability to speak: “But I was a babe, immensely proud of my babble.” In his eagerness to learn English, he “hoarded words like a coin-collector, and the language of my second childhood grew,” though he admits that “the idiom still refuses to enter my blood.” Through the lens of his new language, he discovers the beauty of his old culture; the Danish fairy tales that had bored him in his childhood now “melted in my mouth like liquored candy.” He experiences this second childhood with wide-eyed wonder, eagerly taking advantage of the fabled opportunities of American life, learning English and mathematics and finally attending college. He marvels, “In the old country, only nobility and the clergy rose to such heights.” In his view, America lives up to its reputation as a land of equal opportunity.

The remainder of the novel humorously chronicles Jensen’s efforts to adapt to American life. He sees himself as a representative of the many nationalities that have “melted into a national type” of American. Despite his poverty and dubious reputation as a foreign sailor, he wins the heart of his widowed American landlady’s daughter and raises an American family, determined that they should not live in “immigrant fashion.” They move further and further west, encountering wonders on every hand. Seen through Jensen’s eyes, every hardship is an adventure, every stroke of good luck proof that America is the Promised Land. He encounters scientists and doctors, remarking with amazement, “These great Americans treated me as they would their equal.” Despite youthful attempts to find God, he does not find a religion he can embrace
until he encounters the Doomsday sect in Minnesota, which welcomes him in and offers him employment peddling the Doomsday book zealously throughout the Midwest to settlers of all ethnic backgrounds and languages.

Despite the self-deprecating, slapdash manner in which he recounts his adventures, Jensen repeatedly emphasizes his earnest desire to become a true American while still retaining his love for his Danish heritage. Just before his graduation from Minnesota State University, Jensen receives his American citizenship, though he has never seen an American flag and believes the stars on it to be blue. After Jensen has revealed his ignorance of American history, the district attorney demands, “Tell me, my boy, what did you learn at college?” Jensen replies with conviction, “I learned to speak, read, and write my new tongue. [. . . ] And I learned to love America above all other nations.” This patriotic affirmation of Jensen’s linguistic assimilation and emotional loyalty suffices and Jensen takes the oath of allegiance to the United States, becoming an official American at last. Yet, at the end of Jensen’s book, in contrast to Riis’, it is not the American flag that makes his heart tremble, it is the memory of “a Danish beech grove where long ago I caught a glimpse of Hamlet’s and Holger Danske’s castle; and of a cozy cottage across the sea where an old couple are raising four grandchildren; and of an old, old grandfather I have not seen these many years. They speak of heather, bog, and dune.”

In a more matter-of-fact style than Jensen’s swashbuckling narrative, T. M. Nielsen’s autobiography, How a Dane Became an American or the Hits and Misses of My Life, recounts his rather bruising journey from Danish peasant to American pastor. Throughout his account, the inevitability of his transformation into an American underlies the narrative, beginning with his father’s attempts, while still in Denmark, “to instill in me
America and American ideals. For forty-two years I have lived beneath a flag which my father taught me to respect long before I ever saw it.” Unlike Jensen, T.M. Nielsen makes no claims of glory, for “though the Viking, with his love for adventure, is in my blood. I claim for myself none of his daring virtues. I am neither the Scandinavian demi-god nor the rugged pagan that the Norseman is sometimes featured, and he who approaches this book with such thoughts in mind is doomed to disappointment. I am a very ordinary Danish-American.” However, his path to becoming such an ordinary man is paved with abuse, overwork, illness, poverty, determination, and close shaves with American frontier justice, all of which factor in to his views on how America could improve itself and its reception of new Americans.

Nielsen’s account is more socially conscious than Jensen’s, going beyond the narrative of the author’s life experiences to make an explicit contribution to the national dialogue about immigration. Nielsen’s hope that, by writing his own story, he will be able to repay a part of the debt he owes America by helping “to straighten some of the things which, to my mind, are basically out of harmony with American life and thought,” answers, whether consciously or not, answers Governor Harding’s accusation of the Danish-Americans’ irredeemable indebtedness to their new country. A foreword written by Bishop Thomas Nicholson underscores Nielsen’s reconsideration of the equation of indebtedness between America and its foreign-born population, noting that Nielsen’s story “sets forth the debt of our country to these men of other lands. They have received much, but they have also brought no inconsiderable values to our nation.” Throughout his text, Nielsen is honest about both the assistance he has received and the mistreatment he has endured as a foreigner in America, and concludes his story with a plea to the reader to treat immigrants more tolerantly.

My heart aches for every foreign-born in this country. The foreigner does not leave his native land to come to America because he thinks Americans are greater people than those of his own nationality. He does not think so at all. He comes to America because he believes America is a better land in which to work out a livelihood, richer in resources, a land
where he is not cramped for room. For that he is willing to
tear his heart-strings, saying farewell to everything at home
that is dear to his heart. For that he braves the storms of the
ocean, enduring the loathsome steerage. For that he merges
himself into a new country, new customs, and a new
language, is called “green horn” and thought of as a ninnie
and a weakling, because at first his English sounds like baby
talk. Let the American poor man go over there, try to make a
living and learn the language at the same time and see what
kind of baby talk he will make.56

Having established his own credentials as a true American, Nielsen
urges his readers to look past the “foreignness” of new immigrants
and give them credit for the courage they demonstrate in attempting
to start a new life in America.

Nielsen’s treatment of the language issue is blunt and
evenhanded: the disadvantages every foreigner faces upon reaching
America and attempting to learn English are no different than those
an American would face if the circumstances were reversed. Initial
incompetence in English is no fair cause to discriminate against new
arrivals. For his own part, Nielsen explains that once he began
studying English by reading the Danish Bible alongside the English
Bible, he decided quickly that “I liked English better than I did
Danish.”57 He explains this preference partly in terms of aesthetics,
due to the “power and beauty of the language,” but also, and more
significantly, because of dialect differences that estranged him from
other Danish speakers he met in America. Growing up in rural
Jutland, he had spoken an obscure dialect of Danish that made him
“a sort of stray sheep and the butt end for jokes” among speakers of
standard Danish in America.58 As a result, the Danish language held
little appeal for him as a connection to other Danes, while mastery of
English offered both economic and social opportunities for
advancement, including an introduction to the American girl who
eventually decided to “cast her lot with the ‘Terrible Dane,’ no
matter what came.”59

As was also true in Jensen’s case, many of these opportunities
come to Nielsen through membership in an American church.
Despite little religious training in Denmark, Nielsen finds his most
compelling connection to America through religion, in his case the Methodist Episcopal Church, which provided him with opportunities for higher education, employment, and fellowship that his Danish cultural network could not or did not offer. Although he admits to experiencing some professional discrimination within the church because of his Danish background, Nielsen’s assertive approach to shaping his own destiny carries him well into the range of American frontier legends. While serving as the Methodist preacher in a hard-bitten railroad town of Melbourne, Iowa, he alienates local inhabitants by exposing the illegal alcohol trade in what was supposed to be a “dry town” but refuses to be intimidated by the threats he receives; instead, he adopts a Wild West approach to justice: “I secured a revolver. I took it to the church with me, I laid it on the pulpit, told them that I carried it with me all the time, and that if anybody tried in any way to interfere with me in the lawful pursuit of my work, I would shoot him.” Although Nielsen eventually backs down from such a precarious position, his approach to the situation demonstrates his internalization of both the American frontier mentality and the moralistic view of life advocated by many American churches at the time, as illustrated at the time of the novel’s publication by Prohibition.

In contrast to Jensen and Nielsen’s more adventurous tales, Karl Jørgensen’s Dansk Amerika is a reflective attempt to describe the group experience of Danish-Americans, to themselves as well as to their erstwhile countrymen in Denmark. Where Jensen and Nielsen address English-speaking Americans, Jørgensen writes for a Danish-speaking audience. His goal is not just to tell his own story, but to describe just how Danish America is and to correct misconceptions about America among Danes. What Jensen and Nielsen demonstrate, Jørgensen clarifies. In
the foreword to Jørgensen’s account, C.E. Bardenfleth explains that Jørgensen’s humble undertaking is intended to illustrate how life shapes itself for us, who have gone out into the unknown, shapes itself for us under stars and stripes in that land we have chosen as ours, where each of us has found our purpose, great or small, and where we someday shall enter—may I be permitted to say for most of us—well-earned rest.61

Bardenfleth claims Jørgensen as “one of our own,” someone who is speaking out from inside Danish America, not to explain it, but to describe it. From Bardenfleth’s perspective, Jørgensen’s primary qualification for representing the Danish-American community seems to be that he has achieved a successful American career in the Southern California Gas Company. For his own part, Jørgensen justifies his comments by the universality of his experiences in America.

In keeping with its informative function, Dansk Amerika has a somewhat drier tone than either An American Saga or How a Dane Became an American, and reveals no pretensions to poetic grandeur. Jørgensen recounts his personal experiences in a conversational way, careful to generalize them for the community of Danish-Americans. His reasons for coming to America are less dramatic than Jensen’s or Nielsen’s—simply a desire to see the world for a few years before settling down—but, as Bøggild had accused in 1915, Jørgensen admits that “America held me captive as it does nearly all immigrants!”62 Jørgensen confesses that he knew almost nothing of America before his departure except what he had read in letters from an uncle. He advises those considering emigration to mistrust letters from friends in America and to seek out factual information, so that they will be prepared for the commitment they will enter into as Danish-Americans. To this end, Jørgensen gives a detailed account of his voyage across the Atlantic on a partially renovated freighter which was “anything but comfortable.”63

The first part of Dansk Amerika deals with Jørgensen’s impressions upon arrival in America. He laughs at his ignorance of cultural differences; in the hotel his first night, he puts his boots outside the door to be cleaned, as is customary in Denmark, much to the
amazement of the hotel staff. He soon finds a room with a Danish family, which he regards as an intermediate station between Denmark and America. He is struck by the fact that the children speak Danish, though they prefer to speak English. He discusses the almost religious nature of Danishness in America, which he sees as a result of the fact that, among Danish-Americans, Denmark quickly becomes the stuff of shining memories and dreams. Nevertheless, he tries to dispel the popular misconception in Denmark that immigrants become Americans “in speech and mentality in a year’s time” and warns the reader that the process of becoming an American is a gradual change that requires effort on the part of the individual. He reports that some Danes lose their Danish and never properly learn English, thereby displaying an embarrassing lack of intelligence.

Language is an issue that Jørgensen deals with at length, for it is, in his opinion, the most important element in the immigrant’s development in the new country. Although he admits that Danes are regarded as among the quickest and best to learn English and speak it almost exclusively, Jørgensen encourages each Danish-American to “be willing and courageous enough to use the vocabulary that he has upon arrival and that he acquires here.” He sees his own ability to use English, however accented, as the key to his economic success. He cautions that Danish-Americans cannot afford to avoid conversations with English-speakers out of fear, nor to continually seek refuge among other Danes, or they will never be able to participate in American cultural, political, and social life. Danish-Americans have important contributions to make, not only to the economy but also to the character of America, which they can only accomplish by incorporating themselves into American society.

To a certain extent, Jørgensen’s autobiography could be used as a handbook for integrating oneself into American life. He moves from the Danish family where he found lodgings at first into an American home to force himself to use English, though it is a times impossible to communicate. Though he contributes to Danish organizations, Jørgensen gradually moves into American circles, first through his work and ultimately by marrying an American woman “of an old American family,” which requires him to speak English, as he had
hoped. Yet he also acknowledges the importance of preserving one’s cultural heritage and advises Danish-American parents to teach their children Danish in the home, since they will learn English from friends and in school.

Jørgensen’s comments reveal his awareness of the delicate balancing act that Danish-Americans must perform in order to be true to both countries that claim their loyalty. He is critical of the mockery with which immigrants are so often greeted in America, but his purpose in expressing this critique is to prepare Danes who wish to emigrate to accept conditions in America realistically, rather than cherishing illusions that everything is easy in America. He explains that “American society necessarily requires that the heterogeneous crowds that come here be shaped into certain regular forms for the whole to hold together, and the forms are decided by the majority…. For this reason, society demands that immigrants lay aside the ideas they have brought with them, based on national sentiment and culture, and acquire the country’s ideas, language, and way of life.” Jørgensen readily admits the difficulty of such adaptation and praises Danes for their success in this area, but emphasizes that such national homogenization should not preclude personal opinions nor prevent immigrants from contributing in full measure to America’s national development.

Despite their different audiences and agendas, Jørgensen, Nielsen, and Jensen’s autobiographies reach similar conclusions that hint at a general consensus among Danish-Americans in the interwar period: the Danish-American is a product of the conscious and deliberate merging of the individual’s Danish cultural heritage with the economic and political opportunities that present themselves in America. Each author maps out his individual journeys to this goal, a progression Jensen labels “the inward epic,” demonstrating that the path to this new cultural identity is different for everyone, even for three Danish men of the same age and cultural background. All three writers agree that total commitment to American ideals and practices is necessary if immigrants are going to develop a sense of belonging in their new home, but they warn that, in making this commitment, immigrants should build on their Danish heritage, not reject it. They must learn to speak English and show unswerving
political loyalty towards the United States, but they should cherish the Danish language and traditions in their hearts, for it is in the fusion of these two worlds that Danish-American identity is forged. By embracing American life but enriching it with the wealth of their Danish culture, Danish immigrants have become some of the best Americans, earning Theodore Roosevelt’s approbation.

Individual self-representations in Danish-American autobiography, particularly during the tense interwar period, showcase the tension between descent and consent, between the immigrant’s Danish past and his American future, that lies at the core of the transformation into a Danish-American. Engulfed by American society, Danes assimilated in order to survive, but they made the choice to become Americans consciously and deliberately. Kristian Hvidt cites an anonymous Danish-American, who describes the relationship between his feelings for his old and new countries in terms of family ties:

If I should make a comparison between my feelings for Denmark and America, it would be like the love for a mother and a wife. Denmark is my mother, America my wife, and one’s first responsibility is to the wife, who is the woman one has chosen for oneself.67

Though they could not forget nor deny their Danish mother, the majority of Danish immigrants chose America as their wife and loved her faithfully. They took her name and learned her language, but they did not lose themselves by doing so; instead, a new cultural identity was born from the marriage of cultures, a people at once Danish and American.

1 For a detailed treatment of governmental organizations involved in the drive to Americanize immigrants during this period, see John McClymer, “The Federal Government and the Americanization Movement, 1915-1924),” Prologue: The Journal of the National Archives 10 (Spring 1978), 22-41

5 The most comprehensive treatment of Scandinavian immigrant literature is Dorothy Burton Skårdal’s *The Divided Heart: Scandinavian Immigrant Experience through Literary Sources* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1974).


8 Karl Jørgensen, *Dansk Amerika* (Holbæk, Denmark: Dansk bogsamlingsforlag, 1930).


10 Christianson, 26.


15 Christianson, 27.


18 Many Danish-Americans were so successful not only in speaking English but also in thinking like Americans that some proponents of Danish language preservation criticized them sharply. In an article in *De Forenede Staters danske Almanak, Haand- og Aarbog, 1914* entitled “Modersmaalet” (Mother Tongue), a Danish-American doctor named C.P. Kjærbye chastises his fellow Danish-Americans for using too much English and thereby losing their ability to speak and think like Danes, charging that “we go to Danish meetings and think and act too much according to American habits and spirit.” He argues that a foreign language can rarely express one’s innermost emotions, that it is impossible to formulate national sentiments and thoughts without one’s native tongue, and promises his countrymen: “if we not only think in the Danish language, but as Danes, the language will quickly return.” Kjærbye recognized the cultural significance of the Danish-Americans’ shift towards thinking like Americans, and his plea for them to
use Danish in their homes and daily lives was impassioned, but poorly
timed, since speaking Danish in America had become a highly questionable
activity after the outbreak of World War I.

19 G. Nielsen, 9-10.
20 G. Nielsen, 10.
21 G. Nielsen, 10-13.
22 G. Nielsen, 11.
23 G. Nielsen, 9.
24 Henrik Bredmose Simonsen, *Kampen om danskheden. Tro og nationalitet i de
danske kirkesamfund i Amerika.* (Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus Universitetsforlag,
1990), 7.
25 Simonsen, 8.
26 G. Nielsen cites an anecdote on this subject from the *Danish Times*
(February 20, 1931) in which “one Dane observed that when two Greeks get
together they start a restaurant, but when two Danes get together, they start
a fight,” 13.
27 G. Nielsen, 13.
28 Anne Lisbeth Olsen and Niels Peter Stilling, *Et nyt liv: den danske
udvandring til Nordamerika i billeder og breve* (Strandbergs Forlag, 1985), 12-15.
29 G. Nielsen, 11-12.
30 Max Henius’ 1912 book *Den danskfødte Amerikaner* (Chicago: Trykningen
besørget gennem Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag, København,
1912) introduces this nomenclature.
31 Iver Kjær and Mogens Baumann Larsen, “The Spoken Danish Language in
the U.S. From Interaction to Recollection.” *Danish Emigration to the U.S.* Ed.
by Birgit Flemming Larsen and Henning Bender. (Aalborg, Denmark: Danes
Worldwide Archives in collaboration with the Danish Society for
Emigration History, 1992), 107.
32 Kendric Charles Babcock, *The Scandinavian Element in the United States*
33 G. Nielsen, 32.
34 Kristian Hvidt, *Danske Veje Vestpå* (København: Politikens Forlag, 1976),
271-273.
35 G. Nielsen, 183.
36 G. Nielsen, 200.
37 Henius, 8-9.
38 Jensen, 3.
39 Jensen, 6.
40 Jensen, 8.
41 Jensen, 61.
Jensen, 158.
Jensen, 77.
Jensen, 158.
Jensen, 79.
Jensen, 122.
Jensen, 91.
Jensen, 114.
Jensen, 123.
Jensen, 177.
Jensen, 219.
T.M. Nielsen, 11.
T.M. Nielsen 15.
T.M. Nielsen, 11.
T.M. Nielsen, 10.
T.M. Nielsen, 277.
T.M. Nielsen, 121.
T.M. Nielsen, 123.
T.M. Nielsen, 205.
T. M. Nielsen, 187.
Jørgensen, 5.
Jørgensen, 13.
Jørgensen, 22.
Jørgensen, 75.
Jørgensen, 81.
Jørgensen, 42.
Hvidt, 308.
Reading the Fairytales of Hans Christian Andersen and the Novels of Horatio Alger as Proto-Entrepreneurial Narrative

or

A true story of two boys who grew up to write stories which shaped the entrepreneurial attitude of their nations!

by Robert Smith and Helle Neergaard

Once upon a time, long ago, in the slums of Odense in the State of Denmark there lived a poor boy whose ambition it was to write stories. His name was Hans Christian Andersen, a Cobblers son. As a boy, Hans was noticeably different from other boys, being gentle and taller than others. He lived in a world of his own imaginative making. He was indeed different, being dyslexic in an age before the condition was appreciated. His poor, but industrious father Hans Sr. doted on him and read him stories every afternoon. The young Hans was a bright boy and helped his father around the shop as he dreamed his dreams. Hans Sr. introduced his son to literature and to the theatre – but his greatest gift was to encourage him to write his own fairytales. Hans Christian Andersen’s mother Anne Marie being of peasant stock was a natural storyteller who entertained her children with the folktales of ordinary people. Life was good until tragedy struck the Andersen household when Hans’ father passed away. From that day onwards poverty beset them. Hans helped his mother make ends meet where he could by working long hard hours. It was a time when social inequalities stalked the ancient Kingdom of Denmark causing many of its sons and daughters to brave the passage to the distant shores of America. The spectre of poverty haunted him all his days.
poverty haunted him all his days but it lit a flame deep within that has not yet been extinguished.

At the age of fourteen years, when still a boy, Hans like many before him set out to seek his fortune in Copenhagen. Like the intrepid Dick Whittington in childhood stories, he went in search of a better life. Although the fair streets of Copenhagen were not paved with gold, young Hans applied himself, again working long hard hours first as a weaver and then as an actor and singer before graduating from the University of Copenhagen. Hans kept the Lutheran faith and by dint of personal application and hard work eventually prospered. He toiled all day and wrote long into the night. He read the stories of the Grimm Brothers and other writers of fable. In time, he achieved his wildest dreams and became a published writer of novels and dark brooding fairytales which brought tears to eyes of even the hardest of men. He travelled far and wide, in search of inspiration for his tales and wrote prodigiously into his old age. Happiness eluded him—his mother died an alcoholic and he was to suffer twice from unrequited love. Although he never visited America his stories made the passage and settled there bringing him literary fame. His stories were popular with children and parents alike for in the fables were sound advice for a country folk not to dream a dream too far. In this respect, they were in keeping with the spirit of austerity which prevailed in Denmark at the time where fairytales with a darkness to the plot were common.

Once upon a time, in America, in well-to-do New England there lived a well off boy, a Preacher’s son Horatio Alger Junior. Horatio was a quite, studious boy who read and read and read, and also dreamed his dreams of being a poet. As often was the way in those times Horatio sensibly followed in his father’s footsteps and went to Harvard College before entering the ministry where he worked for many years
tending to his congregation. The restless Horatio travelled to Paris, France and lived there for a while before returning to again take up his ministrations in New York. There his work took him regularly to the slums of the city. In such places as The Five Points he came into contact with abject poverty and the wretched poor who lived without hope. Touched by the spectre of poverty his experiences touched his heart and he swore to do something about it—because after all America was renowned as being the land of opportunity. He vowed to give them hope and did this by the most powerful weapon at his disposal— the pen. By day he carried out his duties as a Minister. But by night Horatio embarked upon a prodigious writing career in which he penned hundreds of Dime Novels about poor boys who made their own way in the world. He set out to spread the gospel of enterprise and taught that with luck and pluck a poor boy could escape from poverty to make his way in the world as a bold entrepreneur. In the process he gave a nation hope and direction which epitomises the American Dream.

Thus in America, the sons of Danish émigrés [and indeed all migrants] were encouraged to read Alger’s novels which were in their own right fairytales with a social purpose. Indeed, many sons of Denmark followed this dream and lived the fairytale that became the American Dream. He encouraged poor-boys to reach for the stars and grasp all that life had to offer by dint of hard work and perseverance. This was sound advice in a land where determination was needed to haul one’self up the social ladder. In this respect, they were in keeping with the spirit of abundant opportunity which prevailed in America at the time where stories of hope were appreciated by all.

Introduction
We believe that these two very different fairytales are a fitting introduction to the first part of this two part exploration by the authors into Danish and Danish-American Enterprise Culture. This
is because they capture the spirit of their respective nations as it stood in 19th Century Denmark and America. The idea for the article flourished from an email conversation, between the authors Helle Neergaard and Robert Smith in late December 2005. The basis of the conversation was that with the year 2005 being the 200th anniversary of the birth of Denmark's favourite son Hans Christian Andersen it would be fitting to commemorate his works in some way. This article grew out of this conversation. As such this article marks the entrepreneurial achievements of Hans Christian Anderson as a talented writer and indeed literary entrepreneur. It also marks the achievements of another famous writer Horatio Alger Jr. Both writers as boys were products of their cultures. In keeping with the title of the article both boys did indeed grow up to write literature which we believe shaped the entrepreneurial orientation of their respective nations. Hans Christian Andersen wrote darkly brooding fairytales which captured the imagination of the world; and Horatio Alger wrote his corpus of fictional novels, now known as “Horatio Alger Myths” in which the poor-boy-makes-good. These stories are credited with inspiring generations of Americans to follow their entrepreneurial dreams. We argue that this body of Americanized-folklore is in its own right closely related to the genre of fairytale. We further argue that the fairytales of Hans Christian Andersen can be read as proto-entrepreneurial tales. Indeed, consideration of folklore and fairytale as proto-entrepreneurial narrative is not a new idea. For example Folklorists such as J Zipes1 have suggested that the fairytales of the Brothers Grimm were prototypical forms of the German Capitalist Dream and indeed a form of enterprise discourse. To date we are not aware of anyone who has suggested that the works of Hans Christian Andersen were a prototype for the spirit of Danish enterprise. We find this significant.

The Denmark of Hans Christian Andersen
The life story of Hans Christian Andersen as read in biographies is that of a Danish fairytale in keeping with the reality of the Denmark of his time. The auto-biographies and biographies consulted for this article include those of Hans Christian Andersen, Robert Nisbet-Bain and Constance B. Burnett.2 Collectively, they narrate a sad tale of a
Hans Christian Andersen was born into relative poverty on the 2nd of April, 1805, the son of a provincial shoemaker Hans Andersen Sr. According to his autobiography, the early life of Hans Christian Andersen was full of sadness. However, what the family lacked the fiscal terms was more than made up for in terms of quality of life. According to Burnett, Hans Sr. believed he was the son of an aristocrat. He was a self-educated man who taught himself to read and write. Hans Sr. appears to be a man as if thwarted by fate. The shoemaker took his fatherly duties seriously and read his son Hans a story every day. This storied quality time would pay long term dividends. One can only conjecture that the stories told to the young Hans were imbued with the traditional moral message. Hans Andersen senior also took his son to the theatre and encouraged him to write his own fairytales. Hans Christian Andersen’s mother, Anne Marie, who was of peasant stock, and by all accounts a gifted storyteller complemented his literary education by entertaining and enchanting her children with Danish folktales of the people. Interestingly, this idyllic picture places Hans Christian Andersen firmly in a creative petty bourgeoisie family.

However, tragedy struck the Andersen family when Hans was aged only 11 years old. His father died and a cloud of sadness descended upon the young Hans. But young hearts are resilient. Initially, Hans helped out by working to make ends meet. At the age of 14 the intrepid Hans ran away to Copenhagen to seek his fortune. Thankfully, fortunes are not merely measured in terms of kroner but in terms of literary success because Hans grew up to be Denmark's most famous author, writing over 350 fairytales, as well as poems, sketches, fantasies, novels and his autobiography. Evidence that Hans Christian Andersen was not of the proverbial poor can be gleaned from an examination of his early life in Copenhagen. He gained employment as a weaver and then tailor, before becoming a singer and actor. He secured sponsorship from a patron to finance himself through University. These are not the actions of a working class pauper, but of a privileged middle class boy. This is not to say that his pain, sadness and experiences of poverty were not genuine
heartfelt experiences, for these are evident in his writings, but it is a world away from the experiences of those raised in a ghetto environment in a far off America pursuing a dream which was not possible in 19th Century Denmark with its parochialism and class division. In his lifetime Hans Christian Andersen became part of the socio-political elite against which many poor Danes so passionately rebelled.

The prodigious writings of Hans Christian Andersen made him a household name across the globe. Few people growing up during the past two centuries can fail to have heard a rendition of *The Ugly Duckling, The Emperor’s New Clothes, or The Little Mermaid* from a doting parent or family member. Few who have heard his fairytales can have been left unmoved by his poignant writings which can bring a tear to the eye of grown men. Andersen’s fairy stories are templates which illuminate moral behaviour. Many are also thinly veiled reflections of his personal life experiences. What is apparent is that Andersen wrote his stories not only as moral reminder, but wrote with a desire to spread humour, joy and laughter, both of which are great antidotes to sadness. In this respect his sense of
humour bordered upon the sly. Hans Christian Andersen was intensely (almost darkly) religious. He remained a bachelor for the duration of his lifetime—a fact which gives rise to rumours of his sexual orientation. This may also have fuelled some of his blacker stories. Andersen’s writings are definitely imbued with a paradoxical juxtaposition of beauty and ugliness, darkness and light. It was as if Andersen was preparing the ordinary Dane not to expect much from life. Although there is scant evidence of an entrepreneurial message in Andersen’s writings, they nevertheless speak volumes for the historical Danish psyche trapped in a world of limited opportunity. This factor is perhaps contributory to why Denmark and the Danes did not develop a healthy enterprise culture.

The America of Horatio Alger Junior
The America into which the sons of the Danish immigrants were born was one of almost unbridled opportunity. As such, the life story of Horatio Alger is that of an American fairytale which mirrors the reality of its time. It is the story of a preacher’s son who gave hope to the poor. Much has been written about Horatio Alger and much of what has been written, such as the works of Stefan Kanfer, Jeffrey L. Decker, Celeste MacLeod, Charles Orson Cook, Carol Nackenoff, Ralph D. Gardner, Gary Scharnhorst and Jack Bales, and Richard Weiss, is eulogistic and on the whole positive. Horatio Alger was born in Revere, Massachusetts in 1832 into a middle class family. Young Horatio was raised a devout Calvinist and his father placed emphasis on education and adherence to religion. The young Horatio followed in his father’s footsteps and graduated from Harvard Divinity School in 1852. As a youth, Horatio had aspirations of becoming a poet but instead followed these paths of sensibility into the Ministry. However, Horatio appears to have had wanderlust because he moved to Paris, France, returning in 1867. On his return Horatio took up a social work position in New York. Here he was exposed to abject poverty of New York’s immigrant underclasses. He was touched by the hand of poverty and decided (like Charles Dickens in London) that the biggest contribution he could
make to the poor was to write about their plight. Thus began a prodigious writing career during which he penned 134 novels.

These “Dime Novels” captured the imagination of a whole new generation of Americans. Horatio’s stories became theirs. The main, inspiring themes were of onward and upward rags-to-riches tales, patterning his hero, *Ragged Dick*, upon the homeless newsboys and bootblacks of urban America. His heroes (Horatio Alger’s boys) almost always had the same qualities—moral, brave, generous, kind, diligent, industrious, and persevering. His ideology promised that everyone, no matter how poor, orphaned or powerless, if they persevered they would succeed by hard work and the right action. This doctrine espoused the values of self-reliance, self-discipline, decency, and honesty. His books inspired a generation and found their way into almost every home, school, and church library in America capturing the spirit of a nation, selling 250 million copies world-wide. These books included such evangelical titles as *Ben the Luggage Boy, Bound to Rise, Brave and Bold, Facing the World, Fame & Fortune, Tattered Tom, Forging Ahead, In a New World, Mark the Match Boy, Risen from the Ranks, Rough and Ready, Rufus and Rose, Strive and Succeed, Strong and Steady, and Struggling Upward*. These titles resonate with the spirit of action and movement.

Few could doubt that Alger’s writings shaped the minds of a generation of American youths and their boys’ own ethos became incorporated into the dominant collective notions of masculinity, and entrepreneurship manifested as independence of spirit and mind. The American author, James Catano refers to them as being morally uplifting stories enacting a successful struggle to overcome less than spectacular origins and reap justly deserved economic and personal rewards. Catano classifies these stories as “proto entrepreneurial tales” in which “poverty’s child” moved into
respectability via a patron capable of recognizing their heroic characteristics.\textsuperscript{4} They are stereotypical endorsements of the entrepreneurial myth and late nineteenth century broad middle class stories of masculine self making. Alger’s books are a classic example of social constructionism in action. Moreover, Horatio Alger’s books demonstrate how one man can construct a fictional genre, which influences a nation’s entrepreneurial propensity and thus libido.

As a novelist, Horatio Alger wrote of courage, faith, and hard, honest work, capturing the imagination of generations of young Americans providing them with a model of hope and promise in the face of real hardships. In his private life Horatio Alger like Hans Christian Andersen had to overcome problems.\textsuperscript{5} Both writers were hugely prodigious in their writing outputs and immensely creative. This inner driving force fascinates us as scholars of Entrepreneurship and human behaviours. It is testament to our moralistic Presbyterian and Lutheran upbringings that we had to struggle long and hard with our conscience as to whether to include such details or simply re-write them from consciousness. It is Horatio Alger and Hans Christian Andersen as creative writers that matters, not their alleged miss-comings that matter.

Elements of this fabulous myth into which Horatio Alger tapped are discernable in empirical research carried out by Bernard Sarachek who examined the biographies of 187 Nineteenth Century American entrepreneurs.\textsuperscript{6} Sarachek emphasises the deeply psycho-social nature of the father-son relationship and the effects of poverty, death and depravation on their desire to become self-made men. This research connected outcome (Entrepreneurial Status) to causal factors (social hardships) which when internalised as deep inner drives helped the individuals overcome adversity. Sarachek documented their formulaic nature as variations on rags-to-riches theme replete with heroes from humble origins raised in poverty by poor but honest parents and mentored by well intentioned benefactors. Saracheck’s work resonates with the work of Suzanne Keller who carried out similar research into the social origins of three generations of American business leaders, finding that a significant number emerged from the ranks of those with humble beginnings.\textsuperscript{7}
For Robert B. Reich these stories gave America a noble ideal and Orvis F. Collins and David G. Moore found evidence of their accuracy with respondents having experienced childhood poverty and disrupted family lives. Stefan Kanfer notes how the classic Alger plot seldom varied; a youth of humble origins makes his way in the city by virtue of grit and toil. Luck usually plays its part, but fortune was something to be enticed and manipulated. In Alger’s view, square dealing and independence formed the basis of the American Dream. Kanfer comments on the cultural underpinnings of this individualism arguing that the novels instilled the idea behind those phrases into America’s children as homespun stories encapsulating the American way of self-reliance in a moral framework. Robert Arnot marvels at their popularity. Yet, Reich asserts that it is an obsolete, gilded myth of stories of respectability, hard work, fortunate accidents, and of denial which no longer holds true in America. Nevertheless, the American Dream became a fairytale par-excellence which metamorphosed into the Horatio Alger myth of poor boys making good. However, this myth continues to shape our understanding of entrepreneurial narrative despite protestations that such myths serve no purpose in the modern world of business. It could be argued that the fairytale of entrepreneurial success became one of America’s most influential exports back to the old world. It could equally be argued that the fatalistic writings of native born Danish authors such as Hans Christian Andersen may have had an adverse effect upon the development of an entrepreneurial culture.

Assessing the influence of these writings
The insight gained from the above sections on Hans Christian Andersen and Horatio Alger are helpful in providing an insight into how far the existing Danish Enterprise Culture needs to change to align itself with the American Dream. The purpose of this section is to consider the contribution made to the collective Entrepreneurial Dream by the writings of Andersen and Alger. So much has been written about Horatio Alger that there is no need to repeat it here. It would be surprising if the moralistic fairytales of Hans Christian Andersen had not touched the lives of as many Americans as did the
novels of Horatio Alger. It is not stretching the truth, or spinning a yarn to humbly suggest that Andersen was a spiritual contemporary of the American author and evangelist of enterprise. Although Andersen did not physically migrate to the shores of America, his writings did and in that way he visited the country. Thus Andersen’s writings appeared in print at the same time as Horatio Alger’s now famous Dime novels. Many of Andersen’s original masterpieces are housed in the Making of America collection in Cornell University Library. In reading Andersen’s life-story it is apparent that his early life reads like a proto-typical entrepreneur story. Had circumstances been different Hans Andersen could have been one of Horatio Alger’s boys had he migrated to the new world, instead of remaining at home. Hans Andersen was dyslexic like many fabled entrepreneurs and had to overcome intense poverty and suffering in his childhood. Although Andersen was not an entrepreneur, as we understand it, his life-story and profile could nevertheless fit the template of an entrepreneur story as we know it. Many of Andersen’s stories are about hardship, and how those who are different struggle to get through life, let alone achieve. Consequentially many of his stories have desperately sad endings – for example 11 swans, The story of a mother and The Little Mermaid. The overarching moral of these is ‘do not wish for what is not in your fate to achieve’. In this respect it is contrary to the American Dream so ably articulated by Horatio Alger.

Moreover, Andersen’s stories are very sad and strike an aesthetic chord within us. Most of his stories invoke emotions such as sadness and even real tears. Such is their power. They cover such a wide gamut of life scenarios and only some of his stories can be related to scenarios we have come to associate with entrepreneurship. They instil basic morals. The stories of Andersen perhaps help make the boy a man, whilst the stories of Alger make the man an entrepreneur. With the benefit of hindsight the stories perpetuated by Andersen prepared those who remained in Denmark to accept their fate. Such stories do indeed tell a very different fairytale than those told by Alger. It is important to remember that Andersen’s fairytales are childhood stories and as such they set the basis of future moralities and possible outcomes. They are generic to human
behaviour—and not scenarios dealing specifically with entrepreneurship. Andersen’s stories perhaps shaped the boys who read them and in turn helped influence their personal *doxa* of masculinity. Furthermore, it is possible to view the stories written by Andersen as being proto-entrepreneurial in that as stories they took a moral message between countries which shared a Western mindset. This is an exciting viewpoint because it makes the story the entrepreneur, and not the person, taking between cultures. One could also be forgiven for stating the obvious, in that the early life of Hans Christian Anderson reads like that of one of Horatio Alger’s boys.

Consideration of the moral message embedded within Hans Christian Andersen’s stories is helpful in explaining why (as a general rule) Danes are not very entrepreneurial. The basic message of Andersen’s stories was in many cases that you shouldn’t try to be something you were not. Indeed very few of his stories have happy endings because he focused on the pain of the ordinary person but (unlike Alger) did not provide any relief – beyond that of trusting in God! For example, *The Little Mermaid* ends up becoming the froth on the waves; the mother realizes that it may be best that her child is dead, although she has given up her eyes and hair to get it back; in the *11 Swans* the favorite brother is the only one who does not get totally rescued and will always have a swan wing for his left arm etc, etc. Thus Andersen narrates a totally opposite message to that of Horatio Alger—whose message really was where there’s a will, there’s a way! In positioning Andersen’s works alongside those of Alger’s we hear a different tale. Contrasting the differing moralities of Horatio Alger and Hans Christian Andersen enables a very different reading of entrepreneurship to emerge from a Danish perspective. It could even be argued that Hans Christian Andersen (like Horatio Alger) could even be classified as an entrepreneur in his own right because he was a purveyor of a cultural product and mindset.

It is apparent that that the fairytales of Andersen and Alger differ tremendously in purpose and in content. Yet for Danes, finding their version of the American Dream need not merely necessitate mimicking America. An overarching theme of poverty links all the
elements of this paper. Hans Christian Andersen was a poor-boy at heart with a wandering soul who in his lifetime experienced real hardship. This moved him to enrich the lives of others by writing stories which exemplified moral lessons appropriate for the old world values, in which he was raised. The cruel hand of poverty thus touched him but did not blight his life. Horatio Alger, although not a poor-boy himself, had a wandering soul in search of a true vocation. In stumbling across the ghetto poor of New York he found his vocation in writing stories to inspire them out of poverty. Being an outsider he was able to romanticise their plight and in the process turn it into a literary art form. We believe these two very different stories do offer an insight into the differing attitudes to entrepreneurship held by the Danes and the Americans. We conclude that it is possible to read the fairytales of Hans Christian Andersen as proto-entrepreneurial narratives in the same light as those of Horatio Alger.


Alger - Gender and Success in the Gilded Age: Ragged Dick and Tattered Tom (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001)


10 Robert Arnot. The Biology of Success: How to have it all (Newleaf, 2000)
A Question of Motive: The Chris Madsen Story Revisited

by Johan Windmüller

Upon first hearing the story of Chris Madsen, I recall the vivid intrigue I experienced when learning of a Danish immigrant who had become a famous lawman in the United States. As an immigrant from Denmark and a member of the American police brethren myself, I seemed to have discovered a kindred spirit in Madsen. I promptly began reading bits and pieces of information and soon had the basics down. Here was a real life hero who had served in three armies, surviving wars and Indian attacks and on top of that had enough gusto to join up with the United States Marshal Service after a long and honorable career in the armed forces. Madsen’s law enforcement career was equally long and eventful, fighting crime and fierce outlaws in Oklahoma Territory during the 1890s and beyond. That the man lived to talk about it and died of old age made it all that much more fascinating.

After hanging up the pistol belt and unpinning the badge for good, I devoted some time to researching Chris Madsen so I could properly share with the rest of the world the story of this often overlooked Wild West champion, only to quickly uncover that there was much more to the story than I initially thought. Madsen may have survived Little Big Horn, been a personal friend of both Buffalo Bill Cody and Wild Bill Hickok, and served with the Rough Riders under Teddy Roosevelt. Once again I found myself filled with excitement and glee. How was it possible that this authentic superman could have gone relatively unnoticed for all this time?

The vast majority of materials regarding Madsen available to peruse all seemed to retell the same wonderful narrative of Madsen’s service in the Danish Army, the French Foreign Legion and later the U.S. Army. Most focused on Madsen’s Deputy U.S. Marshal days roaming the Wild West with well known crime-fighting legends such as Bill Tighlman and Heck Thomas. A wonderful example of this type of article appeared in this very
journal in 1997 (vol. 20, no. 2) written by Sybil Duus Needham and another in the book *The Dream of America* (1986) where Danish historian Stig Thornsohn also shared the fantastic tale of “US [sic] MARSHAL MADSEN.”

Upon further examination of the facts available to me, I soon, to my tremendous horror, uncovered that not all aspects of Madsen’s life had been as they seemed. In fact, the majority of Madsen’s epic deeds were exaggerated or downright false.

Now, I ask you, the reader, to consider revisiting the myth of Chris Madsen and reflect on the new facts presented to you. You might just agree that there is much more than meets the eye once one dwells into the complex life and adventures of Chris Madsen.

Chris Madsen appeared to have been the kind of person only found in fiction, having lived a life full of adventure and dedicated to the pursuit of law and order. Most accounts of Madsen’s life seem to list the same basic chain of events: Madsen was born in Denmark in 1851, served in the Danish army during the war against Prussia in 1864, and in the French Foreign Legion during the Franco-Prussian War. Madsen later immigrated to the United States and joined the army, serving for fifteen years. Upon leaving the army, Madsen enjoyed a twenty-five year career in law enforcement, briefly interrupted by re-enlistment with the army during the Spanish-American War. Madsen died of old age in 1944 after an eventful life in the service of three nations.

At first glance it seemed that Madsen indeed lived an extraordinary life, one filled with achievement and heroic deeds. However, the true Chris Madsen was another person altogether, and very little regarding his life prior to arriving in the U.S., as told by Madsen, was based in fact. It looked as if Madsen wanted, and got,
a second chance when setting foot in New York in January 1876, but it was not long before he again began building up his personal accomplishments and endeavors regarding his life, both prior to and after immigrating. Madsen’s deceit was far reaching; starting with basic facts such as his name and date of birth, and included stories about having been a participant in some of history’s more famous events such as the Battle of Sedan. Madsen also claimed personal relationships with such personalities of Frontier and Wild West fame as Teddy Roosevelt, Buffalo Bill Cody and Wild Bill Hickok.

Chris Madsen also went by the name Christian Madsen, which was the name he used in his U.S. Army records. However, Madsen’s real first name was Christen according to Danish church records. Madsen had even gone by a third name, Christen Madsen Rørmose, during his emigration. Madsen’s use of Rørmose was due to the fact that he had been born in a house by that name, and it was common at the time to use this as an additional last name. It was clear that Madsen’s name change was not a mistake on anyone’s part, nor was it the first time he had done so.1

It would seem only natural for Madsen to be well prepared for his new life in the U.S., so in the Danish Emigration Archive it was recorded that on Tuesday December 28, 1875 he signed out as Christen Madsen Rørmose, but upon arrival in New York on January 17, 1876 he signed himself in as Christian Madsen. Only four days after arriving in the U.S., Madsen enlisted with the U.S. Army under the name Christian Madsen.2

Madsen usually listed his birthday as February 25, 1851, which was his actual birth date. Madsen did change his birthday on at least one occasion, on August 28, 1917 in a document filed with the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Pensions. In this document, Madsen claimed to have been born in 1852. Why Madsen claimed a different birth year in 1917 is not known, and according to Homer Croy, author of Trigger Marshal, and Madsen’s graveyard headstone, he was born in 1851.3

The location of Madsen’s birth has also been an issue of disagreement. Madsen claimed to have been born in Slesvig, which was a Danish province during the time of his birth, but became German after the war in 1864. Other sources have listed Madsen’s
birthplace as Copenhagen, but this may have had more to do with assumptions rather than faulty research. Madsen was actually born in the village of Ørested, on the island of Funen in Denmark.4

The fact that Madsen indicated to be from Slesvig was a large part of his story regarding military service. Slesvig was the region of Denmark in dispute during the 1864 war between Denmark and Prussia, so this would have given Madsen a strong reason for wanting to fight at age thirteen. Madsen also claimed to have served in the French Foreign Legion and to have fought in the Franco-Prussian War, again providing an opportunity to fight the Prussians who had taken his homeland from him.

The simple fact remained that Madsen served in neither the Danish army nor the French Foreign Legion, and there is no evidence of any military service prior to his enlistment on January 21, 1876 in the United States Army. A few obvious clues that Madsen made up this part of his life would be that he stated that he had been thirteen when serving in the Danish army, and that he claimed to have fought at the Battle of Sedan with the Legion; however the Legion did not fight at Sedan.5

The truth, it turns out, was much different. Madsen, among other things, was in and out prison during the time he claimed to have been in military service in Europe and Africa. Madsen claimed to have served in the Danish army and was supposed to have fought at the famous battle at Dybbøl on April 18, 1864. Madsen said that he had served in the French Foreign Legion from 1869 or 1870, for a period of three to five years, and it was during this service that he fought at the Battle of Sedan on September 1-2, 1870. According to Madsen, in Med Sabel og Pistol [With Sword and Pistol], he left Denmark for the last time in his entire life in what appeared to have been 1870 to join the Legion. Madsen did not provide an actual year but explained that it was six years after the end of the war of 1864. Madsen further wrote about how he actively participated at the Battle of Sedan but offered this explanations for his lack of detail: “It is not necessary to tell anyone who has ever participated in a larger battle in a foreign and unknown region, how little he, who barely could see the man at his side, knew about the battle’s course.”6
According to Madsen, he went to Norway sometime after leaving the Legion. Again, Madsen provided no specific year, but it most likely was in either 1873 or 1874 based on the information given. Madsen wrote that he did not know what to do with himself, and was therefore happy when he was offered an opportunity to work for the railroad as an engineer and also gained employment in a shipping office, which later led to service on whaling ships. While in Norway, Madsen said that he met a person who he identified as Major Hansen. Madsen described Hansen as the largest man he had ever seen and explained how Hansen had served in the U.S. Army during the American Civil War. Hansen told Madsen many stories about life in the U.S. and the army, all of which appealed to Madsen. Madsen felt that nothing was keeping him tied to the old country, so on “a fine day” he arrived in New York. Once again, Madsen did not give any specifics with regards to the dates or years of his meetings with Hansen or his decision to leave for America.7

According to Leif Rudi Ernst, a Danish historian and author of Skurk i Danmark–Helt i Amerika [Villain in Denmark-Hero in America], in other versions of his life story, Madsen provided the year of his travels to Norway as 1874, after supposedly having been deported from Slesvig, and indicated the time of his departure for America as December 1875, after being convinced by Major Hansen that U.S. Army life was worth a try.8

There was some truth in Madsen’s own version of his life prior to emigrating to the U.S. but little. Madsen lived at home with his parents during his childhood and was confirmed on April 23, 1865 in the local church. Upon confirmation, Madsen served at the same church, assisting the pastor for approximately six months. At this time Madsen enrolled in an agricultural school at Middelfart, Denmark, where he remained for about two years. After leaving school, Madsen lived at home for about a year, at which time he wanted to move out on his own. Madsen made it to Copenhagen in May of 1868 where he began work for a local wine dealer. He worked for the dealer until September 1 the same year, and this was when Madsen’s life changed for the worse. Upon leaving the wine dealer for unknown reasons, Madsen held some minor jobs, but soon became unemployed. In early February 1869, Madsen went to
Sweden to seek work but was unsuccessful there as well. After returning to Denmark he went to the police and asked for help to return home to Funen. This wish was granted, and Madsen received a free ticket home.9

Madsen did not make it home, but while en route, met a person who offered a solution to Madsen’s money problems. The idea was to write a “beggar’s letter” which was a note in which the holder would write that he or she had lost all his or her belongings. Upon receiving money from someone, the holder of the letter would ask the person giving the money to sign their name on the letter so other people could see who may have been kind enough to help the holder. Madsen decided to take this scheme one step further and added the names of famous people to his letter so others would be more inclined to help him. This ploy worked well for Madsen until he made a mistake and wrote the name of a person on his letter prior to asking that same person for money. This resulted in Madsen’s first arrest in May 1869, and he was sentenced to five days in jail for fraud.10

Madsen continued this behavior and the end result was at least seven arrests for begging, vagrancy, fraud and forgery, between 1869 and 1875, with stops in both Sweden and Norway as part of his crime spree. Madsen spent a total of 1,346 days, or three and a half years in prison for his crimes. It was during this time Madsen began to use different names and began creating stories about his life. On a wanted poster from February 1874, Madsen was identified as Kristian Madsen Rørmosehus, but the alias he was using at the time was listed as Karl Kristian Johan Andreas Daniel Hoffmann. The same poster also listed Slesvig as the birthplace used by Madsen. An indication that this was the same man, who the world would later know as Chris Madsen, was the fact that the poster listed one identifier as a scar on the right leg. In Med Sabel og Pistol Madsen describes how he was shot in the leg during the Battle of Sedan, but did not specify which leg was injured. Could it be that Madsen was aware the scar was noticeable enough that a cover story was needed?11

Madsen did hold a job as an engineer in Norway sometime in late 1873 or early 1874 but shortly thereafter spotted his wanted poster in
a restaurant. As Madsen attempted to leave the area, he was arrested and sent back to Denmark. The Norwegian “Major” Ole Andreas Hansen, who was described as a giant, did exist and had served in the U.S. army during the Civil War. There was indeed a chance that Madsen may have met Hansen while in Norway, as Madsen frequented the region of the country where Hansen lived.12

Madsen was last released from prison on December 26, 1875, after serving 652 days for fraud and forgery, and two days later he appeared in the emigration records as leaving for New York, U.S.A. There was some evidence indicating that Madsen’s ticket was paid for by the prison system; it was common practice for the Danish government at the time to “encourage” career criminals to leave the country.13

Several reasons for Madsen’s departure have been given, some by Madsen himself. In Med Sabel og Pistol, Madsen wrote that Major Hansen’s stories about America and the U.S. Army convinced him to go since he did not have any reason to stay in Europe. In Trigger Marshal Homer Croy explained that Madsen had grown up reading about the Wild West and “one way or another” had saved up enough money to come to the U.S. to fight Indians. Shane Edwards, author of Heroes and Outlaws of the Old West, offered the explanation that Madsen had been forced to flee Europe due to his involvement in the Franco-Prussian War. The truth was that Madsen was deported from his own country due to his criminal activities and unwillingness to reform.14

Madsen prepared well for his new life in America and, in true form, changed his name for the last time to Christian Madsen, soon to be known as Chris. Madsen was off to a fast start once he arrived in New York and enlisted in the U.S. Army only four days after setting foot in the U.S. Only ten days later he was back to asking for money when he wrote the Danish consul, requesting a loan. It should not come as a surprise that there were no records showing whether Madsen ever paid the loan back; there was, however, a second letter dated March 11, 1876 in which Madsen explained why he was unable to pay the loan at that time. According to Madsen, he had been paid the day before but all his money had been needed to
pay other bills. Madsen also explained how he was currently in the hospital after an accident involving a horse.15

While being processed in New York for enlistment, Madsen claimed to have been questioned about the scar on his leg. In Med Sabel og Pistol Madsen again did not specify on which leg his wound was located, but in Trigger Marshal the scar is mentioned, and this time the location was identified as the left ankle. It would seem strange that the location was suddenly so specific after Madsen himself did not seem prepared to provide much detail in his own book. Was this just a simple mistake or yet another bit of proof that Madsen himself, or a writer attempting to glorify him, made an attempt to conceal Madsen’s true identity?16

What unit of the U.S. Army Madsen joined is another dispute. There has been no doubt that Madsen enlisted in the cavalry but was it the 5th or 7th? According to Madsen, he originally joined the 7th, which was Custer’s cavalry but was transferred to the 5th before he could reach Custer and his men. Homer Croy reported the same basic events; Madsen joined the 7th but was among a group of men transferred to the 5th while en route to Custer’s location. Again, it would seem that Madsen had chosen to alter history because it was very clear from his original enlistment contract that he joined the 5th cavalry from the start. This all became part of the giant myth that surrounded Madsen at the end of his life and for many years to come. Claims have been made that Madsen was a participant at Little Big Horn with Custer on June 25, 1876, and one account has boasted that Madsen was not only there, but that he was also the sole survivor. The fact remained that Madsen could not have been at Little Big Horn during the battle, and Madsen himself did not claim to have been there at that time. There was, in fact, another soldier by the same name who fought and died at Little Big Horn. Several stories are told about Madsen and his role during the time of Little Big Horn. Some accounts put him there during the battle, some shortly after the events. The truth is that Madsen was not at Little Big Horn during the time of the battle, and if he did set foot there, it would have been several months later.17

Less than a month after Little Big Horn, Madsen did witness what became a significant event in Western history. On July 17, 1876, the
famous Duel at War Bonnet Creek took place between Buffalo Bill Cody and the Indian Yellow Hand. Again, some of the accounts vary slightly, but enough common information was found to determine that Madsen mostly likely did witness the fight. Madsen was assigned as a signalman in company A and was on a small hill when Buffalo Bill and Yellow Hand engaged each other. Whether Madsen was close enough to have heard Cody utter the infamous words: “The first scalp for Custer” upon killing and scalping Yellow Hand, is unclear. Another unresolved matter was that of Madsen’s relationship with Cody. Madsen and Cody did serve in same army unit and probably knew one another. However, if they spent a great deal of time together, as Homer Croy writes, or if they were close friends as one Danish newspaper article claimed, is not certain.18

The rest of Madsen’s army career was filled with tales of heroic travels and lots of action. Much of Madsen’s version of his service could be dismissed, but one very familiar aspect of Madsen’s personality did surface on at least one occasion. In 1881 Madsen managed to get himself into some trouble with the army, and this cost him five months in prison. What Madsen was accused and convicted of was not exactly specified, but some records indicated that he had been absent without leave and had sold army property. Beyond that event, Madsen seemed to have served the U.S. well for fifteen years.19

After leaving the army in 1891, Madsen soon became a Deputy U.S. Marshal in the Oklahoma territory. This would result in a career lasting nearly twenty-five years, and lead to lots of material for future tall tales and liberties with facts. Several trends showed up with regards to Madsen’s personality and motivations during his law enforcement service. One common issue of importance, or one could argue the root of Madsen’s problems in Denmark, was money. Madsen describes the entire pay scale of the different positions with the Marshal’s office in Med Sabel og Pistol, and Homer Croy provided the pay as Madsen’s deciding factor for taking the job. Madsen also had at least one legal action against him during his time as a law enforcement officer, when he was accused of assaulting a man by pistol-whipping him in the face. The events leading up to the assault have often been told, but Madsen himself was one of the few
to admit that he indeed was charged and convicted as a result. Madsen was also briefly investigated in 1911 when he was serving as acting U.S. Marshal.\textsuperscript{20}

One other trend appeared later, but it was a new area for Madsen. Madsen might have had an interest in politics. In 1898 Madsen volunteered and joined Teddy Roosevelt’s Rough Riders but did not take part in any of the action in Cuba. According to Madsen he had been asked to join and to take the job of quartermaster, a position he had held in his earlier army career. This seemed an odd choice, considering that when Madsen left the army in 1891, his discharge papers indicated that he was ill-suited for that particular job. Madsen soon left the army again and returned to his law enforcement career. Madsen’s decision to join would seem to be the beginning of his newest plan for success: politics. Madsen had learned in his youth that begging for money by using the names of prominent people of the day could provide rewards; he would later attempt to use this formula to further his political career.

In \textit{Med Sabel og Pistol}, Madsen explained how the actual office of U.S. Marshal was a political one and how a presidential appointment was needed in order to hold that job. Madsen also explained that when things went well, the Marshal would get the credit, but when things went wrong, the Chief Deputy would get the blame. At the time Madsen wrote this, he had held the job of Chief Deputy several times, but the position of Marshal only once and only temporarily. When Teddy Roosevelt became president in September 1901 and an appointment was upcoming, Madsen was soon in Washington on behalf of someone else, but it was clear that Madsen himself might be appointed to Marshal due to his Rough Rider ties with the President. Madsen did not receive the appointment, but it did go to another Rough Rider, under whom Madsen served as office deputy.\textsuperscript{21}

In 1905 there again was a possible appointment for Madsen, and this time he was endorsed by the Chickasha Republican Club for the office of U.S. Marshal. Again, Madsen did not get the job. In 1906 Madsen again went to Washington but would not disclose the object of his trip. Madsen did become acting U.S. Marshal on January 1, 1911, but only remained in the job for four months. In 1916 Madsen
was again in the position of Chief Deputy but resigned on April 30, shortly before election-day because, in his own words, he was the only Republican left in the office, and according to Homer Croy, the Democrats found someone for the job. In 1917 Madsen worked with the Tulsa Oklahoma Police Department, but resigned after a Democratic administration replaced the Republicans in 1918. In 1920 Madsen became a delegate to the Republican National Convention, and in 1921 he once again applied for the position of U.S. Marshal, oddly enough the same year Med Sabel og Pistol was published. Madsen did not get the job this time either.22

So what were Madsen’s reasons for lying and stretching the truth his entire life? What did he gain from it? Some clear answers have appeared repeatedly, starting with a need for money. Why Madsen did not stay at his job with the wine dealer in Copenhagen is not known, but it is very clear that Madsen soon found an easy way to make money by passing himself off as someone other than who he really was. Madsen also nearly perfected the art of using the names of famous people in order to get what he wanted. When Madsen was forced to leave his home country, he was offered the chance to start a new life but soon drifted towards his old ways, although not resorting to crime to the extent he had before. Money did continue to be a common and very important factor in Madsen’s life and upon his death in 1944 Madsen left an estate of ten thousand dollars and his farm, which indicated some success with regards to wealth.23

Later in life Madsen, became motivated by the possibility of holding the highest office in his chosen career with the U.S. Marshal Service, probably dominated by the desire for wealth and prestige. Madsen again relied on his winning approach of making himself out to be someone he was not and to associate with famous people. In later years Madsen’s approach included associating and comparing himself to famous lawmen of the Old West such as Wild Bill Hickok, whom Madsen claimed to have personally known, and Pat Garrett, who he did not know but knew many men who did.24

So what did Madsen really gain from his life as a criminal and conman? It would seem that it only resulted in moderate financial success, even though it appeared to have been the main motive. Madsen was successful in creating a legend and myth, which stood
as historical truth for over fifty years after his death. Everything written and told about Madsen until the late 1990s, reported the story, as Madsen himself would have wanted it. Madsen was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame and has been named as one of the “Oklahoma Guardsmen” along with Bill Tilghman and Heck Thomas; a trio that has been credited with bringing better law and order in the West. In 1915, Madsen also played himself in the film The Passing of the Oklahoma Outlaws, which was directed by non other than Bill Tilghman.25

Although Madsen did accomplish a lot in his life, some of which could be described as heroic and adventurous, the truth remains that most of Madsen’s exploits were nothing but wishful thinking and creative story telling. Madsen certainly was to blame for most of the embellished tales, but others continued to retell his stories without checking any of the facts, thereby enabling the legend to grow. Madsen wrote on the last page of Med Sabel og Pistol: “Men like me...do not get their names in history’s yearbooks; we are remembered and talked about for a while by the ones with whom we lived, but another generation comes along and soon our names will only be a saga.”26

2 Ernst, Skurk i Danmark, 201-3.
<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/WWmadsenC.htm> (last visited February 17, 2004); Shane Edwards, *Heroes and Outlaws of the Old West* (Santa Monica, CA: Santa Monica Press, 1993), 73; Ernst, “Rørmose”, 16.

Samuelson, 11.


Madsen, 12-13.

Ernst “Rørmose”, 16.

Ernst *Skruk i Danmark*, 37, 45-6.

Ibid., 49-55.

Ernst *Skruk i Danmark*, 199; Ernst “Rørmose”, 17; Madsen, 6.

Ernst “Rørmose”, 18; Ernst *Skruk i Danmark*, 214.

Ibid., 199-200; Birgit Flemming Larsen, interviewed by author, 8 March 2004, Blair, Nebraska.

Madsen, 13; Croy, 3; Edwards, 73; Samuelson, 12.

Ernst *Skruk i Danmark*, 201-7.

Madsen, 14; Croy, 5.

Madsen, 14; Croy, 6; Ernst *Skruk i Danmark*, 203; John A. Minion *The Death of a Survivor* (Rosedale, NY: privately printed, 1964), 4; Samuelson, 12.

Don Russell “The Duel on the War Bonnet” *Journal of the American Military History Foundation* 1, no.2 (1937), 60; Samuelson, 13; Croy, 10-13; Edwards, 74; Madsen, 25-6; Jim Wilson “Chris Madsen – The Fighting Dane” *Shooting Times* <http://www.shootingtimes.com/gunsmoke/madsen_0731/> (last visited February 17, 2004); Alfred G. Anderson “Præriens bedste mand var dansk-amerikaner” (The Prairie’s best man was Danish-American) *Aalborg Stiftstidende* 7 July 1958.

Samuelson, 15; Ernst *Skruk i Danmark*, 221.

Madsen, 75-6; Croy, 37-8; Madsen, 78; Samuelson, 130, 91. It was unclear why Madsen was investigated but he was cleared of any misconduct or wrongdoing.

Samuelson, 83; Madsen, 75; Samuelson, 86-7.


Croy, 242.

Ibid., 106-7.

26 Madsen, 166.
American Images of Denmark during the Cold War

by Anders Kristian Bærholm Frikke

Preface

The study of the past is essential for our understanding of the present day. In other words, if you want to know something about your own time, a good place to start is to study the previous historical events.

The Cold War is in many ways a defining event for our world today. It was the central conflict of the post Second World War period, and as it was fought between the only two superpowers on earth, the United States and the Soviet Union, no nation could stay completely neutral. Denmark is an example of a country that had to choose sides in the Cold War, despite strong pacifist feelings in the general public, and a history of political neutrality since the Slesvig wars in 1848-50 and in 1864.

Denmark’s strategic and political position during the Cold War is worthy of attention because such a study can bring both knowledge of the small state’s role in the global conflict–seen from an American point of view–and insight into Denmark’s post Cold War foreign policy. The following article will focus specifically on how the Danish political system and the Danish decision-making were perceived by the American presidents and politicians in Washington D.C., during some of the most tense periods of the Cold War between 1950 to 1968.

I want to thank the Board of Directors of the Danish American Heritage Society, administrators of the Edith and Arnold N. Bodtker Grant for Research or Internship, for making this study possible. Their approval of my grant application provided the funds for my research trip to the United States during the winter and spring 2005. There I had the opportunity to collect the necessary archive material for this project—primarily in Washington D. C. at the National Archives II, later at several of the American presidential archives and at the University of Copenhagen.
I am grateful that the board decided to support what I consider to be an important project even though it does not specifically deal with Danish-American immigrant issues.

Introduction
Denmark has an important strategic-military and political position in Northern Europe. The small country’s geography is unique—it could be called the delta of the Baltic Sea between the European continent in the south and the Scandinavian Peninsula to the north. This position made Denmark a relatively important and strong empire through medieval times, and later during the last 200 years Denmark probably only survived as a nation because none of the great powers surrounding the kingdom, Britain, Germany and Russia, could accept the idea that the strategic delta of the Baltic Sea was under control of one of the other two—Denmark stayed independent due to this rivalry, although Sweden got Norway after the Napoleonic wars in 1814 and a combined Prussian and Austrian army conquered the southern parts of the empire, Slesvig (Schleswig) and Holsten (Holstein), in the second of the Slesvig wars in 1864.

New technology, new types of transportation and more powerful weapons up through the twentieth century made Denmark’s strategic position less important, but Hitler still choose to occupy the otherwise German-friendly country, because it could strengthen the position of his fleet and become a necessary bridgehead towards Norway.

With the Second World War it became clear that Denmark would be absolutely impossible to defend in case of a new major war. The country is too narrow and flat and has too many inlets and fjords—there are no natural defense lines against a large, mobile army. This knowledge was especially explicated by the Radical Liberal Party and the politician, P. Munch, but it was also used strongly by the Danish Communist Party as an argument to create a communist society. The communists gained many voters on this issue, and over the years this political debate created strong pacifist feelings among the Danes in general.
It is therefore not surprising that the allied powers and especially the United States after the Second World War had an interest in, but also a problem with, the small state in Northern Europe, Denmark. In sum, two factors were of major importance for the understanding of Denmark’s international position after World War Two, namely the country’s military strategic importance due to its geography, and the political system, which had a tendency to be pacifist and to quite a large degree socialist—and right after the war even communist, due to the party’s important role in the resistance movement. In fact during the 1950s and 1960s – in the context of some of the most tense periods of the cold war – Denmark had an almost uninterrupted Social Democratic rule (from 1953 to 1968) under which the country developed into a modern, socialist inspired welfare state – quite far from the American concept of the ideal society.

It was essential for America that Scandinavia in general and Denmark in particular, became a part of the Western Powers after the war, and not a vacuum of political uncertainty in Europe. This problem became even more imminent as the Cold War slowly emerged in the late 1940s because socialism and to some degree communism, as mentioned, had strongholds in Denmark. These problems gave birth to the important debate about whether or not the relatively socialist Denmark could be trusted as a western allied? This debate continues among Danish historians of the Cold War.

In the following I will present some background information on the Danish-American relations in the period after the Second World War, and discuss some essential research on this topic. I will hereby narrow down my specific thesis for this investigation.

**Denmark, NATO and the Cold War**

The so called consensus-line-historians in Denmark point out that the post Second World War relations between Denmark and the United States were good, and without any serious reservations, because the attitude in the Danish public during the war had been pro-allied, British/American, and strongly against the German occupation forces. The warm relationship in other words just continued, and the recognition of Denmark as an allied state, and later the NATO-alliance was the natural continuation hereof. This
is, however, a very simplistic view that most likely was written with a certain historic purpose in mind, namely the healing of the wounds after the war, when the Danish population was more supportive of Hitler-Germany than most people, including the historians, would admit in the tough years following the occupation. The story that is told by the historians today is, of course, much more complex, as I will explain in more detail in the following part.

This study should be seen as a supplement and extension of a central, ongoing debate about the Danish-American relationship in the Cold War era between two leading Danish Cold War historians, Poul Villaume and Bo Lidegaard. The debate focuses on whether Denmark acted as a real ally, and if the Danish politicians and population regarded themselves as conclusive NATO members and supporters of the United States.

Villaume’s thesis is that Denmark to some degree would not, and possibly could not, become a secure and trustworthy NATO member. Therefore he also calls his mammoth dissertation: *Allied with Reservations—Denmark, NATO, and the Cold War; A Study of Danish National Security Policy, 1949-1961.* The title is, in other words, a strong indication of his interpretation of the Danish security policy during the period. Villaume stresses that Denmark had one of the lowest per capita military budgets among the NATO members—much lower than Britain and the United States recommended—and this fact was only accepted because Denmark had competent (maybe even sly) politicians who acted strategically in international affairs. In this connection the so called “quite a free hand”, which the U. S. was given on the strategically important island of Greenland (the Thule Airbase) should not be underestimated. An important part reason for this attitude in Denmark was, Villaume underlines, that everybody knew that the country could not be defended in case of a major war—it simply was not part of NATO’s war plan, whereas the German river Elbe or later the Pyrenees would be the major defense lines against the Soviet Union – all to the west of the Danish border.

Denmark’s hard but unfruitful work to establish a Scandinavian military alliance (before NATO around 1947-49) between Denmark, Norway and Sweden, shows, according to Villaume, the strong wish
among the Danish politicians as well as the population to stay neutral in the slowly emerging Cold War conflict. It was in fact Norway that more or less forced Denmark into NATO.\textsuperscript{12}

The Danish Social Democratic Party is immensely important when dealing with this question because it was in power during most of this period (prime ministers: Hans Hedtoft (1947-50; 1953-55), Hans Christian Hansen (1955-60), Viggo Kampmann (1960-62) and Jens Otto Krag (1960-68; 1971-72)). It was Hans Hedtoft who was the warmest supporter and the most prominent designer behind the Scandinavian defense alliance project, and it was later the Social Democrats that ensured that Denmark did not spend more money than necessary on the military. The Danish Social Democrats wanted to build a socialist welfare state. This was expensive and it was therefore natural to try to keep the defense expenses to a minimum. This small-state, socialist view of the world was quite far from the American interpretation of the international affairs in the 1950s and 1960s and this created tension. Villaume argues that the Social Democratic hinterland demanded a policy that was not too NATO friendly, but he also points out that for Prime Ministers Hans Hedtoft and H. C. Hansen the NATO choice was the least evil, and something they chose out of “bitter necessity”. The Social Democrats on the other hand felt that it was their duty to make the Danish public understand and accept the need for the NATO alliance and the internationalization of the Danish military involvement in general. The relations between the United States and Denmark/the Social Democratic Party were therefore somewhat tense during parts of the 1950s, because Denmark, according to Villaume, was an ally but with reservations.

Bo Lidegaard’s interpretation of Danish Cold War policies and Danish-American relations is different.\textsuperscript{13} In fact he does not disagree with Villaume in his argumentation, but he claims at the same time that Villaume tells us only part of the whole story. It is, according to Lidegaard, necessary to look deeper on the more structural layers of history to get a consistent and solid understanding of the events. In a way Lidegaard’s interpretation is therefore more indirect, which I will explain in more detail in the following.
Lidegaard focuses specifically on the role of the Social Democratic Party when he analyzes the Danish-American relations during the period. In this connection it is important to keep in mind that the Danish Social Democratic Party was in power in Denmark with very few exceptions from the war ended and until the early 1980s, and had uninterrupted rule during the period 1953-1968, which is the period of interest here. So instead of looking on the Danish-American relations he analyzes Danish Social Democratic-American relations—hence he is able to “dig” a little bit deeper than Villauime. Lidegaard calls Denmark an American ally without reservations. He claims that of course there were some tensions once in a while on the surface over small and often unimportant problems, but that on the deeper level there was a warm understanding between the two countries. The global American fight against communism and the Soviet Union could very well be compared to the daily battles the Danish Social Democrats fought against the communists – the Social Democrats and the Communists were bitter opponents in the Danish parliament - and that created a connection and understanding between the party and the U. S. administrations. It was in other words well known in the U. S. that the best way to fight communism in Europe was to support the Social Democrats. Lidegaard’s argument is that the American administrations never really pushed the different Danish governments, although they of course had the political muscles to do so. It was accepted by the U.S. that Denmark spent less money on defense and that Denmark at least officially never accepted nuclear weapons on Danish soil—including Greenland.

Lidegaard concludes that there was, what he calls, a strategic alliance between the two countries. It was known in America that it would create domestic political problems for the Social Democratic governments if they were pushed too hard on, for example, the defense questions—therefore the Americans did not do that. The central point is, according to Lidegaard, that the American administrations knew that the Danish governments would fight and try to contain communism—which was the American Cold War strategy at the time. The two nations did agree totally on what the United States found most important, and therefore it was possible to
overcome some minor disagreements. Lidegaard’s thesis is, however, as I stated above, more indirect than the one Villaume brings to light. It is much more difficult to find evidence that supports Lidegaard, unless you look at the broad, strategic picture and over a long period of time—it is clear that the small “surface” cases (Lidegaard) takes up a lot of space in the archives, and that is what has made Villaume draw the wrong conclusions, according to Lidegaard. Denmark was in other words an ally without reservations.

The question that comes to mind now, is how this research dispute can be solved? My project, as I mentioned above, can be seen as a supplement and extension of the central, ongoing debate between Poul Villaume and Bo Lidegaard. My scope is, however, different than theirs. I will turn the problem 180 degrees around and try to view Denmark from an American point of view. My starting point is therefore the American archives and the politics of the different American administrations during the period. What the Danish politicians did and thought during the Cold War period is one thing, but what the American politicians, officials and bureaucrats thought and especially wrote about Denmark internally within the American system is a different matter. The specific purpose of this study is therefore to investigate how the different American administrations perceived and assessed the Danish political development from 1950-1968, with a special focus on the Danish Social Democratic Party and the creation of the welfare state. Did the different presidents and their administrations (Harry S. Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson) see the Danish socialist model as dangerous and half Soviet-communist? Or did they view the Danish model as a secure safeguard against communism and the Soviet block, which could possibly be used as a role model for other states in the so-called western world?

My research provides a picture of the American attitude from within towards one of the, seemingly, most socialist members of NATO in Europe, Denmark. In addition to this, my research gives a better understanding of both the role of the United States in Europe, and the American attitude towards and “management” of the of the European states during the Cold War.
My primary source material consists of American embassy reports sent from Denmark to the State Department. Occasionally officials in Washington D.C. commented on these reports, sometimes with proposals to American political initiatives towards Denmark.

**American Images of Denmark during the Cold War**

Based on my analysis the American view of Denmark’s political development from 1950 to 1968 can briefly be summarized as follows: During the early 1950s, American evaluations of Denmark are primarily positive. However, in some areas a wait-and-see policy is clearly evident due to the fact that Denmark is a new and not so well known ally, and maybe more importantly due to the somewhat limited Danish commitment to NATO. There is, however, also a general understanding of the fact that Danish political life is dictated by the voters, of whom many are quite skeptical of NATO, in part because of the earlier mentioned strong Danish tradition of pacifism. Particularly around 1953-54 when Eisenhower takes over the presidency, Denmark is viewed in a more negative perspective. The weakened relationship between the two countries is caused most likely by the rejection of an expanded NATO presence on Danish soil. After this low in the US-Danish relations, the American opinion of Denmark is slowly becoming more and more positive, which seems especially apparent after H. C. Hansen becomes prime minister during the mid 1950s. Extensive Danish welfare programs – that even at a certain point result in a cut in the defense expenditures – do not change this tendency of an improved understanding between the two countries.

The same can be said also about the 1960s. The temporary setback occurs during Viggo Kampmann’s short and hectic term as prime minister, when the extreme political left undergoes a revival under Socialist Folk Party (SF) leader, Aksel Larsen. This does not, however, have any serious or long term consequences for the generally excellent relationship between Denmark and the United States, despite almost mandatory disagreements about the size of the Danish NATO budget. From 1962 and onwards under Prime Minister J. O. Krag, Denmark is evaluated by the American diplomats in unprecedented positive terms as a good friend who is
able to play an ambassador role for the United States within the international community.

My research has shown, however, that a number of factors in the years following the Folketing election in 1966 impair the relations between the two countries, and especially the opposition to the American warfare in Vietnam has an important role to play in this respect. However, the election in 1968 and the new liberal-conservative government coalition that comes into power afterwards in most ways restore the good relations. My investigation also indicates that the above-mentioned disagreements between Denmark and the United States in the second half of the 1960s are temporary and not fundamental by nature.

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The chronological outline above of the Danish-American relations during the 1950s and 1960s points to four general results, which change the image previously shown in the research about Danish-American relations during the cold war. I will discuss these four points in more detail in the following:

1) The United States never questions Denmark’s overall position among the western democracies despite a strong Social Democratic Party and a socialist inspired welfare state. This does not mean, however, that the US-Danish relations are always unproblematic. Especially in connection with the size of the Danish NATO budget there are almost mandatory disagreements, but this does not, however, seem to have any long term effect on an otherwise generally good relationship between the two countries. My study therefore indicates that the Danish-American relations should be seen in a more positive and non-intervening light than Poul Villaume indicates in his research.

2) There is in Washington D.C. a surprisingly low interest in Danish domestic policies that are not related to defense – for example social laws, taxation and union policies, all which are strongly inspired by a socialist way of thinking. There is, however, a fair interest in the outcome of elections, and
especially the Radical Liberal and Communist parties (and from 1958 the Socialist Folk party, SF), due to their pacifist policies and the strong bond between the Danish communist party and the Soviet Union.

3) The Social Democratic Party and its policies are rarely subject to thorough scrutiny and strong suspicion, although they often cooperate with the Radical Liberal Party and during the 1960s the Socialist Folk Party (SF).

4) It is to my surprise not possible to measure a change in the attitude towards Denmark during the presidencies of Democrats John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. There is not a measurable difference between the Democrat and Republican presidents, in connection with how Danish policies are perceived—although the Republican policies and values are further away from the Danish social democratic way of thought than the Social Democratic Party platform.

**Denmark’s Overall Position in the Cold War seen from the USA**

Denmark became a member of NATO in late 1949, and the earliest American “pictures” of Denmark I include in this investigation are from that period—the late 1940s and early 1950s. The perception of Denmark is more a wait-and-see attitude during this period compared to the later 1950s and the 1960s. This could be expected due to the fact that Denmark is a new ally with a pacifist tradition.

A Policy Statement from State Department from 1949 states: “…a large segment of the Social Democratic Party is dubious that the Government was correct in abandoning neutrality and adopting the NATO philosophy.” It furthermore says that the Danish people tended toward reaffirming the former policy of neutrality, and that the government is keenly sensitive to attacks by the Communists. The Truman administration probably was not afraid that Denmark would become a communist nation, but it is also clear that the position of the country, within the general, international landscape was not really settled yet. If one compares this statement, with the later policy statements and political reviews, the differences become more distinct. The Attaché from the American embassy in
Copenhagen wrote in a paper on Danish political developments during 1953: “In spite of becoming increasingly passive participants in NATO, there were continued strong official expressions of support for the organization.” Later he said that the Social Democratic parties were evolving away from the doctrinaire socialism toward a more moderate welfare philosophy, and that there is no danger that the democratic system will be overthrown from within by rightists or leftists. In the end the Attaché states that Denmark is: “Regarded as a prime example of Western Democracy.” The picture is more or less the same during the later part of the 1950s and most of the way up through the 1960s – the tone actually becomes more positive during the 1960s.

A lot primarily negative attention is, however, drawn to the pacifist Radical Liberal Party, the Socialist Peoples’ Party (from 1959 onwards) and the Communists. It is due to their reserved attitude towards NATO, and the socialist views (only Communists and SF) that these parties are mentioned.

The fact that the Communist Party attracted so much attention is probably not that surprising, and the same can be said about the Socialist Folk Party, that had the earlier leader of the Communist Party, the charismatic Aksel Larsen, as chairman. It is more interesting that the Radical Liberal Party is so much in focus in the source material, because their policy is in general mid-centered, and cannot (at least according to Danish standards) be said to be socialist. This only stresses that the United States during the period is heavily focused on Danish defense policies, and not on its domestic policies.

It, however, also seems to become a less important matter over time. When the Radical Liberal leader, Hilmar Baunsgaard, becomes Prime Minster in 1968, it does not create any severe problems between Denmark and the United States. This is, however, most likely due to a Radical Liberal softening on the defense issues over the 1960s—as an analysis from the State Department underlines in 1968 after the election, where the Social Democratic party had been overthrown: “They [Radical Liberals] are unlikely to change domestic or foreign policies significantly.”
The war in Vietnam, however, seems to weaken the relationship between the U.S. and Denmark. In general the Johnson administration still seems to trust the Danish politicians, but it is also a fact that the voice of the people can be powerful. The embassy states in 1967: “Criticism, particularly over the bombing of North Vietnam is widespread, even among pro-American Danes. This criticism has not yet been endorsed by the government leaders, who have tried to induce a balanced approach to the problem within the parameters of a weak domestic political position”. Later the embassy concludes: “The effect of all this has been a slow consistent deterioration of relations. Most Danes, and the Danish government, continue to be friendly to the United States, and there is doubtless a considerable reservoir of good will and even affection, in addition to an effective working relationship in most areas. Equally unmistakable, however, is the fact that the ties are loosening.” Problems and criticism in relation to the Vietnam War was, however, a general problem also in domestic American political life, and there is nothing in the source material to suggest that the problems concerning the Danish-America political relations around 1966-1968 were long term or unsolvable.

In conclusion there were small disagreements and problems at the immediate level between the U.S. and Denmark, for example the fact that Denmark’s NATO contribution is smaller than that of many other comparable countries. On the deeper structural level, however, there is seemingly no doubt concerning the Danish position. Denmark is considered a strong and secure ally in terms of the shared set of human and democratic values between the two countries.

The Welfare State
From the 1950s onwards the Danish Social Democratic party created the foundation for the welfare state Denmark is today. Several of the biggest steps in this process were taken during the 1950s and 1960s. Many of these initiatives were inspired by a socialist ideology, and were, as mentioned earlier, in many ways quite far from the values in the American society—for example high taxation, universal healthcare, general pension plans, a “large state” with more security
for especially the poor people, but also less individual freedom. This
fact could possibly lead American analysts to think that Denmark
would be susceptible to Soviet propaganda or that the country slowly
was developing into a communist type of state. This does not seem
to be the case, however.

In this connection it is worth dwelling a little bit on one of the
most important Danish social laws ever made, and the American
reaction to it—the general pensioning plan from 1956. In September
that year nationwide pensioning became a reality for the first time in
the Danish nation’s history. There are only few comments on the
very expensive plan in the American archives—in this connection it
is worth mentioning that the plan resulted in the significant 50
million kroner cut in the defense budget. The American embassy in
Copenhagen concludes that the law will be costly for the Danish
state, and that it is a shame that: “Although strong supporters of this
bill, the Radical Liberals have seized every opportunity since its
introduction to press their traditional demands for military budget
cuts and reductions in the period of conscript service in order to
finance it”. This report in specific or the pensioning plan from 1956
in general, however, never creates a reaction in Washington D.C.,
which shows the strength and amount of trust in the Danish-
American relations in the late 1950s—Denmark is considered a firm
and strong ally—social laws or a welfare state do not change that
fact.

The picture of a quiet American acceptance of domestic Danish
politics can be seen throughout the 1960s as well. If one looks at
other important and comparable laws during the period the
conclusion is the same. A good example is the large complex of
economic laws in 1961 to 1963, where, for example, the high Danish
sales tax was introduced (the OMS (omsætningsafgift—a sales tax)
and later MOMS (mere omsætningsafgift—more sales tax).

The Social Democratic Party—The Democrats and Republicans
The Social Democratic Party had uninterrupted power in Denmark
from 1953 to 1968 in a long and very decisive period of Denmark’s
recent history, Denmark is therefore in many ways shaped by that
party and its policies. It is a party that is normally placed slight to
the left side of the center in the Danish political spectrum, and although it is not normally considered pure socialist, it is strongly inspired by a socialist way of thinking. That fact does not seem to affect the party and its leaders’ relations with the United States, which seem to be surprisingly good during the period under investigation here. A 1964 Airgram from the American Embassy in Copenhagen shows this clearly. William Blair from the Embassy writes: “The foreign policy objectives of the United States are in large measure supported by the Social Democratic, Conservative, and Moderate Liberal Parties. (...) The Radical Liberal Party has from time to time thrown cold water on the Social Democrats’ willingness to fulfill more adequately Denmark’s NATO obligations.” It is even stated in the analysis that it would be best for America, if Denmark kept some kind of majority or minority Social Democratic Government, because they act responsibly when they are in power and have control over the trade unions. In a later policy assessment, made by the State Department, it is said that Denmark is a country that by large pursues many of the same policies and objectives as the United States. The Danish Social Democratic Prime Minister, Jens Otto Krag, (served from 1962), even developed a relatively warm relationship with President Johnson. Before J. O. Krag’s first visit to the United States as Danish Prime Minister, it is written in President Johnson’s memorandum: “He [J. O. Krag] left doctrinaire socialism (...) A strong supporter of his country’s pro-Western, pro-NATO and staunchly anti-Communist foreign policy, J. O. Krag seems to be favorably disposed toward the U.S.” The base for a friendship between the two was there even before J. O. Krag set foot on American soil.

It is, however, also concluded in a National Security Council Report (NSC) that the Conservative and Liberal parties take a stronger line on increasing defenses and opposing the USSR than the Social Democratic or Agrarian parties. This insight is not surprising, though, since the liberal parties in Denmark by nature are closer to an American ideology of society. On the other hand several reports also mention that the Social Democratic Party has stronger and more experienced leaders – so it is very possible that the American officials, the embassy staff etc. favor the Social
Democrats, because then they know what to expect from Denmark. This is possibly also an important reason why there supposedly is no measurable difference between the evaluations of Denmark during democratic and republican administrations respectively. Secondly has a form of “path dependency” among American government officials probably also an important role to play in this matter. Simply due to the fact that the staff at the embassy or in the State Department influence each other – in many cases the persons that evaluate Danish domestic politics over the years are the same.

Conclusion
This study has a number of important general connotations seen in relation to the conclusions of the existing research of the cold war era as presented earlier, because it provides a somewhat different view of the Danish-American relations during the period. My analysis has shown that America should be viewed in a more passive and non-intervening light in Danish cold war history. If the focus as for example Poul Villaume is more or less exclusively on the NATO and security policies there were considerable conflicts especially during the 1950s. However, the impression is much more positive if the perspective is to give an overall characterization of the civil political relations between the two countries seen from an American point of view. The American diplomats had a general understanding and respect for the Danish political system and a confidence in the general common democratic and humanitarian goals of the two countries. My analysis indicates that these shared values were much more important than the exact size of the Danish NATO budget. This can be explained by the fact that the American ‘project’ in Europe during the 1950s and 1960s was built on a democratic foundation, which allowed Denmark considerable domestic political latitude – it was in other words an “Empire by Invitation”27 more than by force. Therefore, Denmark supposedly did not depend on a strategic alliance between the US administrations and the Danish Social Democratic party in order to keep good relations as Bo Lidegaard argues. However, it is fair to say that a more detailed analysis seen on a more general European scale is necessary to finally confirm or reject Lidegaard’s hypothesis.
The article at hand presents the overall results of my history thesis: Amerikanske danmarksbilleder – Interne amerikanske vurderinger af dansk politik under den kolde krig. University of Southern Denmark, Odense, 2006.


Aage Trommer, Politik og strategi 2. verdenskrig. (Cph: Aschehoug, 1982).


Ibid. pp. 844-852.


It is no doubt on purpose that he uses Villume’s dissertation title, but with the opposite meaning.

This interpretation is supported on a general European scale by the American historian Charles Maier. See: Charles S. Maier, Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors. (USA: Cambridge Mass. 2005).


17 National Archives Record Group (NARG) 59, 8423, All Memorandum – 
 Policy Statement on Denmark, October 1, 1949. See also: NARG 91, CIA, INS, 
 Communism in Scandinavia 1949.

18 NARG 84 – US. Foreign Embassy Files, Danish Political Developments 
 During 1953, Copenhagen, January 18, 1954.

19 NARG 59, box 3123, U.S. Department of State, Intelligence Note 95, 
 February 2, 1968.

20 NARG 59, St. Dep. Lot 73 D 56, Records Related to Denmark, Box 4: 
 Secretary’s Visit to Denmark, June 15-17, 1967, June 5, 1967.

21 The plane crash at the Thule airbase in Greenland (a B-52 aircraft with 
 atomic weapons on board) and several other factors also have a role to play 
 in addition to the Vietnam War.

 Assessment – Denmark, July 2, 1968.


24 NARG 59, box 2115, Airgram, Danish-American Relations in Retrospect, May 
 16, 1964.


26 NARG Lot 63 D 351, NSC files, 6006 series, April 6, 1960.

27 This expression is used by the Norwegian Cold War historian Geir 
 Lundestad to provide an understanding of the fundamental nature of the 
 American foreign policy towards Europe (and presence in Europe) during 
 the cold war. See: Geir Lundestad, ““Empire by Invitation” in the American 
 Century”, in M. Hogan (ed.): The Ambiguous Legacy. U.S. Foreign Relations in 
 “The American Century”. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 52- 
 91.
The Practical and the Sentimental: 
The Artifact Collection of 
The Danish Immigrant Museum

by Angela Stanford

Many of the things immigrants brought from Denmark were of practical value to them as travelers building new lives across the ocean. Trunks, blankets, tools, and clothes were obvious choices for anyone moving from one place to another. Photographs, knick-knacks, toys, and other like items may not have been as practical, but held sentimental value by reminding them of the homes, families, and friends they were leaving behind.

A number of these items, both practical and sentimental, are part of the collection held by The Danish Immigrant Museum in Elk Horn, Iowa. Since 1985, we have been collecting these treasures and have built a substantial collection estimated to number about 40,000 items. Our artifacts span many generations, innumerable miles, and all object types ranging from amber jewelry to copper teapots to handmade violins to wedding clothing. While many of the items housed in the museum came to this country by way of their Danish
immigrant owners, many others originated in the United States and were made or purchased by immigrants or their descendants.

The artifacts that arrived in the United States in immigrant hands are primarily represented in our collection by way of trunks, tools, clothing, photographs, and books. Other items such as figurines, textiles like bedding and clothing, and jewelry are less common, but also find places within our museum. A large part of our collection, though, speaks to the way immigrants and their families made lives for themselves in their new homes. Handmade wood and metal working tools, household furnishings like lamps, and furniture, both purchased and handmade, are all examples of immigrants’ desire to fit in and the ways they succeeded in doing so. Many immigrants continued to maintain close ties to Denmark and our collection also reflects this trend through the several hundred commemorative Christmas plates from Royal Copenhagen and Bing & Grøndahl, as well as family photos, postcards, and newspapers from “home.”

How we have built such a vast collection
The strength of our collection is due in very large measure to the generosity of our donors. Since 1985, when the museum first opened with displays for the public to enjoy, we have received donations from almost 2,400 donors from all over the United States and at least seven different countries including Denmark. Many of these donors are frequent givers, some offering as many as a dozen separate gift lots over the last twenty-two years.

Many, though certainly not all, of our donors tend to be elderly and are passing along keepsakes which belonged to their parents or grandparents who immigrated. Many others are given by young families wishing to honor their ancestors. A large number of the artifacts our donors give come with invaluable histories and documentation which make the artifacts more valuable historically, and allow us the opportunity to build stronger, more comprehensive exhibits and programs.

The artifacts offered to The Danish Immigrant Museum are often highly valued by the donors who make them available to us. They have been part of their families, part of their personal histories, and donors want to know that these items will be preserved for
generations to come and will be used to tell the story of their Danish ancestors. Dozens of families are represented in our collection, and the artifacts we have help to tell stories about immigrant beginnings and the Danish American lives established since.

**Specific artifacts found in our collection**

So many of our artifacts are historically valuable and we are very fortunate to have them. A few items are of particular note. Victor Borge’s first concert piano is prominently displayed in our permanent exhibit, and a few of his performance outfits have been used in rotating exhibits. A huge altar, two chancel chairs, and a podium all carved by Jes Smidt, who emigrated from Denmark in 1883, have a striking presence near our front entrance. In 1995, the Morning Star Chapel was donated by a couple in Cedar Falls, Iowa, and moved to the museum grounds. It has since been host to a handful of weddings and, just recently, a baptism. Another structure donated to the museum was the Jens Dixen House, a Danish immigrant homesteader’s shanty built in Kenmare, North Dakota, and moved to the museum.
grounds in 1999. In 2006, an archival gift chronicling Roxy Clay Works of Kimballton, Iowa, a business we previously had little information about, was donated by a family from Eureka, Missouri. Also in 2006, we received a stone ax and flint knife dating from the Stone Age and found in Jutland. Our donors are very generous.

One of the most significant contemporary gifts from an individual was the collection of twenty-five photographs taken by Danish-born photographer Sisse Brimberg, who has been a photographer with *National Geographic* since 1976. She has been published within the pages of *National Geographic* on numerous occasions, and has received many awards and recognitions for her work. This set of photos first came to the museum in 2002 for an exhibition, and after being displayed here, they traveled to other museums. Ms. Brimberg made the decision to donate them to us, and they became part of the permanent collection in 2006, much to the delight of everyone at the museum.

The donations we have received over our twenty-two-year history have come not only from individuals and families, but also from organizations. One of the largest collections we have is from the Danish Brotherhood in America. Some of the DBIA items we have include recognition certificates and plaques, individual Lodge seals, commemorative plates, photographs of most of the annual
conventions held around the country, and booklets outlining by-laws, constitutions, and various Brotherhood rituals and procedures. Many of these items came in one large gift in 1994, but dozens of individual Lodges have contributed as well.

**Timeline of our collection**

As is the case with many museums, the majority of our collection dates prior to World War II. “Modern” artifacts tend to be underrepresented and much more difficult to find in museums across the country and The Danish Immigrant Museum is no different. Though we have thousands of artifacts ranging from commemorative plates to photographic postcards to wedding dresses and more, the vast majority of our holdings, in both our permanent and in-use divisions, are pre-World War II. We are therefore unable to exhibit more recent generations as comprehensively as earlier ones.

We are trying to collect artifacts from recent generations so that we may preserve that history now while the opportunity exists. Though it is difficult for people to think of contemporary things like childhood toys, clothes, photographs, homemade tools and decorations, household appliances, and military-related materials as artifacts appropriate for a museum, all of those items, and more dating from the 1940s through today, are historically valuable. If artifacts from these generations are not collected now, they may be lost or discarded. In this throw-away society, it is more and more important to cultivate these generations and make sure they are represented in museums in the future. At The Danish Immigrant Museum, we strive to tell the complete story of Danish immigrants and their descendants. Immigration continues today and we need the artifacts to illustrate those stories and experiences. Incorporating more modern artifacts into exhibits will also help attract a younger generation of museum visitor, which will make this museum a viable and necessary part of many more generations.

**Tracking our collection**

In the mid-1990s, the museum purchased a collections software system called “PastPerfect.” This program is used internationally
and has become one of the most widely-used systems on the market for museums. PastPerfect allows museums to keep electronic records of all artifacts in their collections and those being loaned. It maintains the names and contact information of donors and lenders, the physical locations of all artifacts, and any and all known documentation and family associations related to each piece. Within the individual record for each artifact is space for a detailed description, measurements, and a strict condition report in which even the slightest scratch or chip is noted. The system also allows the user to attach images so that there is a visual record to coincide with all cataloged pieces.

Since PastPerfect was purchased and staff members were adequately trained in its use, all donations have been entered into the system under one of four catalog areas: objects, archives, photos, and library. The majority of our collection falls under the object category which includes three-dimensional items like tools, clothing, and dishes. The next largest category for us is archives, which includes all paper materials like correspondence, certificates, and scrapbooks. All original photos, negatives, and photo albums fall under the photo category, and all books and some booklets are cataloged under library.

PastPerfect allows the user to search all records contained within each of the four categories. If a family comes to the museum and asks to see the trunk donated by their grandfather, we can search the system using the name of the donor or simply by using the word “trunk.” The record will contain the location code for that specific piece, making it possible for staff to retrieve the trunk and allow the family an opportunity to see it.

Striving for complete, accurate inventories and records
Earlier, I shared that we estimate the size of our collection to be around 40,000 artifacts. This count includes both the permanent collection and the collection we refer to as in-use. The latter are those artifacts that people can handle and use, those that do not require the same environmental monitoring, and are generally allowed to “live out their lives” as their creators intended.
We currently do not have an exact artifact count due to three different factors. First of all, most of our paper artifact records dating prior to the mid-1990s and prior to the purchase of PastPerfect have not yet been entered into the system. This means that most of the information we have on those fifteen years of donations is still in paper form and is, therefore, not easily searchable. While we have donation paperwork which provides counts and brief descriptions of the most of artifacts given in those early years, and we now have electronic listings of all of our donors and the identification numbers assigned to their donations, we must manually open each file and count the items listed in order to gain an estimate of the size of our collection. We have been going file by file and entering information into the system, but it is a very time consuming process. Progress is being made and will continue until all paper files are in PastPerfect.

Secondly, we have never conducted a full inventory. Spot checks of some of our storage cabinets and shelves have been done throughout the last several years, but a complete process that includes every single artifact throughout the entire building, as well as off-site storage, has never taken place. In November of 2006, we began this enormously daunting task. As we go shelf by shelf in our Visual Storage area, we are recording brief descriptions, detailed condition reports, and the locations for all artifacts we find, and are also taking photographs of them. Once we complete a shelf, we go back to the computer and enter all of the information we have for that object. If the objects on our inventory list are older and have not yet been entered into PastPerfect, we pull the paper file and add it at this time. By the time a unit is finished being inventoried all known information, including photographs, will be in PastPerfect and will be searchable. This will not only help us establish accurate artifact counts, but will also verify location records and fill in gaps so that if a donor visits the museum and asks to see something he or she donated 10 years ago, we will be able to search the system and find that artifact.

Finally, there are almost 400 donations currently waiting to be reviewed and added to our collection. These donations are part of the backlog which resulted from changes taking place within the
department a number of years ago, as well as from receiving such a large number of donations that the department could not keep up. The artifacts within these gifts have not been reviewed to determine if they would be appropriate for our collection or not, and while we have lists which briefly record what each gift contains, those lists are often not as inclusive and detailed as they need to be in order to give an accurate count. Tremendous progress has already been made in reducing this backlog. Each month, our Collections Review Committee reviews about a dozen older gifts to determine if they are appropriate for our collection. We have completed three of the seven backlogged years, and will soon be starting on the fourth.

In conclusion
Maintaining an artifact collection requires a great deal of time, attention to detail, and the care and concern of all museum staff. Everyone has to (and does) value the collection and understand that the artifacts we house are really held in trust for the public. We strive to preserve all of our artifacts according to established professional standards so that generations to come can learn from them, and so that they can see the things that their immigrant ancestors valued enough to bring with them as they traveled such a great distance. Connections can be made between the past and present by bringing to life and sharing those stories connected to these artifacts. We are very fortunate to have been able to build such a strong collection. We have a very bright future ahead of us, one filled with the personal stories and family connections to the artifacts that serve as the tangible reminders of the past.
Reviews


In the days of “horse culture,” farmers needed to have a market town every six to twelve miles in order to get there and back in one day. Towns sprang up like mushrooms as agricultural settlement sped across the Middle West in the half-century 1830-80. Some became county seats, and one of these was Benson, Minnesota.

Ole Corneliusen, a twenty-four-year-old native of Norway, walked to the site in 1866 across boundless prairies and stayed to file a claim. Lars Christensen (Kjørnes) and family arrived the same year in a covered wagon hitched to a yoke of oxen (he later became renowned for his woodcarving in Vesterheim Museum). Four years later, a railroad surveyor laid out a town plan. The Lathrop brothers put up a sod hut for a mercantile store and Thomas Knudsen started a similar saloon, while Theodore Hansen hauled in lumber to build his general store. The railroad arrived that same year of 1870, Swift County was organized, and presto!—Benson was launched. By 1875, the village and surrounding township had 688 inhabitants, including 424 Norwegian immigrants and their children, sixty-two Swedes, fifty-seven “Yankees” (Anglo-Americans), forty-eight French Canadians, six Swiss, five Irish, three English, three Scots. Oh yes, and one Dane.

Lovoll’s aim is to follow the history of Norwegians and their neighbors in three country towns in western Minnesota: Benson in Swift County, Starbuck in Pope County, and Madison in Lac qui Parle County. He wants to show how Scandinavian immigrants interacted with others to shape a local community. He picked these prairie towns in order to document changing patterns of community and ethnic identity in an environment where cultural pluralism has been the norm from the ground up.
All three communities were surrounded by extensive Norwegian farming settlements, generally dominated by people from a specific region in the old country: Valdres and Sognefjord around Benson, Gudbrandsdal and Trøndelag around Starbuck, Rogaland and Hordaland around Madison. The farmers continued to speak their regional dialects into the third generation.

Norwegian men in town were mainly blue-collar laborers, carpenters, mechanics, and retail clerks, while the women worked as waitresses and domestics. Religious life tended towards Sabbatarianism, temperance, and pietistic sexual morality, which must have been quite a shift in values for many rough Norwegian immigrants. Although social distinctions were not sharp and there was no working-class mentality, towns like Benson were dominated by a Yankee elite of merchants, bankers, and professionals. All three towns had some Norwegian merchants and pharmacists. Madison also had Norwegian physicians, midwives, lawyers, and Lutheran Normal School teachers, while in Starbuck, the local physician, Carl Rasmus Christenson, was a Dane who built the first hospital in all of western Minnesota. Each small town, Lovoll notes, had its own unique ethnic and social identity.

Norwegian immigrants brought political experience and a strong drive for self-government as a legacy from the old world, and they were very quick to enter American politics. By the 1870’s, they were deep into township and county government. By the 1880’s, they were a force in Minnesota state politics, and from around 1900, they were virtually dominant. Their political orientation varied. Mainly Republican at first, they leaned towards Populism in the 1890’s, then veered to Bull Moose progressivism in 1912. During the 1920’s, small towns reverted to the GOP while hard-pressed farmers went with the Farmer-Labor Party, which merged with the Democratic Party in the 1940’s.

Norwegian immigrants were quick to become American citizens while also maintaining their native language and culture. They saw U.S. citizenship and ethnic adherence as “mutually supportive” and maintained “strong ethnic loyalties and a coextensive loyalty to American citizenship” (270) throughout the whole period from original settlement until the present.
Ethnicity was constantly redefined. The first shift in self-definition came when immigrants stepped off the ship into a multicultural society. The process continued as immigrants and their children joined other ethnic groups to establish prairie communities and develop a “shared identity based on landscape and place” (124), spiced by ethnic cultural activities like ski-jumping, celebrations of the Seventeenth of May, and the culinary markers featured at church suppers. Norwegian American ethnicity was reinterpreted wholesale by the immensely successful Norse-American Centennial of 1925 at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds, emphasizing “a wholesome rural and religious heritage relating to pioneer days, brave and patriotic American citizenship, and ancient Viking roots” (231). Eventually, Norwegian ethnicity declined to a silly “Chamber of Commerce” stage in the 1980’s, when Madison erected a huge codfish monument and claimed to be the “Lutefisk Capital” of America while Starbucks made the world’s largest lefse (Norwegian unleavened bread) as part of local marketing strategies.

Few have dealt with the role of ethnicity in a multicultural society with more subtlety and insight than Odd Sverre Lovoll. This book is selling like hotcakes. Snap it up while you can.

J. R. Christianson
Danish American Heritage Society

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