Danish American Heritage Society  
4105 Stone Brook Road  
Ames, Iowa 50010  
Phone 515.232.7479 or 480.816.8725  

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Inquiries concerning membership in the Society and subscription to *The Bridge* should be sent to Rudolf Jensen, Grand View College, Third Floor West Old Main, 1200 Grandview Avenue, Des Moines, Iowa 50316-1599.  

*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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Editorial Statement

Three of the four articles in this issue of The Bridge deal with the educational experiences of Danish immigrants in the United States, particularly efforts modeled on the concepts of the Danish folk high school. The fourth article tells the story of a man who was likely the most recognized immigrant visitor to virtually every Danish-American community west of the Mississippi River during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries.

John Mark Nielsen compares and contrasts two church-related Danish immigrant schools on the Great Plains—Nysted Folk High School in Nebraska and Brorson High School in North Dakota. Nielsen describes how the two schools reflected the theological differences that divided Danish Lutherans in the United States.

Thorvald Hansen recounts the life of Hans Jorgen Pedersen, pastor of several Danish-American congregations and the president of three folk schools, two of which he founded. Pedersen’s labors reveal both the successes and challenges of trying to transplant the folk high school concept to American soil.

Johan Windmüller traces the long and, at times, difficult educational path of Paulus Falck from a young high school student at Elk Horn College to a member of the faculty and basketball coach at Dana College.

In the introduction to his “Portrait of a Peddler,” the late Enok Mortensen writes of his “desire to tell the story of the most interesting immigrant whose path crossed mine.” After finishing Mortensen’s account, many readers of The Bridge may share the author’s view that Jørgen Juul, the peddler, was unique among the thousands of Danes who emigrated to the United States.

Once more The Bridge contains reviews of several books that may be of interest to our readers. This is possible only because individuals are willing to donate their time and expertise to writing about new books. Our gratitude is their only recompense.
Contributors to This Issue

John Mark Nielsen is Executive Director of The Danish Immigrant Museum in Elk Horn, Iowa. He has written numerous articles on Danish immigrant literature and history and co-authored the entry on Danish Americans for the *Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America*. He served as chair of the planning committee for the DAHS-sponsored conference on Danish-North American Relations held in Omaha in 2002.

Thorvald Hansen retired as Professor of History and Director of the Danish Immigrant Archive—Grand View College. He is the editor of *Church and Life* and wrote a history of its sponsoring organization, The Danish Interest Conference, for the previous issue of *The Bridge*. Among the several books he has written is *That All Good Seed Strike Root: A Centennial History of Grand View College*, published in 1996.

Johan Windmüller was born in Nykøbing, Sj., Denmark. He earned a B. A. degree from Dana College and is a graduate of the Nebraska Law Enforcement Center. After a stint as a policeman in eastern Nebraska, he returned to Dana where he is Assistant Director of Admissions. He is also a graduate student in history at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Enok Mortensen (1902-1984) was a pastor in the Danish Lutheran Church in America as well a writer, historian, teacher, and archivist. Among his major historical works are *Danish-American life and letters: a bibliography* (1945), *The Danish Lutheran Church in America* (1967) and *Schools for Life—A Danish American Experiment in Adult Education* (1977). For more information on Mortensen’s life and works see *The Bridge* Vol. X, No. 2 (1987).

George R. Nielsen is Emeritus Professor of History at Concordia University, River Forest, Illinois, and the author of *The Danish Americans* (1981). He resides in Rapid City, South Dakota.

John M. Pederson is Assistant Professor of History at Mayville State University, Mayville, North Dakota. He has authored numerous articles including “‘A Lioness for Denmark?’ Ambassador Eugenie Anderson and Danish American Relations, 1949-1953,” which appeared in *The Bridge* Vol. 27, No. 1-2 (2004).
Anne Ipsen was born in Denmark and came to the United States as a teenager, an experience she described in her article “Teenage Immigrant” in The Bridge Vol. 26, No 3 (2003). Recently retired from the University of Minnesota, she has just published a historical novel, Karen from the Mill: a novel from the golden age of sail.

Carroll Engelhardt is Professor Emeritus of History at Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota. He has published widely and is the author of On Firm Foundation Grounded: The First Century of Concordia College (1891-1991).
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The Cups of Blood Are Emptied: Pietism and Cultural Heritage in Two Danish Immigrant Schools on the Great Plains*

by John Mark Nielsen

"The Great Plains Drinks the Blood of Christian Men and Is Satisfied."
-Ole Rolvaag, Giants in the Earth

Following the American Civil War, the vast sweep of the Great Plains exerted a powerful force on the imagination of Americans and Northern European immigrants, resulting in a period of rapid settlement. Within immigrant communities, in particular, attempts were made to establish institutions where the language, beliefs and cultural heritage of a people might be preserved. The history of these immigrant institutions mirror the challenges immigrant communities faced in confronting not only the vicissitudes of climate and evolving economic conditions but also the pressures of assimilation.

Numerous works of both fiction and non-fiction explore the broader challenges of life on the Great Plains; none captures the experiences of immigrants as does Ole Rolvaag’s trilogy, Giants in the Earth, Peder Victorious, and Their Fathers’ God. Not only does Rolvaag depict the environmental challenges immigrants faced, but also the religious conflicts that arise from denominational differences. Ever present, particularly in the first novel, are the Great Plains, which Rolvaag personifies as a she-monster, a primordial giantess, patiently biding her time as Norwegian immigrants coming to this vast open grassland in 1873 struggle to gain a foothold and to transform the "American desert" into a land of "milk and honey."

*This article appeared originally in the Great Plains Quarterly, 23 (Summer 2003) and is reprinted here with permission.
Novels, such as Rolvaag’s, focus on the experiential level of individuals and communities and help readers to enter vicariously into that experience. While historical and geographical studies have focused on the broader experience, few have addressed specific immigrant groups or explored the institutions they founded. Such an investigation can offer insight into how these institutions provided both opportunities for self-expression and identification. The history of individual institutions can also serve as a barometer, reflecting the pressures that the forces of environment and assimilation exerted on individual immigrant communities.

This is the story of two church-related, immigrant institutions founded on the Great Plains by Danish Lutherans: Nysted Folk High School in Nysted, Nebraska, which existed from 1887 to 1934 and Brorson High School situated in rural Kenmare, North Dakota, that operated from 1901 to 1917 and again in 1919 to 1920. Both schools were modeled on the concept of the Danish folk high school, a movement inspired by the thought and writings of the Danish poet, religious leader, and educator, Nicolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig who lived from 1783 to 1872. The teaching at each school, however, reflected competing understandings of faith and life among the Danish Lutheran immigrants, differing understandings that led to bitter divisions within the small Danish American Lutheran immigrant population. Both schools depended on energetic, charismatic individuals under whose leadership the two schools flourished, but the efforts of these individuals were not enough in the face of changing weather patterns, population movement, and evolving economic, social and political realities. Ultimately both schools were closed. The struggles faced by supporters of these two schools are foreshadowed in the last chapter of *Giants in the Earth* entitled, "The Great Plains Drinks the Blood of Christian Men and Is Satisfied" which metaphorically captures the interplay between human effort and a sometimes harsh and unforgiving environment.

**Theological Differences**

The theological differences that resulted in a division among Danish immigrant Lutherans have been treated extensively by among others John M. Jensen, Paul C. Nyholm and Enok Mortensen
in their studies of the two Danish-American Lutheran synods. A brief summary of the two sides that framed this division is useful since the theological understandings informed the curriculum of Nysted Folk High School and Brorson High School. Essentially, the division arose from differences in interpreting scripture and the role cultural heritage played in the life of a Christian.

On one side were those who had been influenced by Protestant pietistic traditions, arising in Germany during the 17th century. This group had its roots in the informal conventicles or "godly gatherings" that had formed in Denmark to reawaken the faith of members within the state church. (Prior to the passage of the Constitution of 1849, Danish law prohibited any formal organizations outside the Danish State Church.) Organized in 1853 as "The Association for Indre Mission (Inner Mission) in Denmark," members of this group stressed the need for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as one's savior, disciplined reading of scripture and active participation in church life, and they saw this world as being fraught with sin and temptation. In this tradition, the Bible was the revealed word of God and therefore inerrant. To reawaken individuals to the faith, the Inner Mission, stressed missionary work both within and outside of congregations and funded the travel of selected individuals for the expressed purpose of witnessing for the faith. Immigrants brought this understanding to the United States although no formal association was formed here. Its influence, however, contributed much to the theology of the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church Association, founded in 1884 and often known as the "Blair Church," and later to that of the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church (UDELC) or "United Church" that was formed in 1896 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, although its headquarters continued to be in Blair, Nebraska.

On the other side were Danish American Lutherans who had established the "Danish Church" in 1874 and had been influenced by writing and thinking of N.F.S. Grundtvig. Grundtvig's study of the Bible and Nordic mythology, as well as his experiences as a parish pastor, had led him to two radical but interrelated positions concerning faith, biblical interpretation and education. A student of mythology, Grundtvig had worked with early medieval manuscripts in both Copenhagen and London and was sensitive to the problems
of translating texts. While he encouraged lay people to read scripture, he became increasingly concerned that lay readers, lacking linguistic and historical knowledge might easily be confused or misled. This led him to challenge the orthodox Lutheran position arising in the 17th century that the Bible was the source and primary evidence for the Christian faith. In what he called his "matchless discovery," Grundtvig maintained that the source of faith is the living church and its community of believers. It is most clearly articulated in the words of the Apostle’s Creed spoken at the sacrament of baptism. Consequently, his first radical position was that the Apostle's Creed, as the most clearly articulated statement of the living church, was of equal if not greater importance than the Bible, which was the source and inspiration of truth but not the truth itself. "We shall not stand on the Bible and search for the faith," he said, "but stand on the faith and read the Bible."4

Grundtvig’s second radical position, at least in the eyes of many pietistic Danish Lutherans, related to the everyday lives of Christians in this world. Since God had created man and woman in the divine image, humanity needed to be awakened not only spiritually but also culturally. He believed that the language and the culture of a people were essential to a people’s identity, and that more importantly this diversity of cultures and languages reflected the diversity of God’s creation. The cultural spirit of a people was expressed in their stories, songs and dance, and learning about and celebrating this cultural heritage awakened individuals to richer lives and a greater sense of community. Thus, the culture and language of a folk were worthy of study, preservation and celebration and all should have opportunity to learn and experience this cultural heritage.5

Grundtvig proposed that the government provide this kind of education by funding a school, of equal status to that of the University of Copenhagen, which would provide a model for education growing out of folk culture. He called it a "high" school although it was to award no degrees, nor was it to prepare students for specific professions. The pedagogy was to differ from the university in that the focus was on instilling within students a lifelong love of learning by appealing to their intuitive and imaginative natures. This could best be achieved through a close,
interactive relationship between student and teacher. Furthermore, there were to be no exams and grades, students could be motivated by their own innate curiosity to learn. While the government did not immediately respond to Grundtvig's proposal, many Danes, particularly in rural areas, saw possibilities in such an approach. In 1844 the first Danish folk high school was established and by 1867 there were over forty such schools. (Today there are 86 folk high schools in Denmark continuing the tradition of alternative education.) One in particular, Askov Folk High School, provided numerous teachers who both founded and operated Danish folk high schools in America.

The competing theological understandings that informed the faith of Danish American Lutherans often inspired conflict in their communities. At the same time, many who had attended folk high schools in Denmark brought the folk high school concept to the United States. Between 1878, when the first Danish American folk high school was founded in Elk Horn, Iowa, until the late 1930s, a time that parallels the highest immigration from Denmark, seven folk high schools existed. Six were founded by members of the Danish Church (later known as the American Evangelical Lutheran Church or AELC) and reflected most closely Grundtvig’s positions on both faith and cultural heritage. In addition to the one school at Nysted, Nebraska, others were located in Elk Horn, Iowa, from 1878 to 1899; Ashland, Michigan, from 1882 to 1888; West Denmark, Wisconsin, for one term in 1884 to 1885; Tyler, Minnesota, from 1888 until the early 1930s; and Solvang, California, from 1910 to 1931. Only one, Brorson High School, was founded by members of the United Church (UDEL) and reflected a pietistic understanding.

**Nysted Folk High School**

Nysted Folk High School was organized in 1887 in the small town of Nysted, located in the center of the large Danish settlement in Howard County, Nebraska. In 1871, Danish immigrants from Waukesha County, Wisconsin, formed the Danish Land and Homestead Company and took out options to purchase 24,000 acres of Union Pacific Railroad land along the north side of the Loup River that flows through the southern part of the county. That same year, members of the homestead company founded the towns of
Dannebrog (the name of the Danish flag) and Dannevirke (named after the defensive wall that since Viking times protected Denmark from peoples to the south). Through letters and newspapers, settlers aggressively advertised the existence of this Danish colony, urging other Danes to join them on the plains of Nebraska. Growth led to the founding of Nysted (or "new place" in Danish) in 1882. By 1880, 10 percent of Howard County's population was Danish born, making it one of the most populated Danish counties per capita in the country.  

A letter in 1872 from P. C. Petersen (later Dannebrog's postmaster) to a newspaper in Denmark, expressed the optimism community members had for the future and the natural urge to create institutions that reflected the immigrant population. "Last year we founded here a Danish settlement, as they call it, or a Danish colony consisting of fifty families...Schools and churches are going up with remarkable speed, one after another. We Danes intend to build a Danish school and gather a Danish Lutheran Church." Already that year, Pastor Hans Hansen, who 1884 was to be a founding member and president of the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church Association headquartered in Blair, organized the first church and established Dannebrog College. While the congregation flourished, the school lasted only two years. (Ironically, Hansen was later to play a major role in the settlement of Kenmare, North Dakota, and the founding Brorson High School.) By the turn of the century there were ten Danish Lutheran congregations in the county, reflecting both the pietistic and Grundtvigian theological positions. Given Howard County's significant Danish population and the businesses and churches they had established, the desire to establish a folk high school was natural.

Enok Mortensen, who attended Nysted Folk High School during the summer of 1921 and who later taught there from 1922 to 1924, has written the most comprehensive history of the Danish folk high schools in the United States. In Schools for Life: The Grundtvigian Schools in America, he devoted a chapter to each of the institutions that reflected Grundtvigian spiritual and cultural understanding. A summary of his chapter on the school at Nysted, a review of selected printed materials published by the Nysted Folk High School, and accounts from letters written by members of the Nysted community,
underscores that the survival of these institutions depended on the devotion of individuals, willing to sacrifice themselves for a cause in which they believed strongly.

The individual responsible for founding the Nysted Folk High School was Pastor Christian J. Skovgaard, who served as its first forstander or principal (for a list of Nysted Folk High School’s principals, see Table 1). Newly arrived from Denmark, where he had attended Askov Folk High School from 1884-1886, Skovgaard was anxious to carry on the work of the folk high schools in the new land. Called to serve St. Peder's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Nysted, he worked with other like-minded community members in 1887 to secure a place and to organize classes for a folk high school before winter descended on the plains. His plan for classes followed a schedule that had evolved at the other folk high schools in Elk Horn, Ashland, and West Denmark; a term for men began on or about mid November, after the fall harvest and lasted until early March just before the spring planting. This made the schools attractive to young immigrant men, who were able to find work on farms throughout the rest of the year. During the winter months, when work was difficult to find, it offered them an opportunity for learning. Classes for young women were offered beginning in late May and lasting until early September. Later, in 1911, the school was to become co-educational, which contributed to increased enrollments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Principal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1887-1890</td>
<td>Christian J Skovgaard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891-1898</td>
<td>H. C. Strandskov</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898-1901</td>
<td>Thorvald Knudsen (St. Peder’s, 1898-1903)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901-1906</td>
<td>A. Theodor Dorf (St. Peder’s, 1903-1906)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906-1907</td>
<td>No classes; school stood empty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907-1912</td>
<td>Carl P. Højberg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912-1931</td>
<td>Aage Møller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931-1934</td>
<td>Carl P. Højberg</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All also served as pastors of St. Peder's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Nysted organized in 1883.
Nysted Folk High School was officially established on 1 December, 1887, although not without some controversy. At the opening ceremonies, one of the speakers, Niels Nielsen, or “King Niels” as he was known in the community, countered the folk school philosophy in suggesting that the school should become an American school as soon as possible as "there was no practical advantage in learning Danish." However a student who had come from Minnesota responded, "If this be an American school, I need not have come here all the way from Minnesota, for that kind of schools we have there, but no Danish folk schools which is what I need." This exchange captured a tension that existed within most immigrant communities, and it continued to be a debated issue among those who were advocates for the Danish folk high school movement in America. There were students who wanted to study their Danish heritage, but many young immigrants were interested in the schools as opportunities to learn English within the context of a familiar environment. Their goal was to assimilate, to become Americans. Table 2 is the weekly class schedule at Nysted Folk High School in 1911. Classes in English assisted students in their attempts to assimilate.

Early enrollments were not encouraging. Only twelve students registered for the first term that ran from 1 December to 1 March, and Skovgaard continually struggled to attract students. In 1890, he gave up and accepted a call to a congregation in Iowa, leaving the congregation to retire the debts that had accrued and to identify a new leader. They called Pastor H.C. Strandskov, who had taught at the folk high school in Ashland, Michigan. Recognizing the needs of immigrant students, he initiated classes in English and American history and geography. To appeal to his Danish audience and to celebrate Grundtvig’s birthday on 8 September, he established Septemberfest. Over a two- to three-day period, lectures, discussions, singing and folk dancing were scheduled, much as in the American tradition of the Chautauqua movement. These innovations led to a small increase in enrollment. Between 1891 and 1894, fifty-nine men had attended the winter terms and the participation in the September meetings was high, drawing crowds from surrounding communities and counties.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Mandag</th>
<th>Tirsdag</th>
<th>Onsdag</th>
<th>Torsdag</th>
<th>Fredag</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:45</td>
<td>Frokost (breakfast)</td>
<td>Frokost</td>
<td>Frokost</td>
<td>Frokost</td>
<td>Frokost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:50</td>
<td>Morgensang (morning prayer)</td>
<td>Morgensang</td>
<td>Morgensang</td>
<td>Morgensang</td>
<td>Morgensang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00-9:40</td>
<td>Engelsk A</td>
<td>Engelsk A</td>
<td>Engelsk A</td>
<td>Engelsk A</td>
<td>Engelsk A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engelsk B</td>
<td>Engelsk B</td>
<td>Engelsk B</td>
<td>Engelsk B</td>
<td>Engelsk B</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Englesk C</td>
<td>Englesk C</td>
<td>Englesk C</td>
<td>Englesk C</td>
<td>Englesk C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:45-10:25</td>
<td>Arithm. A</td>
<td>Lecture &amp; Discussion</td>
<td>Arithm. A</td>
<td>Lecture &amp; Discussion</td>
<td>Arithm. A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30-11:10</td>
<td>Lecture &amp; Discussion</td>
<td>Lecture &amp; Discussion</td>
<td>Lecture &amp; Discussion</td>
<td>Lecture &amp; Discussion</td>
<td>Lecture &amp; Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:15-12:00</td>
<td>Dansk</td>
<td>Dansk</td>
<td>Dansk</td>
<td>Dansk</td>
<td>Dansk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engelsk B</td>
<td>Engelsk B</td>
<td>Engelsk B</td>
<td>Engelsk B</td>
<td>Engelsk B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engelsk C</td>
<td>Engelsk C</td>
<td>Engelsk C</td>
<td>Engelsk C</td>
<td>Engelsk C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>Middag (dinner)</td>
<td>Middag</td>
<td>Middag</td>
<td>Middag</td>
<td>Middag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30-2:15</td>
<td>Girls' Gym</td>
<td>Girls' Gym</td>
<td>Girls' Gym</td>
<td>Girls' Gym</td>
<td>Girls' Gym</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:15-3:00</td>
<td>Boys' Gym</td>
<td>Boys' Gym</td>
<td>Boys' Gym</td>
<td>Boys' Gym</td>
<td>Boys' Gym</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:10</td>
<td>Kaffe (coffee)</td>
<td>Kaffe</td>
<td>Kaffe</td>
<td>Kaffe</td>
<td>Kaffe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:30-4:10</td>
<td>Lecture &amp; Discussion</td>
<td>Lecture &amp; Discussion</td>
<td>Lecture &amp; Discussion</td>
<td>Lecture &amp; Discussion</td>
<td>Lecture &amp; Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:00</td>
<td>Aftensmad (supper)</td>
<td>Aftensmad</td>
<td>Aftensmad</td>
<td>Aftensmad</td>
<td>Aftensmad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:15-8:15</td>
<td>Girls' Basketball</td>
<td>Boys' Basketball</td>
<td>Girls' Basketball</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30-9:30</td>
<td>Oplæsning (group reading) Aftensang (evening song)</td>
<td>Oplæsning Aftensang</td>
<td>Oplæsning Aftensang</td>
<td>Torsdags-møde (meeting)</td>
<td>Boys' Basketball</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Folkedans en Gang om Ugen (folk dancing one time a week)

Strandskov left Nysted in 1898, largely due to his wife’s illness, which was exacerbated by her many responsibilities as a pastor’s wife, overseeing the household duties of both parsonage and folk
high school. (The struggles of immigrant women echo Rolvaag's depiction of Beret in *Giants in the Earth* but are seldom if ever discussed in immigrant church histories.) The congregation then called Pastor Thorvald Knudsen, who was newly arrived in the United States. Like Skovgaard before him, Knudsen had studied at Askov Folk High School in Denmark and but unlike his predecessors he had also attended the University of Copenhagen, and so had broader academic preparation. Furthermore, he was a dynamic speaker with a wide range of interests, and under his leadership, according to Enok Mortensen, Nysted Folk High School experienced its "golden years."

In his book *Life in an American Denmark*, Alfred C. Nielsen, a Nysted native who later served as president of Grand View College, described Knudsen as "a handsome man... medium in height, with natural dignity. His personality commanded attention. He was an excellent speaker, one of the best I have ever heard. He was a leader of men and he usually got what he wanted... Like Caesar, he came, he saw, he conquered." In part Knudsen was successful because he was able to inspire and engage the young people in the community. He organized a Young People's Society and for activities gave public readings on Friday evenings (the first novel was *Ben Hur* in a Danish translation) and started a gymnastics team and a rifle club.

During Knudsen's years at Nysted, the enrollment increased. In his first year, thirty-three students attended the winter term of 1898-99, and by 1904, a year after Knudsen's departure to lead Danebod Folk High School in Tyler, Minnesota, forty-four students were enrolled in the winter term. With the increasing annual enrollments the school buildings were remodeled and expanded, and hopes were high. In 1901, Knudsen stepped down as principal although he continued to serve St. Peder's congregation and to teach at the school until 1903. A. Theodor Dorf, a gifted scholar who was later to become a professor of Assyriology at the University of Chicago, replaced him as principal. In an effort to continue increasing enrollments, Dorf began publishing a quarterly *For Dansk-Amerikansk Højskole* (For Danish American High Schools).

In an early publication from his tenure, Dorf articulated the goals of the folk high school movement in the United States, goals that clearly echo Grundtvigian philosophy. His comments also, however,
reflect an ongoing philosophical debate on the purpose of education. To the Grundtvigians, education was and should be more than preparation for an occupation.

Our school is neither a high school nor a college. To call it an academy would be more appropriate, for an academy is a name applied to any school where the higher branches of learning are taught, regardless of either curriculum or degree. Our school, then, is an academy of General Culture, -- culture for culture's sake only and not for the sake of a livelihood. Its aim is to give to students, by way of lectures in history, geography, civics and literature and practice in the most necessary arts and sciences, a select acquaintance with what is best in life, and to send them back to their respective homes with a broader outlook upon life's privileges and duties. The kind of an education sought by most people to-day, and the only kind given by most schools, is the education that will give, or pretend to give, the students, when through, a good paying position... We might call [our school] an Academy of Home Culture, for its aim is...to make [students], both morally and spiritually, better citizens and better members of the home and church circle.13

Despite his best efforts, Dorf was unable to imitate Knudsen's success in recruiting students. Two years after Knudsen's departure from Nysted, enrollment for the winter term of 1905-06 dropped to seventeen students. During the summer of 1906 Dorf gave up and returned to Denmark for several years. After his departure the school stood empty until the fall of 1907 when the community was able to secure the services of Carl P. Højberg, who had been serving as professor of theology at Grand View College and Seminary in Des Moines, Iowa.

During C.P. Højberg's first tenure at Nysted Folk High School (he was to return again in 1931), the school again flourished. A graduate of the University of Copenhagen, he had earned a reputation for academic excellence while teaching at Grand View College. Consequently, he was able to attract a cadre of gifted teachers, and enrollments increased, averaging fifty men during the winter term and forty women during the summer term. To further take
advantage of the facilities, Højberg initiated *Martsstævne* (March meeting), a weeklong session in mid March. Modeled on the annual September meetings, the activities were church related and appealed to members of surrounding congregations. Finally, in 1911, the school became co-educational. This resulted in sixty-eight students registering for the winter term, the highest enrollment the school had achieved. The increased activities inspired the support of the community; the buildings were renovated, a heating system was installed, and in 1910, a new wing and tower were added.

FIG 1. *Nysted Folk High School after the 1910 remodeling.* Courtesy of the Danish Immigrant Archive, Grand View College, Des Moines, Iowa.

The efforts, however, of serving the congregation and operating the folk school exacted a toll, particularly on Højberg’s wife, Hilda who, like so many wives, labored to support their husbands' efforts. Furthermore, they had lost their oldest son, Leif, who died in the summer of 1909. In 1911, she became ill, and in an effort to regain her health, she and their remaining three children returned to Denmark in April. The following year, Højberg left Nysted and joined his family in Denmark. He remained there until 1915, when he returned with his family to become president of Grand View
College, a position he occupied until 1925. He was, however, to return again to Nysted in 1931.

In a series of letters to his three children (among them Otto Hoiberg, Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln), written shortly before his death in 1953, C.P. Højberg remembered his first years at Nysted and the challenges they presented, particularly for his wife.

In a sense, it seems to me, the situation was somewhat akin to Paradise...Whether or not we accomplished anything? I don't know. I hope so. We put forth tremendous efforts. And we sang, sang, sang--in unison, terrific! Kr. Andersen organized a chorus for part-singing. He handled Danish history, gymnastics, and singing. Ammentorp taught Danish literature... Yes, we had many magnificent students. How I wish that we had photographs of them all and were familiar with their subsequent life histories. My brother Valdemar was a student one winter.... [He] helped the cook bake pancakes every Saturday morning. Niels Hermansen taught Mother-Hilda the art of dissecting a pig on the kitchen table (a whole pig at a time). It doesn't take long for fifty young men to consume a pig!... Mother-Hilda arranged for substantial and nutritious meals; and we always had competent kitchen help. She directed the whole operation with great skill; and in addition, had small children to care for. ...Well, then Mother and [you] children departed for Denmark...and I followed in 1912... Mother's illness was the reason; but within two years she was much improved... We could, of course, have returned to Nysted; but I simply didn't dare. Mother was unable to get the rest she needed at the Folk School; and that was the problem. If we could have had a private, quiet dwelling, I still believe we might have ventured to return to Nysted in the fall of 1912.14

After Højberg's departure in 1912, the congregation and local folk school committee secured the services of Rev. Aage Møller. Born in West Denmark, Wisconsin, and educated at Grand View College, he was the first native born and educated principal of a folk high school in this country, although he had spent some time in Denmark. Furthermore, he was to serve Nysted Folk High School for almost 20
years, longer than any other leader. This was in large measure because he was a compelling speaker and had a charming personality. According to Mortensen, who was both his student and a colleague in the early 1920s, Møller was able to engage audiences through a "mystic and prophetic dynamism" that made him almost more of a prophet than a teacher. Additionally, Møller was interested in social justice issues and was not shy about speaking out on behalf of political forces that advocated for the poor and disenfranchised. He lectured on Upton Sinclair, supported the Socialist, Eugene Debs and was in contact with Jane Addams at Hull House in Chicago. This social activism often brought him into conflict with conservative members in the community.

With the advent of World War I, immigration from Denmark decreased dramatically. Since young Danish immigrants were a significant part of the student populations at the few folk high schools scattered across the country, all experienced declining enrollments. In addition, the war inspired a rise in American nativism and pressures for immigrant groups to assimilate, pressures that led many within the Danish American community to question the need for such schools. Møller, not surprisingly, felt differently. Writing in 1919, he argued:

[T]here are those who contend that it is useless to have a Danish school. Let me answer by saying that in as much as Nysted Folk School primarily is led by people born, and who will live and die in our country, people who feel themselves heartily at home in the great amalgamated and living society which is America, and who aim to help young people to see how fully they can realize their humanity by living in the USA, it seems to me that this school is as fully justified in calling itself an American school as any other.

Despite nativist pressures, Møller forged ahead, believing that the folk school had a role to play in expanding the continuing educational opportunities for local community members. Lectures and reading circles were an important part of this effort. In a letter written in Danish in 1922, which has only recently come to light, Gudrun Nielsen, who with her husband had an eighty-acre dairy farm south of Nysted, described for her father, a dairy farmer in Tyler, Minnesota, a lecture she and her husband attended at the folk
high school. "The other night he (Møller) spoke about a new book...he then told us about an Italian woman, who has a school in Rome. Montessori. She is a doctor and has studied much. She has a school where the children hardly know they are learning...it's almost like a game... Yes, he [Møller] has so many interesting things to tell us."17 Numerous other letters from this collection describe the school's activities, and Møller's efforts to engage and improve the lives of community members. However, during the 1920s the community's population began to decline as economic and environmental conditions on the Plains deteriorated. Møller's responses to these changes were often radical and put him at odds with community members. Finally, he resigned his post both as pastor and principal in 1931. His legacy, however, is far reaching. Elsewhere I have discussed how he and Enok Mortensen influenced Myles Horton and the founding of Highlander Research and Education Center, an educational center modeled on the Danish folk high school movement that played a role in the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s and inspired the founders of Elderhostel.18

Møller's resignation in 1931 at the height of the Depression left the local folk school committee in a difficult position during desperate times. They were, however, successful in persuading C.P. Højbjerg to return to Nysted. Since his departure from the school in 1912, Højbjerg had served a parish in Denmark until 1915 when he and his family returned to the United States to serve as president of Grand View College and Seminary in Des Moines. In 1925 he left this post to become pastor and principal at the congregation and folk school in Tyler, Minnesota. Perhaps Højbjerg's statement to his children referred to above, that the situation at Nysted "was akin to Paradise," explains his willingness to leave Minnesota in the midst of drought and depression. Despite his best efforts and the commitment and work of his sons Hans and Otto Hoiberg (who had anglicized the spelling of Højbjerg) and Arnold and Edith Bodtker, who were later to found the Danish American Heritage Society in 1977, Højbjerg's second tenure at Nysted was to mark the end of the Danish folk high school experience on the Great Plains.

Arriving in Nysted in 1931, Højbjerg threw himself into raising money and recruiting students for the school. His passionate
advocacy for the folk high school approach reflected both his Lutheran and Grundtvigian heritage. Writing in Danish, Højbjerg addressed skeptics within the Danish American community.

Many complain that the folk high schools do not send forth from their lecture halls, doctors, lawyers, engineers, and others of similar position. For almost a hundred years now, those who advocate for the folk high schools answer: Could we but send forth individuals fully awakened to their humanity...These individuals have greater value than the professional...It is well enough to be educated for a vocation... but there is a vocation that is common to all of us, the call to be fully alive as human beings...It is nothing to be born into the world as a child with eyes, ears and all our limbs as Luther says. It is something infinitely greater. Life is God’s gift to each and every one of us... [W]e ask accordingly: has anyone ever noted among any people or within any land the phenomenon that a man has had courage and faith enough to call all the nation's young people to attend a "school for life"? 19

Advertisements run in Danish American newspapers, and the college catalogs of 1932-33 and 1933-34 reflect the social and economic challenges Højbjerg and the school faced. Not the least was assimilation. In an attempt to identify with a population that now included second and third generation Danish Americans, few who spoke Danish, the school was renamed the Nysted People's College, and English was the language of the classroom. Only Højbjerg continued to deliver the main lecture of the day in Danish. The curriculum too, reflected the times. Social welfare and economic issues, topics that Aage Møller had championed, dominated the 1932-1933 catalog. Among the issues scheduled for consideration were: "Capitalism, Socialism and Communism," "The Causes of World War," "The Future of Farming," "Science and Religion," and "The Role of the Negro in American Civilization." 20 Tuition, room and board, which had steadily increased over the 1920s, was lowered to $80 for the winter term that extended from 1 December 1932 through 1 March 1933. This was done, according to Hans Hoiberg, "not with the intention of 'underbidding' other educational institutions, but because it is a matter of life and death to us; a
reduction in tuition is...a superior policy to a reduction in the size of the student body.” It was not enough, and when tuition for the next year was increased to $100, too few students enrolled. The 1933-34 term was cancelled, and the school was officially closed in 1934.

C.P. Højbjerg and his wife left Nysted in 1936 for the last time, returning to Denmark, where he served a parish until his retirement in 1942 and where he died in 1953. At his request, his ashes were returned to Nebraska and interred in the Nysted Cemetery. For a time, members of St. Peder’s Lutheran Church attempted to sponsor retreats, using the folk high school buildings that were rapidly falling into disrepair. Finally, the property was sold to the Western Conference of Evangelical Wesleyan, a breakaway Methodist group who continues to use the site several weeks each summer for church camps.

**Brorson High School**

The history of Brorson High School and Danish settlement in North Dakota parallels the story of earlier settlement on the Nebraska prairies. While the Danish community in Howard County was due to the efforts of the Danish Land and Homestead Company of Waukesha, Wisconsin, a secular organization, the North Dakota settlement represented the only formal attempt by the United Church to establish a colony. Pastor Hans Hansen, the same man who had organized congregations in Howard County and founded Dannebrog College, and who later served as president of the Blair Church until the formation of the United Church in 1896, led this effort. During the annual convention of the Blair Church in 1895, delegates discussed the high cost of land in established communities and the challenges faced by recent immigrants and second-generation members of the church finding affordable farms. Establishing a colony would provide economic possibilities for church members while at the same time creating new mission opportunities, and so official action was taken to establish a "Colonization Committee." Hansen, who was serving a well-established parish in Hutchinson, Minnesota, volunteered to lead an exploratory trip to western North Dakota where the Soo Railroad Company was constructing a line northwest to the Canadian prairie and where both homestead and railroad land were available.
In summer of 1896, Hansen and twelve other church members traveled to Kenmare, North Dakota, a newly platted community along the railroad line, sixty miles northwest of Minot and twenty miles south of the Canadian border. There they homesteaded on land northwest of Kenmare, and on 14 October 1896 organized the first Danish Lutheran congregation in North Dakota, Trinity Lutheran Church. Shortly thereafter, congregations were established in the nearby communities of Bowbells and Flaxton. Census records indicate the rapid growth that occurred. In 1890 there were six Danish born inhabitants in Ward County in which Kenmare was located. By 1900, this number had swelled to 485 and there were over 1,000 inhabitants of Danish heritage. In 1910, Burke County, which lay adjacent to Ward County and included the towns of Bowbells and Flaxton, was organized. The 1910 census indicated that Burke County had 303 Danish born inhabitants and Ward County 441. Rapid growth in settlement created the need for additional congregations and a school. A church building for Trinity Lutheran Church was dedicated in 1900, and by the following year five additional congregations had been organized in the area extending north to Flaxton.

In 1901, Pastor Hansen organized the school that was to become Brorson High School. During the first winters, classes were held in the parsonage and then in an addition to the church. As in the folk high school at Nysted, Hansen's purpose was initially to provide education to the many young men who had come to the area to work on the farms. However, both young men and women from the area also attended. Henry N. Hansen, who was later ordained and served parishes in the United Church, described attending the school. His narrative provides insight into the conditions under which teachers and students labored and the school's religious tone.

During the winter months of 1903-04, I attended a school conducted by our pastor. It was in a room built to the east end of Trinity church. This was used as classroom. Miss A. (Arildsen) from C.F. (Cedar Falls, Iowa) was our teacher. She taught the elementary subjects, while the pastor taught Danish grammar, reading and church history as well as religion. Here for the first time in my life, I heard the Catechism taught in the English language....Miss A. did a
blessed work among the young people in our church. Indeed it was "rough" material. Most of us had but very little schooling. I remember her fine christian spirit. Her heart burned for the salvation of our souls. She organized a choir. Many of the old danish hymns became familiar thru her efforts.25

By 1905 it was clear there was need for a building to house the school. In the spring of that year, members of what was now the North Dakota District of the United Church successfully raised $7,000 in cash and subscriptions, and a three-story wood framed building was completed in time for the beginning of the winter term of 1905, when fifty students were enrolled.26 In the basement was a kitchen, dining room, and furnace room with coal fired, steam heat. On the main floor were classrooms, a large hall, and an apartment for the principal. The second and third floors provided residential space for forty students.27 Since the school terms lasted from mid-November through mid-March, the building was used for other meetings and courses the rest of the year. In 1906 and 1912, the United Church held their annual conventions at the school, suggesting the importance the school and the North Dakota District had already come to play in the larger church body.

FIG 2. Delegates to the 16th annual convention of the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1912 meeting at Brorson High School. Courtesy of The Danish Immigrant Museum, Elk Horn, Iowa.
The school was officially named Brorson High School at the time of its dedication in 1905. Pastor P.M. Petersen, Hansen's colleague who served the congregation in Flaxton had suggested the school be named for Hans Adolph Brorson, a Danish bishop and hymn-writer who lived in Denmark from 1694 to 1764.\textsuperscript{28} Brorson, who had served as Bishop of Ribe, a diocese on the west coast of the Jutland peninsula, had been influenced by 17\textsuperscript{th} century German pietism. As N.F.S. Grundtvig's thought and belief clearly influenced teaching at the folk high schools, Brorson's hymns and published sermons inspired the pietist tendencies of the United Church. The fact that the name of the school did not include the word "folk," though the curricular model was similar, suggests again the deep division between Grundtvigians and pietists. Members of the United Church believed that the folk high schools focused too much on contemporary issues and the "folk" aspects of Danish culture to the detriment of bible study and developing a deep personal faith.

\textbf{Table 3:}

\textbf{Annual enrollments and principals at Brorson High School}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>Principal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901-1902</td>
<td>Unreported</td>
<td>Hans Hansen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902-1903</td>
<td>15 students</td>
<td>Hans Hansen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903-1904</td>
<td>Unreported</td>
<td>Hans Hansen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904-1905</td>
<td>Unreported</td>
<td>Hans Hansen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905-1906</td>
<td>50 students</td>
<td>Jens Dixen (manager/teacher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906-1907</td>
<td>Unreported</td>
<td>Jens Dixen (manager/teacher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907-1908</td>
<td>Unreported</td>
<td>J.P. Nielsen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908-1909</td>
<td>22 students</td>
<td>J.P. Nielsen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909-1910</td>
<td>47 students</td>
<td>J.J. Kildsig (Jens Dixen, manager/teacher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910-1911</td>
<td>44 students</td>
<td>J.J. Kildsig (Jens Dixen, manager/teacher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911-1912</td>
<td>Unreported</td>
<td>J.J. Kildsig (Jens Dixen, manager/teacher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912-1913</td>
<td>49 students</td>
<td>J.J. Kildsig (Jens Dixen, manager/teacher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913-1914</td>
<td>37 students</td>
<td>J.J. Kildsig (Jens Dixen, manager/teacher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914-1915</td>
<td>44 students</td>
<td>C.E. Nielsen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915-1916</td>
<td>38 students</td>
<td>J.A. Larsen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916-1917</td>
<td>19 students</td>
<td>J.A. Larsen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917-1919</td>
<td>Closed due to the war and poor harvests.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919-1920</td>
<td>27 students</td>
<td>J. Knudsen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920-1921</td>
<td>No classes for lack of principal.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-1922</td>
<td>No classes for lack of students.</td>
<td>(James Lund was to serve as principal.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note: All the principals except for Jens Dixen also served as pastors of Trinitatis (Trinity) Lutheran Church in rural Kenmare. Organized in 1896, the congregation was the first Danish Lutheran church organized in North Dakota.

Source: *Beretninger om Den forenede danske evangelisk-lutherske Kirke’s Aarsmøde* (Annual reports of the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church) (Blair, Nebr.: Danish Lutheran Publishing House, 1901-1922)

Among those who played a seminal role in teaching, attracting students to the school and fund-raising was Jens Dixen, a tile layer, lay preacher and missionary (See Fig. 3). Dixen, who had been born in 1858 in a part of southern Jutland that came under Prussian influence after the Dano-Prussian War of 1864 and was not returned to Denmark until 1920, had immigrated to Denmark in 1875 to avoid military service in the Prussian Army. In 1880, he immigrated to the United States, finally settling near Coulter, Iowa in 1881. On first arriving in the United States, Dixen had joined the Danish Church that, as explained above, reflected the theology of N.F.S. Grundtvig. However, in 1884, at a revival meeting at which a young Swedish minister preached on the text "Ye must be born again," Dixen experienced a reawakening. In a passage from his diary that is reminiscent of Martin Luther’s decision to enter the priesthood, he described that on the way home from this meeting in the midst of a lightning and thunderstorm, he heard his calling. Though he had received no formal education beyond the parish school in Roibøl, he began reading widely, but particularly the writings of P.C. Trandberg, a Danish immigrant seminary professor who was a fervent advocate of the pietist stance. Through Trandberg, Dixen was also exposed to the writings of Søren Kierkegaard, who influenced him and whom he was often later to quote both in his speaking and writing. This reawakening also led Dixen to leave the Danish Church and join the United Church, largely due to its emphasis on mission work. Beginning in 1889 Dixen would spend the winters traveling to Danish American communities to preach. Ultimately this led to church-supported missionary trips in 1903 and from 1907 to 1909, when Dixen circled the globe, preaching to Danes who had settled in South Africa, India, Australia and New Zealand. In 1929, after years of traveling, Dixen returned to Denmark where he died on January 12, 1931.
Between 1901 and 1914, however, Kenmare, North Dakota, was the center of Dixen's life and work. In 1901, he left Coulter, Iowa, to homestead in the community that Pastor Hans Hansen and other members of the United Church had founded. Here, during the winters, he assisted Hansen in teaching, and from 1905 to 1907 and again from 1909 to 1914, he taught and managed Brorson High School. That Dixen was a powerful presence in student lives is clear from Henry N. Hansen's description of him.

The influence of Dixen on us students was tremendous. He led us into the Word of God. He could tell Bible Stories as no one else. He also told of his travels. He had visited most of the Lutheran Mission fields. Missionary characters were made alive to us. He also taught us Danish composition. He was a many sided man. A hard worker
indeed, a ditch digger from Iowa. He kept us spellbound, when he preached and lectured. We all loved him, yet we were a bit fearful at times, he might become too personal. His eyes could penetrate into the innermost parts of our being. And he could talk to us personally about Jesus and our relationship to Him. He had an austere personality, yet when we learned to know him better, he became a real pal full of fun. We young people took to him.31

Brorson High School flourished from 1905 to 1916, and especially during those years when Dixen was present. In 1908, while he was away on one of his missionary trips, enrollment slipped to twenty-two students, but on his return enrollment figures once again climbed. Between 1909 and 1914, the principal of Brorson High School was Pastor Jens Jensen Kildsig. In many ways, Kildsig and Dixen were kindred spirits. Kildsig, who immigrated to America in 1878, had studied at the seminary operated by the Pietist P.C. Trandberg, whose writings had influenced Dixen.32 Together, and with the assistance of a number of young teachers, these two men were to shape the lives of many young men who were to become pastors within the United Church.

It is clear from the curriculum that the Bible and biblical authority were stressed at Brorson High School. Henrik Bredmose Simonsen, in his study *Kampen om Danskheden* (The Struggle Over Danish Cultural Identity), rightly characterizes Brorson more as a bible school than as a folk school in the Grundtvigian tradition since greater emphasis was placed on evangelism and inspiring an active Christian life.33 And yet student letters suggest that the curriculum also focused on traditional academic subjects as well. Ethan Mengers, who was to become a professor at Trinity Seminary in Blair (the only seminary of the United Church) and later, after the 1960 merger forming the American Lutheran Church, at Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa, was a student at Brorson during the 1913-14 winter term. Writing to his sister in February, he described his classes: "Yesterday and today there have been mission meetings here. Fridays I have Danish that includes reading, composition, grammar, as well as vocabulary and spelling. I also have church history before that. I also took gymnastics. Next week I have penmanship and music as well as all the lectures, devotions,
etc." Noteworthy is the fact that while gymnastics was a part of the curriculum, there was no folk dancing, which a student could expect to find at the Grundtvigian inspired folk high schools. It is one of those details that suggest the reason why Danish American Lutherans referred to the Grundtvigians as the "dancing" or "happy" Danes while the members of the United Church were called the "praying" or "holy" Danes.

Despite the departure of both Kildsig and Dixen in 1914, the school continued to do well for two years. However, in 1916 conditions began to deteriorate in large measure due to weather on the Great Plains. Brief entries in the annual church reports tell the story. "Brorson High School student enrollment was not as large during the winter of 1916-1917 as it was accustomed to being and this was no doubt due to the poor harvest and the hailstorms in the North Dakota District last year." "Brorson High School has been closed this year (1917-1918) because of the war and poor harvest. When it can open again is difficult to say." As World War I drew to an end, plans were made to reopen, but they came to nothing until December 1919. Pastor Jens Knudsen wrote what was to become the school’s final report.

After Brorson High School on account of the war had been closed for two years, the District decided to open the school and have it open for 13 weeks. The school opened on the 1st of December 1919, and held classes until the 1st of March 1920. Due to the poor harvest in this area last year, many students could not afford to attend. Counting the music students who all do not live at the school, there were 27 students. We had three teachers at the school. Mr. Oscar Petersen, Miss M. Gissel, and Miss Hedvig Knudsen. Oscar Petersen and Miss Knudsen taught the general English school subjects; Petersen also taught mission history and gymnastics. Miss M. Gissel taught singing and music. I have taught bible history… and bible study two hours daily; I also gave 35 lectures over church history, bible history and mission history as well as ethics… The school is without debt and despite the difficult times, financial expectations are good.
Contrary to Knudsen’s hopeful words, Brorson High School did not open the next year for lack of a principal, and though the North Dakota District appointed Pastor James Lund to serve in that position for the 1921-1922 term, "due to pressing times too few students enrolled to open the school." The inability to open the school resulted finally in the sale of the building to the Trinity congregation for parish use. As the economic depression that began in rural areas during the mid 1920s, gripped the northern plains, the once proud symbol of the North Dakota District stood vacant, and in 1941 it was torn down. In its nearly twenty years of existence, however, almost 500 students had attended Brorson High School. Twenty-five of these students went on to be ordained and served the United Church as ministers and three became missionaries, serving in Africa. The spiritual ideals that had inspired the school were carried on in the work of these students.

Among former members of the two Danish Lutheran synods the memories of Nysted Folk High School and Brorson High School loom large. At annual meetings held at Danebod Folk School in Tyler, Minnesota, and in Solvang, California, individuals still gather who had family who attended the Nysted Folk High School. During the summer of 2003 at the annual reunion of members of the United Church to be held at Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa, the program focused on Jens Dixen and Brorson High School. But this group of individuals is rapidly dwindling.

These two schools were hopeful attempts by Danish immigrants to establish institutions on the Great Plains where their young could grow in knowledge of their faith and cultural heritage. Despite the hard work of dedicated teachers, pastors, and community members, environmental forces and pressures on succeeding generations to assimilate were too great. With the close of Brorson High School in 1920 and Nysted Folk High School in 1934, the Great Plains, that she-monster of Ole Rolvaag’s novel Giants in the Earth had claimed the blood of two more victims.

1 At the time of their merger with other Lutheran synods in the early 1960s, three histories were written examining the experiences of Danish Lutheran immigrants in the United States. These are Paul C. Nyholm, The

2 Jensen, ibid., p. 9.

3 Comprehensive introductions to the life and work of N.F.S. Grundtvig are available in Hal Koch, N.F.S. Grundtvig (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1959) and P.H. Traustedt, Dansk litteratur historie (Copenhagen: Politiken, 1967); English studies, including a bibliography in English can be found in N.F.S. Grundtvig: Tradition and Renewal: Grundtvig’s Vision of Man and People, Education and the Church in Relation to World Issues Today (Copenhagen, Det danske Selskab, 1983) and Grundtvig’s Ideas in North America: Influences and Parallels (Copenhagen, Det danske Selskab, 1983).


5 English translations of many of Grundtvig’s writings on education and his proposal to the government for a revision in the curriculum at Sorø Academy can be found in Harold Judd Alford’s "A History of Residential Adult Education" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1966), 321-417.

6 Enok Mortensen, who attended Nysted Folkehøjskole, taught at several folk high schools and was responsible for renovating Danebod Folk High School in Tyler, Minnesota, has written extensively on the Danish folk school movement in the United States. See Enok Mortensen, Schools for Life: The Grundtvigian Schools in America (Askov, Minnesota: Danish-American Heritage Society, 1977); The Danish Lutheran Church in America: The History and Heritage of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (Philadelphia: Lutheran Church of America Board of Publications, 1967), 84-89; and "Grundtvig’s Influence on American Education" in Grundtvig’s Ideas in North America: Influences and Parallels (Copenhagen, 1983), 42-50.
America: Influences and Parallels (Copenhagen: Det Danske Selskab, 1983), 122-131. For an early Danish summary of the folk high school experience in America, written to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the first school in Elk Horn, Iowa, an including description of the school at Nysted, see A. Bobjerg, De danske Højskoler i Amerika: 1878-1903 (Kolding, Denmark: Konrad Jørgensens Bogtrykkeri), n.d.

7 For the most recent and extensive treatment of this period in the establishment of Danish communities in Howard County, see Torben Gronggaard Jeppesen, Dannebrog på den amerikanske prærie (Fynske Studier19. Odense, Denmark: Odense By Museer, 2000), pp. 111-135. A brief overview of settlement in Nebraska can be found in George R. Nielsen, The Danish Americans (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), pp. 136-141.


10 Mortensen, Schools for Life, p. 58.


14 Extensive excerpts of these letters were translated by Otto Hoiberg, C.P.'s youngest son, who shared them with the Centennial Committee for publication in their centennial history of St. Peder's Lutheran Church in Nysted. Otto G. Hoiberg, "The Højbjerg Years at Nysted: 1907-1912" in St. Peder's Evangelical Lutheran Church 1883-1983 (Cairo, Nebraska: Record Printing Co., 1983), pp. 26-29.

15 Mortensen, Schools for Life (see note 6 above), p. 69.

16 Quoted in Mortensen, ibid. p. 71.

17 Gudrun Hansen Nielsen, Letter to her father on 14 May 1922 (Collection CHH-2002, Box 1, Packet 2, Letter 10), Danish Immigrant Archive-Dana College, Blair, Nebraska.

18 For discussions on the relationship between the Danish folk high school movement, other folk schools and Elderhostel, see: John Mark Nielsen, "Tracing Threads: N.F.S. Grundtvig, the Danish Folk High School Movement, and the Elderhostel Experience," in Nordics in America: The Future of Their Past, ed. Odd S. Lovoll (Northfield, Minnesota: The


20 Ibid., pp. (10-11).

21 Ibid., pp. (8-9).


23 Kirsten and Knud Madsen, Han Sled Bibler Som Sko: Bogen om Jens Dixen og hans landsmænd i det fjerne (Copenhagen, Denmark: Forlaget Savanne, 1995), 32-33 and John M. Jensen, The United Evangelical Lutheran Church: An Interpretation (see note 1 above), pp. 136-137.

24 Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research. United States Historical Census Data Browser (note 8 above).

25 Henry N. Hansen, Memoir, a typewritten manuscript (Collection HNH-992, Box 1, Chapter 3, page 2), Danish Immigrant Archive-Dana College, Blair, Nebraska.


31 Hansen, Memoir, p. 3.

32 Jensen, United Evangelical Lutheran Church (note 1 above), pp. 286-287.


34 Ethan Mengers, Letter to his sister on 19 February 1914 (Collection HAN-988, Box 28, Packet 2, Letter 34), Danish Immigrant Archive-Dana College, Blair, Nebraska.

36 Beretning om Den forenede danske evangelsk-lutherske Kirke’s toogtyvende Aarsmøde 1918, p. 17.

37 J. Knudsen, ”Indberetning fra Brorson Højskole” Beretning om Den forenede danske evangelsk-lutherske Kirke’s fireogtyvende Aarsmøde 1920, p. 84.

38 Beretning om Den forenede danske evangelsk-lutherske Kirke’s seksogtyvende Aarsmøde 1922, p. 29.

39 Madsen, Han Slid Bibler Som Sko (note 24 above), p. 54.

Hans Jorgen Pedersen: The Founder of Danebod

by Thorvald Hansen

He served as pastor in a number of congregations. He was president of three Folk Schools, two of which he founded. He was a good businessman and was able to finance some of his undertakings. Yet he seemed never to stay at any one thing for very long. He easily became discouraged and he seems to have been that type of person for whom the grass is always greener somewhere else. Nonetheless, in the thirty years of his activity in America, Hans Jorgen Pedersen made a significant contribution to the life of the Danish Lutheran Church among the immigrants.

On December 28th of 1851 Hans Jorgen Pedersen was born. He was the son of a poor family living at Ringe Parish on the island of Funen, in Denmark. He was baptized on January 11th of the new year. There were ten children in the family, but just where Hans Jorgen ranks in the line of siblings is not stated in any of my sources. Despite the fact that poverty was a constant in the family, the family never lacked having something to eat.

The parents belonged to a pious group which read a sermon every Sunday and sang some of Hans Adolf Brorson’s hymns. Brorson’s poetry reflected German piety and was replete with intimations of the hereafter. As soon as the children were able to read they were encouraged to sing along. The singing they rather enjoyed, but the sermons were often long. They were taught to pray every morning and every evening. If he missed a time, Pedersen later writes, “I was not at all happy -- then the Lord would be angry, I thought, and I was afraid of Him.” He learned more about religion in the school, but even after confirmation his relationship to God remained the same. At times he felt Christianity was an illusion, but this only added to his feeling of guilt.

When, as a teenager, he went away from home to do farm work, he heard of the Grundtvigians, who always looked happy. He dismissed them as hypocrites. “I did not understand,” he writes, “that the most serious Christian is the most happy one.” It was with
such thoughts that he enrolled in the Folk School at Ryslinge, not far from his home. Here he began to understand and eventually was able to accept and embrace Grundtvigianism. At Ryslinge he began training for pastoral service in America and concluded his preparation in Copenhagen. He then took and passed the examination for a pastor in the new world.

He came to America accompanied by Jens Peter Lillesø, who was also a candidate for the ministry in America. Lillesø was ordained in 1875 to be pastor at Muskegon, Michigan. Pedersen was not ordained immediately because it was felt he was too young, the minimum age being 25, and he did not have a definite call to a congregation. Instead he was sent off to assist Pastor Rosenstand in Manistee. However, it quickly developed that Pedersen was a good preacher and was fully competent to be ordained. Further, he now had a call from the congregation at Gowen, Michigan. He was, therefore, ordained at Greenville, Michigan, by Pastor Adam Dan on October 20, 1875. In connection with Pedersen’s ordination it should be noted that Adam Dan wrote a hymn for the occasion, a hymn which is expressive of the work Pedersen and other pastors contemplated. That hymn has been translated as “We Publish the Greatest of Tidings Abroad.”

Gowen, Michigan

Little information is available regarding Pedersen’s work at Gowen. I do not even know how many congregations he served though I do know that there were a number of Danish congregations in the Gowen area of Montcalm County. Early in the twentieth century there were five. Some of these had been begun by a somewhat eccentric Norwegian bachelor pastor named Ole Amble. Among the sizeable number of letters addressed to Hans Jorgen Pedersen there is only one written by him and that is addressed to Ole Amble.

Pedersen had received what he called “an angry letter” from Amble during the last days of September in 1877. I do not know the specific nature of his complaint. Pedersen replied he was not aware of having done anything that he would wish undone. Then he goes on, “In the future I shall strive to deal; with you, your congregation and your work, as one who is fully aware that he must make an
accounting in the final judgment.”

If this reply should not be satisfactory, Pedersen writes, with Amble’s permission he is willing to submit the letter from Amble, as well as the detailed reply to Kirkelig Samler so that congregations may judge for themselves. A perusal of a number of subsequent issues of Kirkelig Samler indicates this was never done. Apparently Amble was mollified by Pedersen’s letter.

On the basis of a letter in Kirkelig Samler, sent by a woman who preferred to keep her identity secret and who was member of one of Pedersen’s congregations, I can only conclude the his work in the Gowen area was more than satisfactory. “It was with sorrow,” she writes, “that the congregation heard of Pastor Pedersen’s resignation as their pastor.” We face the days ahead, she says, “Not only with sighs and concerns about the future, but with gratitude for what the Lord, through his [Pedersen’s] mouth has let us hear.”

Though Pedersen’s name was not added to the ministerial roll of the Danish Church until 1875, he rather quickly became a vital and recognizable part of the Synod. In paging through the 1880 issue of the church paper, Kirkelig Samler, one comes across Pedersen’s name quite often. He frequently contributed sermons and among these is his inaugural sermon at Elk Horn. He was also somewhat of a poet. He contributed an Easter song to the paper in April.

Because of his abilities and his known interest in Folk Schools, it was to Pedersen that the Church turned when there became a vacancy in the president’s position at the Elk Horn Folk School. That school had been founded in 1878, by a margin of one vote in the Synod as a proprietary institution with ownership resting in the president, Pastor O. L. Kirkeberg. Two years later Kirkeberg resigned his position because of ill health and turned the school over to the Church. The debt at the school, which was assumed by the Church, was $620.

Elk Horn, Iowa

Hans Jorgen Pedersen accepted the president’s position on the condition that Kristian Østergaard, who had ably assisted Kirkeberg, would remain. Østergaard, who was not yet ordained as a pastor, agreed to do so. Enok Mortensen writes of Pedersen: “He was an
able man, probably not as brilliant as Kirkeberg, but more practical and a better organizer.”

The attendance the first year was not great and the summer school for girls did not go very well, but by the next school year things looked much brighter. There were 30 men enrolled for that session and the school had just about all it could handle. A teacher named Peter Jensen aided Pedersen and Østergaard and by the summer of 1882 two more teachers were added. One was a Norwegian named Skinvig, and the other A. Skands Hansen, who later became a pastor and ultimately a physician in Cedar Falls, Iowa.

The instruction at Elk Horn followed the traditional Danish Folk School pattern, as to subjects and methods. The lecture method saw primary use in subjects such as history, biography, and religion. In the more practical subjects, such as grammar, mathematics, penmanship, and physics, other hands-on methods were used. There were classes in sewing for the girls. Knitting and embroidering were popular pursuits by them during lecture periods.

Despite the obvious success of the school, Pedersen was restless. He had long wanted to open his own school. He was a good businessman who knew something about earning money. Somehow he was able to purchase land and when the price of that land went up, he sold it at a profit. Thus he was able to pay off the debt of the school and have funds left for his own use. He determined to start a Folk School, somewhere in Michigan. The Synod president was informed of Pedersen’s intention to move and a Chicago Pastor, Kristian Anker, was recruited to head the school at Elk Horn.

Michigan Again

Michigan was chosen as the site for the new school because of Pedersen’s familiarity with the area. Many immigrants had come from Denmark and the men had found work in the sawmills and as lumberjacks. It was hoped that these would come to the school during such times as there was no work for them. It had first been thought that the school should be built at Big Rapids, but Peder Kjøjhede, who was then the pastor at Muskegon, convinced Pedersen that a better site would be east and north of Muskegon, near the little town of Grant. Here Pedersen was able to purchase forty acres at a price that fitted his resources. The area had been
heavily forested, but was now burned over. Not much remained but bushes, some dead trees and ashes. Pedersen therefore named the place Ashland and here he built his school.

The school building which Pedersen planned and had built at Ashland was a simple but practical structure. On the first floor there was an apartment for the president and his family plus a dining room for the students. The second floor would contain classrooms and the attic would be given over to a dormitory for the students. There was a small and separate house for Østergaard and his family. The people at Grant, where there was a small Danish Church, as well as those in the surrounding area, were enthused at having a Folk School in their midst. They did what they could to expedite the construction. The opening was planned for November 1, 1882. The school was dedicated on that occasion and it was a happy time for all who were present. In addition to a number of guests there were 21 students present, some of whom had come from Pedersen’s former congregation at Gowen.

In addition to Østergaard, Pedersen added Emil Ferdinand Madsen to the faculty. Madsen, who was a layman, is perhaps best
known as the one who was instrumental in the founding of the Dagmar colony in Montana in 1906. That winter the school went well enough, but the number of students who attended did not meet expectations. A school for girls was conducted during the summer, but likewise, there were not as many as had been hoped for. The young men who worked in the woods and the sawmills did not flock to the school as Pedersen had assumed they would. Then, too, there were constant financial problems. While the school at Elk Horn was now owned by the Synod and could expect some help from that quarter, Pedersen had nowhere to turn except to the goodwill of nearby friends whose help could only be very limited. One fund raising effort launched by Pedersen, the selling of a photograph of the school and its students, was a complete failure.

In terms of enrollment, the second year went no better. There were still only 21 students. The school was not growing as planned and Pedersen was becoming discouraged. Half way into the third year Østergaard resigned and returned to Denmark as he had long wanted to do. Here on the Jutland peninsula, not far from Aalborg, he established a Folk School at the town of Støvring. This proved to be a disaster because of the political situation in Denmark at that time. Østergaard and his teachers were too liberal for the conservative administration and the school received no support from the state. Then, early in 1892, Østergaard’s wife died. It was in the midst of this situation that Østergaard wrote the much beloved song, “That Cause Can Never Be Lost,” (Den Sag Er Aldrige I Verden Tabt). That year he returned to America, enrolled in the theological seminary at West Denmark and was ordained as a pastor in 1893. He served in several pastorates and wrote a number of books, songs and poems and died at Tyler, Minnesota in 1931.

Meanwhile, Pedersen had written to Østergaard of his concern for the school at Ashland and, as his concern became common knowledge, friends came to his support. They wanted to retain the school. In no uncertain terms Pedersen let them know what was needed. A Folk School Association had been formed and, under the leadership of Pastor H. C. Strandskov, who was now at Muskegon, the group assumed the responsibility for an annual contribution of $200.
Things seemed to go a bit better now. Winter school, for the boys, increased ever so slightly in some years. The summer school attendance for the girls was not very good. One factor in the slight increase was the addition of Lorentz Henningsen to the faculty. Henningsen had studied art in Denmark. He had come to America in 1882 and had spent some time in Racine. His background made it possible for him to attract some students to the school. Henningsen later became a pastor in the Danish Church. He died at Solvang, California in 1927.

Two others who later became noted in the church were Jes Smidt and Christian Hansen. The former was a student who later became the noted wood carver living at West Denmark. The latter, who told stories to Pedersen’s children, later moved to Tyler, where he earned an enviable reputation for story telling (Æventyrmanden).10

His school at Ashland was now limping along and it appeared that it would be able to hang on. However, Pedersen was not satisfied. He began to look about for greener pastures.

He was called to serve the congregation at Fredsville, Iowa, not far from Cedar Falls. That congregation was hopeful he would come and begin a school there. There was a large number of Danes in that area. He declined that call, however, and a school was never built at Fredsville. Pedersen gave some thought to establishing a Folk School at Carlston, near Albert Lea, Minnesota but nothing came of this. He followed with interest, however, the founding of a new congregation at Tyler, Minnesota.

Tyler, Minnesota

At the annual meeting of the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church at Clinton, Iowa in 1884 a land committee had been named with the purpose of starting a new colony for the church. Within a short time this committee had negotiated an agreement with the Winona and St. Peter Railroad Company to purchase 35,000 acres of land in southwestern Minnesota. It was further agreed that for the first three years this land was to be sold only to Danish people. When 12,000 acres had been sold, 240 acres were to be donated for schools and churches.

Late in June, on a hot summer day, a large number of settlers set out from Lake Benton, Minnesota to tour the area and the select farm
sites. The tour ended in Tyler, Minnesota, by which time 3,000 acres of land had been sold. The next day being a Sunday, a picnic was held on an island in Lake Benton. There were several pastors present and the sermon was delivered by A. S. Nielsen. In the afternoon there was singing, lectures and talks. Most then left for their homes in the communities from which they had come. A few settlers came during the summer of 1885, but the bulk of those who had bought land did not arrive for a permanent stay until the spring of 1886.

Hans Jorgen Pedersen was not among those who assembled at Lake Benton and Tyler in 1885, but he was well aware of what was going on and followed those developments with a great deal of interest.

The Danebod congregation was formally organized at Tyler on July 11, 1886. A letter of call was sent to Pastor F. L. Grundtvig at Clinton, Iowa. Grundtvig was interested and would have accepted had it not been that a paragraph excluding members of secret societies had been adopted and then deleted from the constitution. Since he was strongly opposed to secret societies, Grundtvig declined the call. For almost two years the congregation existed without a resident pastor. Services were held in various homes and sometimes in a nearby church. Either a sermon was read or a visiting pastor was present. Finally, after Hans Jorgen Pedersen let it be known that he was available and would not only accept the call but would build a Folk School, he was called and arrived with his family in April of 1888.

The Synodical Land Committee had indicated a willingness to accept an offer of four acres on the edge of Tyler on which to build a church. Pedersen was not satisfied with that choice. Instead he looked around and finally settled on 160 acres south of town. When he had determined it was for sale, he bought it for $1,000. Here he planned to build the church and his Folk School.

He then made an appeal to the settlers for funds with which to build the school. When the funds received proved insufficient, he appealed to the Synod and thus he was able to raise enough. The school he called Danebod. Over a thousand years ago Danebod was the name given by the Danish king, Gorm, to his wife, Thyra, for her
work in saving the Danes from invaders. Danebod, therefore, means literally the one who mends or saves the Danes.

**Folk School**

Danebod Folk School was officially opened on December 1, 1888. This was the fifth Folk School founded by the Danes in the new world. Elk Horn, the oldest, was begun in 1878 and Ashland opened in 1882. A school at West Denmark was opened in 1884 and closed within the year. A school had been begun at Nysted, near Dannebrog, Nebraska the year before Danebod. Pedersen, who now headed the Tyler school, had headed both Elk Horn and Ashland, but had not stayed long at either place.

At the opening of the school that fall there were 19 students enrolled and, including Pedersen, there were three teachers. Carl Hansen, who had attended a state agricultural school and who had some knowledge of veterinary medicine as well as literature, was one of the three. Another was Christian Hansen, who had told stories for Pedersen’s children at Ashland and who was knowledgeable in Danish history and English. Pedersen himself, lectured on the history of Israel and early church history.

**Stone Hall**

During the next summer it became evident that a larger facility was needed in which to hold worship services. The lecture hall at the Folk School was no longer large enough for the growing community. It was not possible to finance the building of a church at that time. Gymnastics were a vital part of the community and the Folk School and so a hall for gym was also needed. Pedersen came forward with a suggestion for filling both needs. A building to satisfy both needs could be erected if the men would find and haul in large rocks. This was agreed to, though not without some objection. Kristian Klink, who was a professional stone mason, aided by two others took on the project. By the fall of 1889, the Stone Hall, a building large enough and suitable for the needs of the community, was completed.

Unfortunately, the first funeral service held in the Stone Hall was that of its builder, Kristian Klink. He had been ill with tuberculosis for some months and had known that it was a life threatening
illness, but he was determined to complete the building before he died. It was Pedersen who took it upon himself to arrange for Klink’s burial and the marking of his grave with a suitable stone. Two letters were received by Pedersen from Valleklode, in Denmark. Both letters were written by J. P. Klink on behalf of his siblings. The first letter was to thank Pedersen for his kindness toward their brother and the second letter was to express thanks for the photographs of the grave site.11

Danebod Congregation

While the Danebod congregation was appreciative of Pedersen’s work on behalf of the local church and its people and found his sermons good, there was nevertheless an undercurrent of criticism of him. He had withdrawn from both the Synod and the Danish People’s Society in 1891. He felt there was continual strife within the Synod regarding the theological position of the Danish Church. Some felt its concern should be only with life after death. Others felt that though this was important, there should also be an emphasis on this life and that the cultural background of the church should be emphasized. Strangely enough, Pedersen himself had contributed to this strife by his words and deeds. He had been a dedicated member of the Danish People’s Society (Dansk Folkesamfund) and that
organization was a major bone of contention within the church. Not only so, but he was quite vocal in defense of the Society. At the annual meeting of the Church at Racine, Wisconsin, in 1887, Pedersen, in an exchange with Pastor P. S. Vig, replied that Vig’s criticism was “Nonsense that was just as old as the Danish Church.” In a similar exchange with Pastor Theodore Lyngby, he replied to Lyngby’s comment by saying, “It is sad to see partisanship take the upper hand in such a manner when there is something {the Danish People’s Society} that it wants to destroy.” Criticism, perhaps born of envy, was also aroused by Pedersen’s ability to profit financially by his land transactions. There were those who felt that this kind of activity should not be indulged in by a preacher.

The number of families in the settlement had increased and the number of elementary grade children was growing larger. Many of these families were averse to sending their children to public, or common school, and there was growing interest in a parochial school. This was really not the first such school at Tyler. Since 1888 many children had met at the Folk School in what was the Pedersen apartment. Later, a school attended by some 15 boys was conducted in a home east of the Folk School. By 1892 many parents felt that now was the time to build so that the school might have facilities of its own. Once again Pedersen came to the fore and offered to donate land for the school; an offer which was gratefully accepted. The school was to lie west of the Stone Hall and east of the site chosen for a church. A school was therefore built on this site during the summer of 1892. The first floor was to be a classroom with facilities for 20-30 pupils. The second floor was to be an apartment for the teacher.

The usual elementary subjects were taught with the addition of such things as Danish History and literature. Through the years many children were to attend this school and they remember it fondly. One such wrote in 2002, “It was a unique and wonderful school with lessons in both English and Danish; an early bilingual school.”

In the summer of 1893 a severe wind and hailstorm swept through the community. Many lost their crops and it was a harsh blow to the settlement. The following Sunday Pedersen called for the building of a church. He said, “We are all poor now, and we need a church
more than ever. Now we can lift together; now is the time to build.”¹⁵ They began almost at once; a place was cleared for the new building and many loads of stone were hauled for the foundation. By winter a foundation was ready for the superstructure.

Then, in October of that same year, in the midst of the building project, Pedersen resigned. The work with the Folk School and with what was now becoming a large congregation had taken its toll. Not only so, but he served as pastor in two other places. Diamond Lake, near Lake Benton, was served by Pedersen until 1892 and Ruthton, founded by him in 1888, which he continued to serve. The work was beginning to be too much for him and he rejected the idea of reconsidering his action. However, after some unsuccessful attempts by the congregation to call a new pastor, Pedersen did reconsider and agreed to serve on a temporary basis.

Meanwhile, by a vote of the congregation in the spring of 1894, it was agreed to continue the project. During the summer and through the following winter the work continued. Finally, the building stood complete and was dedicated on June 16, 1895. It quickly became known as the “Cross Church at Danebod,” apparently because it was built in the shape of a cross.

The Folk School was far from an overwhelming success. The number of students Pedersen had hoped for did not materialize. As president, Pedersen received a small salary, but there was not enough to pay the other teachers. A couple of them, therefore, made their living by farming and one was the postmaster and for a time ran a pharmacy. Thoroughly discouraged, Pedersen resigned his position as president in 1894. Since he could no longer occupy the president’s quarters at the school, he built a house for himself and his family across from the church. He could now give more attention to his ever-growing congregation.

The ownership of the Folk School building rested in the hands of the Danebod Folk School Society (Danebod Højskolesamfund) which had been formed somewhat earlier. From this society Ole Stevns and Dorothea Rasmussen, who were later married, rented the school and continued. From time to time Pedersen did lecture at the school but he was no longer closely associated with it.

The Danebod congregation was host to the annual meeting of the Synod in 1896. At this meeting there was much discussion of the
new college and seminary in Des Moines and there was also some fund raising for that institution. Hans Jorgen Pedersen gave $100 to the cause at that time. That year also, Pedersen came back into the Synod and was elected secretary of the Danish Church at that convention.

**Ruthton, Minnesota—Illness & Death**

At the end of the year 1901 Pedersen announced his resignation to the Danebod congregation. He had, he wrote, “For some time suffered under the feeling that he no longer filled his place so that the congregation or he himself could be satisfied.” The resignation was to be effective as of October 1, 1902. At that time he moved out of the house in Tyler, sold it to the Danebod congregation, and moved nearby to Ruthton where he served that congregation. A church had been built in Ruthton in 1899. His service at Ruthton did not last long. He became ill in 1904 and by the beginning of 1905 it was evident that his illness was terminal. His suffering lingered until he died on July 20, 1905 at the age of 53.

Services were held at both Ruthton and Danebod. The funeral cortege was very long and he was buried in the Danebod cemetery where a large memorial stone marks his grave today. The Danebod congregation had already honored him as “the founder of Danebod” with a memorial stone placed between the Folk School and the Stone Hall.

During his years in America Pedersen sent countless sermons to *Kirkelig Samler* and from time to time he sent articles to the Danish paper *Dannevirke*. Aside from this, however, he left no written record except for a collection of sermons that was edited by Pastor Anders Bobjerg and published posthumously in 1906. It bore the title *Lyse Tanker*. This 245 page hardcover book was later translated and published by a granddaughter, Allegra E. P. Stehr as a paperback in 1988. The title under which it was published is *Illuminated Thoughts from a Living Faith*. 
Letters to Pedersen

There remains but to say something about the letters that have been preserved and which may be found in the archives at Grand View College. These letters, addressed to Hans Jorgen Pedersen, cover the period of his life and work in America. Since a reply to these does not exist, or if it does it is unavailable, one can only cite the letters and draw some inferences from them.

In most cases there are single letters, but there is a collection of 12 letters from Frederik Lange Grundtvig, indicating that he and Pedersen had an active exchange of letters. In one letter he writes of how nice it would be if he could come to Diamond Lake as pastor, but he writes that conditions are such in Clinton that he cannot now leave that congregation. In another he asks about the colony at Kingsbury, South Dakota, and inquires about the availability of land and the price for such. Another has to do with Pedersen’s resignation from Tyler and the possible successors. He says that he has taken himself out of the running. In that same letter he states that he does not believe that the idea of building a theological seminary in Des Moines will amount to anything. Then, he says, Thorvald Helveg could come to Tyler and head a seminary there. With Pedersen at the Folk School, this would be a grand arrangement. Some of the letters deal with theological and Biblical problems and one final letter is a farewell from Grundtvig who is leaving for Denmark.

One interesting letter is from Martin Holst, who at that time was a second year student at the Askov Folk School in Denmark. He would like to come to America and lead a school for children, but he seeks a way to become acclimated first. He, therefore, asks Pedersen if he knows of a family needing a farm hand. In a later letter, written from Cedar Falls, Iowa, Holst seeks to borrow a small sum with which to expand the weekly, Dannevirk.

A letter from Peder Jensen, written from Denmark seeks information on coming to America. Jensen did come and eventually was ordained as a pastor in the Danish Lutheran Church where he served until 1921.

Emil Ferdinand Madsen is the author of a puzzling letter asking Pedersen to come and speak at a celebration to be held for F. L. Grundtvig. No date or place for the celebration is given. The letter...
is puzzling because no reference can be found to any such celebration.  

A large number of letters were written to Pedersen by pastors and other friends in early 1905 on the occasion of his illness and ultimate death.

For Hans Jorgen Pedersen life was short. Nonetheless, he accomplished a great deal in those few years. In addition to being known as the founder of Danebod, he made his influence felt in the Danish Lutheran Church in many ways and in various states. As pastor, Folk School president and a shrewd businessman he left his mark in many places.

1 Hans Jorgen Pedersen, Vita, *Kirkelig Samler* 1876, p. 66.
2 Ibid.
3 *Hymnal for Church and Home*, #412, *Sangbog for the det Danske Folk i America*, #120.
4 Hans Jorgen Pedersen, letter to Ole Amble, Oct. 1, 1877.
7 Ibid., p. 113.
8 *Kirkelig Samler*, 1880, p. 306.
10 Christian Hansen became widely known as “Æventyrmanden” -- the story telling man.
11 J. P. Klink, two letters, fall of 1889.
13 Ibid., p. 9.
15 Enok Mortensen, *75 Years at Danebod*, 1961, p. 29.
16 Ibid., p. 35.
18 F. L. Grundtvig, letter September 1888.
19 Ibid., fall 1891.
20 Ibid., Dec. 8, 1893.
21 Ibid., May 5, 1900.
22 Martin Holst, letter Dec. 11, 1880.
23 Martin Holst, letter Dec. 24, 1888.
24 Peder Jensen, letter Mar. 31, 1880.
During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, thousands of immigrants from Denmark settled in the American Midwest. Some of them brought with them educational concepts and religious convictions they hoped to pass on to future generations; to do so they created a variety of educational and religious institutions scattered across several Midwestern states. What follows is a study of Paulus Falck, who passed through several of these institutions.

Paulus Frederik Madsen Falck was born on September 4, 1892 in Madison, Wisconsin, the oldest of three children born to Christian and Karoline Madsen Falck. Following his immigration to the United States from Denmark in 1884, Paulus’ father had become an ordained pastor in the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church and thus Paulus grew up in Danish American communities speaking, reading and writing Danish and English. From his parents, Paulus learned to appreciate his both his Danish and Lutheran heritage, and he was confirmed on April 28, 1907.¹

Education appeared to have been of great importance to the Falck family, but the Reverend and Mrs. Falck believed in free will for their children. Paulus did not always seem enthused about his own education, but with a little early guidance, education became an important part of his adult life. Due in part to his heritage and religious background, Paulus completed a large part of his education within the confines of institutions which was popular with elements the Danish-American immigrant community at the time.

The Falck family moved to Jewell, Iowa in the summer of 1909 due to Rev. Falck’s appointment to serve as pastor of a United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church congregation there. Paulus was set to enter the eleventh grade in the fall and his parents had hoped he would attend a local Norwegian Lutheran college, but much to his father’s dismay, Paulus decided to attend public school. During the summer, Paulus secured work as a farm laborer and had thoughts of
making this his permanent occupation. A fellow farm hand persuaded Paulus to reconsider and return to his studies in the fall.

Shortly before the school year was set to begin, Rev. Falck received a letter from the president of Elk Horn College, a Danish school in Elk Horn, Iowa, originally based on the Danish Folk High School tradition. President L. A. Laursen suggested in his letter, apparently an early form of college recruitment, that Paulus attend Elk Horn College. Again, Paulus had to be convinced, this time by his father, to return to school. He enrolled at Elk Horn College in October 1909.²

Elk Horn College had grown out of what was the first Danish folk school in America. Founded in 1878, it initially followed closely the concepts articulated by the Danish plan of instruction, meaning mostly lectures offered in the afternoon and evening in order for the farmers in the area to attend. This plan did not emphasize much traditional book work and there were few if any examinations. Elk Horn was chosen as the location of the first Folk School primarily because it was near the center of the largest Danish settlement in the United States at the time.³

By the 1890s the school had moved away from its Folk School beginnings and had slowly taken on the attributes of an American college, albeit one of Danish heritage. The result was more class work and fewer lectures. The school was divided into four departments: the Folk High School; English Language for immigrants; a commercial department; and a “normal” department. The school offered classes in Danish and U.S. history, English and Danish language, civics and science. In 1894 a seminary was added. By 1899 the seminary and college departments had both been removed to Blair, Nebraska, and the school moved in the direction of its folk school roots.⁴

Danish Folk Schools in the United States were generally created for one of two reasons: to foster an interest in and to ensure the preservation of Danish culture to Americans of Danish heritage; and to provide education in rural areas for immigrant farmers. The school at Elk Horn seemed to have served both purposes at different times during its existence. Elk Horn College closed on March 1, 1917 after thirty-nine years in operation.⁵
When Paulus Falck arrived at Elk Horn College in the fall of 1909, he was met at the train station by the president of the college, Rev. Laursen, who had just taken over the leadership of the school that same year. This was a common practice at the time, and Rev. Laursen made many trips to the train depot throughout the school year to pick up arriving students; on some occasions, however, his trip was in vain due to prospective students changing their minds and not showing up after all. Upon setting foot on campus, Falck was told to go to the main building containing dormitories and classrooms and to pick out a room. During his search, Falck discovered that the dorm also served as a local boarding house, with the principal of the Elk Horn Public School being among the boarders.

The day before classes began, Rev. Laursen met with Falck to discuss his course schedule. Falck signed up for algebra, physics, pedagogy, American literature and geography. The school day ran as follows: 6:30 A.M. wake up, 7:00 A.M. breakfast, 8:00 A.M. chapel and beginning of the school day, 12:00 lunch, and 6:00 P.M. dinner. Between 7:00 and 10:00 P.M. was study time, after which students were expected to go to bed. By the end of the first week at Elk Horn, Falck had become accustomed to the routine of the school but began to express some disappointment. He enjoyed his subjects and teachers but was unhappy with the fact that he was the only male student and felt as if he had been enrolled in a girl’s school. Later in the semester another male student did arrive and as luck would have it, Falck already knew him.

Towards the end of October 1909, Falck was introduced to teaching and basketball. A male student in his late twenties arrived at the college and this individual was a recent immigrant from Denmark. Due to his ability to speak both Danish and English, Falck was able to tutor the student, and thus get his first taste of teaching.

Falck began to learn about the game of basketball and soon engaged in practices and games with another student and some local boys. Later, with the arrival of the winter term, more male students were enrolled at the school and a newly arrived teacher organized a team. The team later played games against other area teams and had to resort to borrowing torches from locals in order to illuminate their
gym for an evening game. The teacher, who coached the team, appointed himself a starter and played in the games. During the fall session, Rev. Laursen had a conversation with Falck regarding his future. Laursen asked what profession Falck might be considering. Falck admitted to not having given this much thought but said that he might want to become a farmer. Laursen suggested that Falck consider teaching as a career, and further recommended Falck complete another year at Elk Horn. This would enable him to sit for the country school teacher examinations. Laursen explained that Falck could farm in the summer and teach during the school year. By doing this for a year, he could save enough money to attend college if he so desired. Falck informed Laursen that he did not have much interest in teaching.

In January 1910, Falck was present when a fire destroyed most of the college. In the days following the fire, some students decided to leave the school, while the ones who remained were put up with local families and arrangements were made for classroom space off campus. The school year continued but was called to an end in early spring. Falck returned home and began work for a farmer. He was unsure whether he would return to Elk Horn in the fall.

In fall 1910 Freda Falck, Paulus’ younger sister went to college at Elk Horn. Paulus stayed employed as an agricultural laborer but towards the end of November decided to return to Elk Horn shortly before the winter session began. Upon returning to campus, Falck found a new, larger building in place of the two that had been destroyed in the fire. Basketball continued to interest to Falck but the school placed much more emphasis on gymnastics. Basketball was “tolerated rather than practiced” by the leadership of the school. During this school year Laursen again approached Falck, questioning him about his plans to which Falck responded that he intended to become a farmer.

Falck returned home after the completion of the winter term and started work digging ditches as soon as the weather permitted. Falck spent the year doing different manual labor jobs and did not return to school. However, by late fall 1912, he began considering returning to Elk Horn for the winter session. Upon prompting from a farm family for whom he was working, Falck did attend that winter.
A noteworthy event during Falck’s time at Elk Horn College in 1912-13 was that, due to the lack of interest from the faculty, Falck himself organized a first and second team basketball squad. The interest in gymnastics had disappeared so facilities and time were available for regular practices. The team played several games, including two against Dana College from Blair, Nebraska. One game was played at Elk Horn and the other in Blair. Falck arranged for a game against Grand View College in Des Moines, Iowa, but without faculty permission. The team members all skipped classed the entire day of the game, made the trip to Des Moines and were promptly defeated. Upon returning to Elk Horn, they were met by members of the second team, who informed them that they had all been suspended from playing in the next game due to their unexcused absence.

Falck again got a taste of teaching when he helped another recent Danish immigrant with his homework. Falck informed the student that he would help him anytime and this resulted in several others coming to him for assistance. Falck expressed how this offered him self satisfaction and how he really enjoyed helping these students due to their eagerness to learn.11

As a member of the college’s literary society, Falck also participated in a theater production of Jæppe på Bjerget (Jæppe on the Mountain) by the Danish author and playwright, Ludvig Holberg. The play was a comedy about an alcoholic and initially got the students much praise. However, there were mixed emotions from some people in the community and a second show was cancelled. Activities such as the theater, dancing, drinking and card playing were still frowned upon.

Falck left after the winter term with the intention of returning for the next full academic year to finish high school. That spring (1913), his sister Freda had graduated as part of the first ever high school class at Elk Horn College. Falck returned to work during the spring and summer and began drifting towards his old plans of not completing school and working all year. When Freda decided to return to school, this time at Dana College, Falck again longed for academics. He sent his transcript with his sister to be evaluated and soon received a letter informing him that, based on his completed school work, he would be able to
complete his secondary education at Dana College in one year. The following day Falck left his job and headed for Blair.12

Dana College had its roots in Trinity Seminary which was founded in Blair, Nebraska in 1884. The first two years, classes were conducted in the president’s home, but in 1886 a brand new building was completed on a site known as Skolebakken (School Hill). In 1899 the “college department” of Elk Horn College merged with Trinity and the school operated as a dual institution. When the first catalog was printed, the college was listed as Blair College but in 1903 it officially became known as Dana College.13

When Falck arrived at Dana College in the fall of 1913, the school was operating eight different departments. Falck enrolled in the Academic School which carried the following description in the 1913-1914 catalog: “This course is outlined in accordance with the requirements for admission to the freshman class of the State University of Nebraska.” It was further described as: “Besides preparing the student for admission to the university and other colleges, it aims to give the student who cannot pursue their studies further a good elementary education.” 14

A College Department also existed and it provided two years of college level work for students “who wish to continue their studies.” What was called the Normal Department offered elementary school teacher’s certifications. The school also had a pre-seminary department, a commercial department, a music department and a traditional Folk High School. Trinity Seminary was listed as Den teologiske Afdeling (The Theological Department) and classes were offered mostly in Danish. Total cost for the 1913-14 school year, including tuition, room and board was $157.50.15

Classes had already begun at the time Falck set foot on campus. He soon had his class schedule and it included advanced algebra, geometry, chemistry, Latin and Bible study. Falck was offered the opportunity to take a test in order to receive credit for German. He also planned to be a member of the basketball team. Falck was soon set up with a room and went on a tour of the facilities. To his delight he discovered that the gym had both electric lighting and heat.

The daily schedule was similar to that of Elk Horn College and each class period lasted forty minutes, with five minutes in between.
Chapel was required five days per week; students who did not understand Danish were excused.

Among the events Falck recalls from his first year at Dana was a visit and lecture by John G. Neihardt and the basketball season. Falck was on the team which played several local area town teams, other high schools and colleges such as Grand View, Wayne State and Bellevue. In a letter written in 1934, Falck recalled a particularly difficult game with Wayne State: “We were considerably handicapped as the gym in the basement of one of their buildings had a low ceiling supported by two pillars in the center of the floor and Wayne boys had a knack of ducking behind those pesky pillars when they had the ball so that we were obliged to look out for pillars and players.”

In the spring Falck was among twenty-six graduates, and one of only two from the Academic Department. Before leaving school, Falck had a conversation with the college president, C.X. Hansen, regarding Falck’s college plans. There seemed to be no doubt that Falck would continue on but he was unsure which college to attend. He was considering either St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, or the University of Nebraska. Hansen suggested Falck come back to Dana for at least one more year and promised him that he could teach a beginning English class the following year.

Falck returned to Dana for his freshman year of college and his class schedule contained Greek, Latin, Danish history, Danish literature and trigonometry. According to Falck he had been “toying with the idea” of teaching Latin and German and requested permission from the German instructor and college president to participate in the German courses as well. Falck was elected president of the Hesperian literary society, which was one of two such groups on campus. One conducted its business in Danish and the other in English. The Hesperian society was the English speaking organization.

This year saw a big change in Falck’s priorities when he decided against playing basketball due to his large class load and promise to teach a class during the winter term. The basketball coach approached Falck regarding this decision and explained that the team would be made up entirely of students and that he had counted on Falck’s assistance. Falck still insisted on not playing that
year, but did teach an English reading class for Danish immigrants during the winter session.

At the conclusion of the school year Falck returned home to help his parents move. Rev. Falck had been appointed the pastor of St. Peter’s Church near Potter, Nebraska. While preparing for the move, Falck was offered work by a local farmer near Jewell, Iowa, for whom he had worked before. Falck declined the offer and informed the farmer that he felt he would “hang up the spade for good.” A completed college education was now the goal for Falck and he decided he would return to Dana in the fall for a second year of college work.\(^{18}\)

When the 1915-16 school year began at Dana, all three Falck children were enrolled. Paulus as a college sophomore, Freda to obtain a higher level teaching certificate and the youngest, John, enrolled in the Academic Department to work on his high school courses. The college was under new leadership and the president was none other than Rev. Laursen, the same individual who had been the president and an instructor at Elk Horn College during Falck’s time there.

Falck met with Laursen to register for classes and also to ask for the opportunity to teach beginners English again. Falck ended up with courses in economics, psychology, English literature, rhetoric, German and Danish grammar and composition. He would teach English during the winter term and was offered the chance to teach a spelling class lasting the entire year. Falck again became active with basketball and was involved in the production of what might have been the first play staged at Dana College. This time it was met with open arms, not controversy.\(^{19}\)

The following two years were spent at the University of Nebraska as a college junior and senior. Several former Dana students attended during the same period and Falck’s roommate for three of the four semesters was a former Dana classmate. Falck graduated in the spring of 1918 with an A.B. (Bachelors of Arts) degree from the College of Arts and Sciences. While at the University, Falck joined the University of Nebraska Army Base Hospital #49 as an enlisted man and served in France with the American Expeditionary Force for fourteen months after graduation.
Falck did not devote much space in his manuscripts to his World War I service but did recount an incident where he met another soldier and upon engaging in conversation, determined that they had both been involved in the same basketball game between Dana College and Bellevue College in 1914. According to his daughter, Falck suffered what has been described as a “nervous breakdown” during the war but he never mentioned this in his writings.20

Upon his return from France in 1919, Falck spent time with his parents in Potter, Nebraska. He worked several odd jobs but one day in late summer he got an unexpected visit from C.X. Hansen who asked him to return to Dana as a full time faculty member. Falck accepted right away but in his excitement forgot to ask what subjects he would teach or what his salary would be.

A few days prior to the start of the semester, Falck arrived back in Blair to assume his duties as a college instructor. Just like his student days, he had free pick of a dorm room in Old Main and arrangements were made for him to eat at the college. Falck met with C.X. Hansen, who was once again the president of Dana, to discuss his teaching responsibilities and salary. When he asked what subjects he was to teach, Hansen responded by asking what subjects could he teach. Falck stated that his main subjects were history and languages, mainly Latin and German. These courses had already been filled with an instructor so Falck was given the job of teaching economics for college freshmen, grammar and syntax for the normal department students, botany for the academic department and business math. Hansen asked that Falck be put in charge of athletics. Falck’s salary was $1,000 per year, plus room and board. According to Falck, he would have taken half of that, for he was so happy to be back at Dana.

The athletic programs at Dana in 1919 consisted of basketball, tennis and horseshoes. An attempt was made at volleyball but it quickly fell by the wayside. Falck was approached by members of the basketball team requesting that he play on the team. Falck informed them that regardless of what had been done in the past, the team would be made entirely of students as long as he was the coach.21
As a second year instructor, Falck took over the U.S. history class and continued teaching economics and botany. He continued developing the athletic program and for a brief period worked with a girls’ basketball team. The 1920-21 school year saw an addition to the academic programs at Dana with a junior and senior year being offered in the college department. The following year, Dana awarded its first ever Bachelors degree to Ms. Esther Bonnesen. Falck remained at Dana for two more years but towards the end of year three he attempted to resign, citing “health problems” as the reason. C.X. Hansen urged him to reconsider and after a summer of rest and outdoor activities, which Falck called “outdoor medicine,” he decided to return to Dana for one more year. In Falck’s own words, he was at the “end of [his] rope” by the end of the first semester of his last year (1922-23) and this time resigned, stating that he had had enough of teaching and wanted a different line of work.22

*Paulus Falck and the 1921 Dana basketball team Courtesy of the Danish Immigrant Archive—Dana College*
According to an article written by an anonymous alumnus in 1923, Falck was “leaving for Wyoming where he has a homestead which needs his attention.” In the 1924 edition of an alumni listing, Falck was listed as being a farmer in Montana but in a letter to the Dana student newspaper, *Hermes* in 1924, Falck was writing from Wyoming and expressed that he still had “a warm spot in his heart” for Dana. In his manuscript, Falck indicated that pay was not a factor for his departure but he did not specify a reason beyond a “health problem.”

The breakdown Falck had suffered in France during World War I was the reason he left Dana and the teaching profession. It was believed that moving to Wyoming to run a farm would aid in his recovery. In 1925, Falck was back in Nebraska teaching in the Cordova Public School system and he married Laura Johnson on May 9, 1926. Falck remained in teaching for one or two more years and then went to work for the city of Cordova. He later became the postmaster of Cordova, a position he held until his retirement.

Upon his retirement, Falck moved to Lincoln, Nebraska where he began writing down his memories of his time at Elk Horn and Dana. Paulus Falck died in June 1985 in Lincoln at the age of ninety-two.

In his short tenure as a faculty member at Dana College, Falck did leave his mark, mostly as a coach. Falck was credited with bringing new sports to campus, including track and field, and with making athletics an important part of school life. Falck showed that he was a very flexible and competent instructor by being able to teach classes as diverse as mathematics, economics, history, science and English. Although Falck may not have left any lasting legacy in the world of education, his story does offer some insights into two small religious educational institutions and the Danish immigrant community of the early twentieth century.

On a more personal note, one could conclude that Falck returned to Dana in order to seek refuge from his “health problem,” but despite being surrounded by, and submerged in Danish culture, the Lutheran religion and the other things with which he felt comfortable, the familiar surroundings failed to improve his condition.
The Falck collection consists of two boxes. The first includes three typed and five hand written manuscripts. The manuscripts are mostly Falck’s memoirs, but cover only his time at Elk Horn College and Dana College. One manuscript is an early history of St. Peter’s Lutheran Church near Potter, Nebraska. Because the manuscripts are undated, it is not known when they were written and/or typed. The first box also contains several photographs of Falck while the second has a small collection of books owned by Falck.

1 Social Security Administration Death Index <http://ssdi.genealogy.rootsweb.com/> (visited November 18, 2004); Interview with Carolyn Larsen, November 19, 2004, Lincoln, Nebraska; David L. Hendee, 1886: A Danish-American Family Saga (Fremont, Nebraska: Prairie Wind, 1986), 124; Paulus F. Falck, “My Days at E.H. C. 1910-1911,” typed manuscript, Paulus Falck collection box 1, manuscript 2, Danish Immigrant Archive, Dana College, Blair, Nebraska, 10; and a Bible belonging to Paulus Falck, confirmation date written inside the front cover, April 28, 1907, Falck collection, box 2, Danish Immigrant Archive, Dana College. The Falck collection consists of two boxes. The first includes three typed and five hand written manuscripts. The manuscripts are mostly Falck’s memoirs, but cover only his time at Elk Horn College and Dana College. One manuscript is an early history of St. Peter’s Lutheran Church near Potter, Nebraska. Because the manuscripts are undated, it is not known when they were written and/or typed. The first box also contains several photographs of Falck while the second has a small collection of books owned by Falck.

2 Falck, “My Days at Elk Horn and Dana Colleges,” typed manuscript, box 1, Falck collection, 1-2.


4 Camery, 83; Falck, “My Days at Elk Horn and Dana Colleges,” 12.


6 Falck, “My Days at Elk Horn and Dana Colleges,” 6-7, 9, 17, 26.

7 Ibid., 1-18.

8 Ibid., 21-22, 31, 36-37.

9 Ibid., 28, 37-44.


11 Ibid., 3-5, 8-9, 11.

12 Ibid., 12-17.

13 William E. Christensen, Saga of the Tower: A History of Dana College and Trinity Seminary (Blair, Nebraska: Lutheran Publishing House, 1959), pp. 6-7, 13, 18; Peter L. Petersen, A Place Called Dana: The Centennial History of Trinity Seminary and Dana College (Omaha, Nebraska; Acme Printing Company, 1984), pp. 17, 36, 42.

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14 Catalogue of Dana College and Trinity Theological Seminary 1913-1914 (Blair, Nebraska: Danish Lutheran Publishing House, 1913), 8.
15 Ibid., 9-10,12-14, 17, 19, 20-21.
16 Petersen, A Place Called Dana, pp. 59-60.
18 Falck, “My Second Year at Dana as a College Freshman, 1914-15,” 3-4, 8-9, 23, 28, 31.
19 Falck, “My Second Year of College at Dana,” 1-3, 9, 12-17.
21 Falck, “My Second Year of College at Dana,” 23-25; Falck, “My Days at Dana as a Member of the Faculty,” 1, 5-6, 8, 29-30, 33.
22 Falck, “My Days at Dana as a Member of the Faculty,” 41, 50-52, 65, 82, 85-86. 88-89; Catalogue of Dana College and Trinity Seminary 1921-22 (Blair, Nebraska: Danish Lutheran Publishing House, 1921), 5; Catalogue of Dana College and Trinity Seminary 1922-23, 5, 44.
23 Alumni (Blair, Nebraska: Dana College, 1924), 20; Hermes, January 1924; Falck, “My Days at Dana as a Member of the Faculty,” 84; Larsen interview; Alumni, 1925, 20; Social Security Death Index http://ssdi.genealogy.rootsweb.com/ (Visited November 18, 2004).
Editor’s introduction: Editors learn about potential articles in many ways. Last spring my wife and I were participating in “volunteer week” at the Danish Immigrant Archive—Dana College. During one of the twice daily breaks for coffee and kringle, Marilyn Juul Hanson, a volunteer from Cedar Falls, Iowa, shared some anecdotes about her great uncle, an itinerant peddler named Jørgen Juul. When I expressed an interest in the story of Jørgen Juul, Marilyn and her husband, Roger Hanson, a retired professor of physics at the University of Northern Iowa, gave me a copy of an article in English about the peddler written by Enok Mortensen and published in Volume II (1946) of YULE, for many years the annual Christmas publication of the Danish American Young People’s League of The Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Two days later we stopped in Ames, Iowa, to visit with DAHS president Jim Iversen and his wife, Marge. During a conversation over coffee about The Bridge, Jim mentioned that he had been contacted by Inge Prytz Johnson, a federal judge in Alabama and a new member of the DAHS board of directors. Johnson had recently returned from visiting her mother in Denmark. While there her mother had given her an article in Danish by Enok Mortensen about Jørgen Juul and explained that the peddler was Johnson’s great grandfather’s brother. Shortly after her return from Denmark, Johnson had written Iversen to see where she could find out more about the peddler.

What a strange coincidence. Within a short time period, two relatives of Jørgen Juul, each unknown to the other, had called him to the attention of the DAHS nearly sixty years after Mortensen’s article appeared. With this in mind, I decided it was time to share Mortensen’s poignant account of Jørgen Juul with the readers of The Bridge. One lesson of this story, perhaps, is that time spent drinking coffee is not always wasted.

The Danish Immigrant Archive—Grand View College has a small collection of materials, including several photographs, on Jørgen Juul. I am indebted to Archivist Sheri Kleinwort for her assistance and also wish to thank Marilyn and Roger Hanson, Jim Iversen and Inge Prytz Johnson. And, by the way, Marilyn Juul Hanson and Inge Prytz Johnson are looking forward to a meeting sometime in the near future.
Author’s introduction: The present article grew out of a desire to tell the story of the most interesting immigrant whose path crossed mine. Since 1929, I have gathered letters, anecdotes, and data; and I have interviewed, or corresponded with many people who knew him. Some of this material I used in the writing of my play, Livets Lykke (1933). Some of it is used here; but the full story is yet to be told. E. M.

It was almost Christmas and the little girl stared through the window pane at the falling snowflakes and dreamed of Santa Claus. Suddenly she saw him!

He was not as paunchy as she had imagined. But he had a full white beard; his cheeks were red and his eyes were merry. And he stooped under the load of a heavy knapsack. She watched him cross the yard. He was coming to their house. She ran to the door and opened it wide:

“How in the world did you know that we live here?” she gasped.

But her question was never answered; for it was not Santa Claus. It was Jørgen Juul, come to peddle lace and needles and good books. The little girl was too little to recognize him; but her parents knew him. Thousands of Danish immigrants in the Middle West knew him. Through nearly fifty years he had tramped from one Danish-American settlement to the next. He was a familiar sight, and a welcome guest in lonely farm houses from Texas to Montana; never seen east of Chicago, he traveled as far west as Washington and California. He must have known more Danish immigrant families than any other person. He once claimed to have slept in ten thousand beds!

Jørgen Juul was born March 24, 1851 on the small island of Hjarnø, in Horsens fjord. His father, a small landholder and a leader in cultural and spiritual affairs, was instrumental in having Pastor Otto Møller visit the island to conduct services, and it was this outstanding minister who confirmed Jørgen Juul. The boy was apprenticed to a weaver, but secretly he longed to become a missionary. He worked at his trade; he served his time in the army; and he attended folk school in Gjaltrup. In 1874 he went to Newcastle, England, to earn money for continued schooling, and to learn languages.
He found work with an importer of Danish cattle, but suspecting his employer of dishonesty, he left him and went to work in a factory. For two or three years he worked long days. At night he attended school and studied English, French, Latin and Greek. Exhausted from overwork, he was taken seriously ill. He had to discontinue his studies, and the illness left him a hopeless stammerer—a defect which was to haunt him all his life.

One night along the quay at Newcastle he gathered a crowd. He prayed for a sign. Could God use him in spite of his defective speech? He began boldly to preach, but soon he was stammering hopelessly. People drifted off to assemble elsewhere. He followed them, dejected yet curious. A dog had fallen into the harbor and lay in the water splashing and howling. What right had he to seek the ministry when he couldn’t even hold his own—not even against a yelping dog?

Yet he persisted. At Askov he took the course sponsored by the Committee for Danish-American Missions. Classmates were P. Kjølhode, P. S. Vig, and others who were to become prominent in Danish-American church life. He was a good student, though odd both in character and appearance; but his stammering was a serious handicap. Forstander Schröder advised him against the ministry. Desperate, yet hopefully, he sought his beloved Pastor Otto Møller and asked his opinion. The learned man sadly quoted the ancient
adage: “A dog which cannot bark and a preacher who cannot speak are not worth their daily bread!”

It was disheartening; but Jørgen Juul was a *Jyde*. He refused to give up. Perhaps he would improve; perhaps in America—?

He arrived in Chicago in April, 1880 and found work in a hospital and later with a Danish gardener on the South Side. In Mrs. Rasmussen’s boarding house on 36th Street, he met P.S. Vig and Laust Jensen, classmates from Askov.

The following spring he went to Gardner and Dwight [Illinois] where he worked on farms, but he was restless and that Christmas he traveled to Centerville, (Viborg), South Dakota to visit his friend Søren Andersen.

There is no evidence that he ever formally asked for ordination. Probably “Gamle” Nielsen, the ordainer, discouraged him; but I have it on good authority that it was F.L. Grundtvig who urged him to visit the scattered immigrants and to distribute good books. So, in Dwight, Illinois, I believe, he began his unique ministry which was to last almost half a century.

A huge knapsack on his back, he trotted from farm to farm, visiting settlement after settlement. I doubt that he ever spent a penny on passenger trains. Sometimes he would catch a free ride, tending stock on a cattle train. Occasionally, he grabbed a lift with a farmer, sharing a hard plank on a creaky lumber wagon, or with a pastor calling on scattered parishioners. Years later, the automobile was to ease the hardships of his
traveling. I wonder if Jørgen Juul may not rightly be called the first hitch-hiker!

At first he peddled books only. There were always good books: Grundtvig’s works, Otto Møller’s theological treatises, Fr. Nielsen’s Kirkehistorie. He lugged them all over the Middle West and wondered sadly why people didn’t buy them. And he grew indignant when rural folks asked for lighter fare. He did finally condescend to carry a few good novels, but cheap and sentimental fiction he refused to touch. “My legs will not carry manure and trash!” he declared.

But he had to make a living; and so he added to his stock a supply of lace, handkerchiefs, needles, and other notions. These things sold well and he began to prosper. Still, he stuck to his wonted mode of travel and used “the Apostle’s horses.” He walked from West Denmark to Askov, caught a ride halfway to Neenah and stomped on his feet the rest of the way. Walked to Cedar Falls, Fredsville, Hampton, and Newell, jogged up to Hutchinson, Alden, Carlston, Sleepy Eye, and Tyler, swung south into South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas. I have yet to hear of a Danish settlement west of Chicago that he has not visited at least once.

Of medium height, he was sparely built and stooped under the weight of his heavy burden. He had a heavy crop of uncombed hair and a full beard, once fiery red, now faded by wind and sun and years to a graying blond. Most of us remember him wearing an army uniform, purchased thriftily in an army store, and a soft, slouchy hat with a wide brim. Dogs yapped furiously at his strange
tramp, and women on lone farms watched cautiously behind curtained window panes, as he crossed farmyards and knocked on kitchen doors.

“Ar- are their Danish people living here?”

“Yes,” hesitantly from a frightened women ambushed behind the kitchen door.

“This is Jørgen Juul the peddler. May—may I come in and show the womenfolk some fineries?”

Once in the kitchen, he would unbuckle and open his knapsack while lone farm women, starved for beauty would stare, first cautiously, then covetously, at the unkempt peddler’s display of fine lace. (Jørgen Juul ordered all his lace from Marshall Fields. He is said to have been the only dealer without an established place of business who Fields trusted with a charge account.)

Jørgen Juul silently exhibited. With each piece of merchandise he announced the price: “Five cents. Ten cents.” And a little louder: “Twenty-five cents!” But he neither haggled nor high-pressured anyone. If anyone dared to touch his lace he told them gruffly to keep hands off; if an eager child reached for the finely patterned goods, he might get his fingers slapped. And if no one bought, he silently packed his knapsack and closed it.

But he usually sold lace or handkerchiefs or notions; and occasionally he did sell a book, much to his joy, even if the profits were smaller on books. If people were poor but interested, he often gave them a book.

The trading over, Jørgen Juul took off his heavy boots and made himself at home. While the woman cooked supper, he told the latest
news from other settlements, or he asked for the latest copy of *Dannevirke* and perused it while filling the room with smoke from his ever warm, and smelly pipe. If people had a new book, he grabbed it and sat up half the night reading.

On Sundays, in outlying settlements with no pastor, he would sometimes read a sermon, frequently of his own composition. Once, in Nebraska, he was asked to preach in a church. He sat up all night studying furiously. The church was packed with people, yet it was very quiet when he entered the pulpit. The hymn ended and everyone looked at him expectantly. He tried to speak. Not a word came. Desperately he clung to the railing of the pulpit and stared into a sea of swirling faces. No sound. At length he sank down behind the paneled pulpit, hidden from view of the congregation, and sobbed hysterically.

On another occasion he was more successful. He actually spoke, and people listened. It was wonderful! Perhaps it was not too late to ask for ordination. Then, suddenly, his throat parched and he began to stammer hopelessly. It was pathetic, yet comical to hear him stammer. People began to snicker and the meeting broke up in a riot of uncontrollable laughter.

What was this dark specter of the past that shadowed him on his long, lone wanderings to clutch at his throat and choke all sound when he most fervently desired articulation? Lack of space prohibits an exhaustive analysis.

As a child he tried to exterminate mice in a barn by smoking them out—with the result that the barn burned down. There is evidence that this unfortunate experience was so deeply imbedded in his subconscious that he was burdened with a sense of guilt all his life. It is a fairly well established fact that the fire started as a result of playing with a sun-glass in the barn, focusing the rays of the sun through a window, thus setting fire to the straw. Also that Jørgen Juul eventually saved up enough money by peddling to repay the owner of the barn.

Again, it is said that he was jilted by a woman with whom he was passionately in love when a young boy. His older brother has told me that the stammering was not apparent before his trip to England, and blamed it on over-exertion, and the resultant illness there. The real cause we shall probably never know. The soul of a man is his
most intimate world, and the strangest—even to himself! Jørgen Juul, himself, unquestionably looked upon his speech impediment as a dark curse, or a punishment justly deserved.

In most settlements Jørgen Juul gradually found a certain place of lodging while visiting other homes. Preferring to spend the night with enlightened people, he was often a guest in parsonages. Violent by temperament, he soon weeded out the pastors not to his liking. Some made fun of him. Others failed to follow his interest in Grundtvig and Otto Møller. One infuriated him so much by nosing out information about his financial status, that the frugal, but not miserly, peddler actually considered suing him for libel.

But he had many good friends among the ministers. And after a day of peddling he loved to settle down in a pastor’s study with a book on theology or history. If deeply engrossed, he might stay on for several days, sometimes to the dismay of the minister’s wife whose house was often uncomfortably crowded with a guest such as Jørgen Juul.

For though his wants were few, his odd behavior sometimes tried even the most angelic patience. Once, he stormed into a house, removed his shoes with a grunt and threw them on the floor. He pulled off his sweaty socks and placed them on the table which was being set. Then he asked for Dannevirke which someone else was reading; but he simply took it with the remark, “Oh, let me see that.” When the children played noisily, disturbing his peace, he yelled at them to be quiet. All of which infuriated the woman of the house so much that she told the eccentric visitor to pack and go elsewhere.

Ordinarily clean in spite of his unkempt appearance, he once found himself infested with lice. Visiting a Danish baker at the time he told him:

“I’ve got company!”

“So?”

“Yes, little black ones. Ah, won’t you help me get rid of them?”

Then he took off all his clothes and put them in the baker’s oven. Stark naked, Jørgen Juul hopped around clapping his hands.

“That’s – that’s the way to treat ‘em, the little black pests!”

Sometimes he would argue a fine point in politics or religion so fervently that he grew angry and left; but he usually regretted and returned to apologize. Through hot-tempered he was essentially a
pious and generous soul. While in Texas he would rise early, walk behind the barn, and greet the sun with a grateful prayer to God, the Giver of all Light and Life. He disliked unction or formalism in religion, and even though he sometimes disagreed with F.L. Grundtvig, he was deeply attached to him because he was the son of Bishop Grundtvig. When this former Danish-American pastor died in Denmark Jørgen Juul’s eyes filled with tears and he kept repeating:

"Is he dead? Is he dead? Is he dead?"

And he added by way of explanation:

"For – for I’ll say one thing, and I’ll say it right now: he was the King’s son, wasn’t he!"

When a new colony was begun in Dannevang, Texas, he decided to give up his wanderings and settle there. I quote from a letter of November 18, 1894:

"...I’ve gotten Texas fever and intend to settle there. I shall buy 80 acres, work on the side for my M.A. and till my own land; for I am frightfully tired of peddling, which becomes increasingly difficult for me. So then, goodbye peddling!

“So you see, I am a hopeful bachelor, 44 years old, ditto farm aspirant though I have not plowed three acres all my life. The little fat one with the long pipe told me I was building castles in the air, but if I succeed I shall have a roof over my head before reaching old age. I’m tired and long for a home...."

But he did not succeed.

He bought 40 acres but sold it soon because it was swampy land; “a paradise for frogs and other pests.” For a while he tried his hand picking cotton and herding sheep. Then for a while he was night watchman on a big ranch near Pierce, Texas. Years later, I interviewed the owner who remembered Jørgen Juul as “a fine old man.”

Once more he bought land and tried to build a home. But he was too restless to become rooted any place. So once again he sold the land, this time at a good profit and took to the open road.

Before leaving Texas he made a will in which he allegedly left $1,000 to Grand View College and $1,000 to the folk school at Rødding. The lawyer at El Campo found it difficult to understand
Jørgen Juul’s broken English. Three times he had to redraft the will. Finally Jørgen Juul lost his patience and shouted:

“Ca- can’t you understand common talk?”

“Take it easy, old man,” said the lawyer. “I’ve got lots of paper!”

It is doubtful that this will was valid at the time of his death, for Grand View never inherited any of Juul’s money. In passing it might be mentioned that the thrifty peddler once intimated that he owned $9,000—a sum far below the fabulous fortune attributed to him by public opinion.

So, at the beginning of the century Jørgen Juul took to the road again, his peddler’s box crammed with books and lace and notions. He was past fifty and his back stooped under the heavy burden and the long years.

He trudged from Texas through Kansas up to Nebraska; up into the Dakotas and east to Minnesota and Wisconsin; down into Illinois, west to Iowa, and back again. There was no apparent planning behind his wanderings. If a preacher moved, Jørgen took the opportunity of pleasant company and a free ride on a spring buggy—even if he had meant to go elsewhere. He usually managed to be present at church conventions or at folk meetings. On one such occasion he stomped up the middle aisle of the meeting hall and stuck out a hand of greeting to the lecturing minister with an embarrassing but heartfelt:

“Tak for sidst!”

Year after year he trod the muddy roads of Iowa and dusty trails of Kansas. People in lone settlements looked for him eagerly. He was more than a peddler; he was a bearer of good news, a confidante of lonely settlers and frustrated parsons, a symbol of the restive, impatient spirit of the immigrant himself, and his times.

He walked long miles in search of a certain settlement and hustled off impatiently in quest of another. He yearned for a roof over his head and a home of his own. But he could not rest. The road beckoned; he yearned for it, yet hated it. Some dark motive, some evil force drove him on and on. God or the Devil? He did not know. But the compulsion was there; the open road was there.

In 1927 he went to California by way of Texas. He arrived at Solvang, cold and exhausted. A stranger had found him lying in a ditch and took him to an inn. His friends were afraid his days were
numbered. He was seventy-six. But warmth and food and friendship revived him. Soon he asked for his pipe and tobacco and intimated that he had come to California so that he might have something to relate upon his return to Denmark.

One wonders how often the strange wanderer thought of the home he had left on the little island. Following his father’s death, his older brother had taken over the farm and Jørgen Juul, though given a sum of money, felt himself slighted and swore that he would never set foot in Hjarnø. He never did; but years later he asked his brother’s forgiveness, though the older brother insisted that “any injustice was his fault alone.”

In 1929 Jørgen Juul went west again, this time going through Montana and Washington. Wandering along a lone prairie road he was picked up by strangers who amused themselves at his expense. When Jørgen Juul grew angry and threatened to have them arrested, they forced him into a deserted shack on the prairie and locked him up. It was daybreak before he managed to free himself.

I saw him for the last time at Solvang, California. He had spent several days there, trading in the settlement and visiting old friends. Now he wanted to go north as far as Washington again. But he never got there.

Near King City he paused to hail an approaching auto-mobile. He was seventy-eight and the peddler’s box was heavier than ever. In his impatience he took a step forward. The car swerved, but too late. The old man was knocked unconscious and lay still on the road he had followed for fifty years. They brought him to the hospital at King City. He talked incoherently. He wanted to absolve the driver of the car of all blame; and he wanted to be buried among his own people.

He died the next day, January 19, and he was buried by the sons of his only brother, at Hutchinson, Minnesota.
Editor’s note. Marilyn Juul Hanson relates the following story about the “peddler” and automobiles: “My parents, Peter Juul and Martha Jensen, were married May 3, 1915 in Hutchinson, Minnesota. Peter owned a car, not common in Hutchinson at that time. They had planned to drive to Litchfield (22 miles away) to Pete’s brother, Jens and his wife Hetvig, for their honeymoon. Jørgen Juul the peddler, who was Peter’s uncle, decided that he also wanted to go to Litchfield and of course he expected to ride with Peter and Martha. When it was time to go he was ready to climb into the front seat with Pete, but Pete said ‘I don’t think it would look right while we drive out of town if my bride isn’t sitting beside me,’ so Jørgen yielded and climbed into the back seat. Pete and Martha drove regally out of town with Jørgen riding behind them. When they got a little ways out of town, Jørgen insisted that now he could ride in the front seat which he did, and Martha had to ride in the back seat. Apparently it wasn’t easy to disagree with Uncle Jørgen!” Marilyn Juul Hanson to the Editor, May 9, 2005.
Reviews


Written in the 1930s, Petersen, in his memoirs, tells the story of his life beginning with his childhood in Denmark in the 1860s and concludes in the 1890s when he married and became a settled citizen in Dannebrog, Nebraska. He is best known for his decade-long service as postmaster in Dannebrog and publisher of the *Dannebrog News*. But instead of telling about his career as postmaster and publisher, he relates, in great detail, events from his youth, his various jobs, his travels from place to place as his work directed him, and incidents that he witnessed. Nevertheless, his story is an important document in Danish American immigrant history, because it not only tells how he found his place in America, but also includes his frequent references to other Danish Americans, and his observations about a significant Danish settlement in Nebraska. Considering the extensive gap between the events and his writing, one can only be impressed with Petersen’s memory for names and details.

The original handwritten manuscript of Petersen’s memoirs is located in the Nebraska State Historical Society and was uncovered in 1995 by researchers from the Odense City Museum as they prepared an exhibition on “Danes on the Prairies.” These Danes then translated Petersen’s lengthy manuscript into Danish and published a condensed version. As the importance of the memoirs became evident in the United States, John W. Nielsen edited the original English manuscript and published it as one of Dana College's Lur Publications.

P. S. Petersen’s father, Jens Petersen, owned fifteen acres on Jutland, and in 1872, when Peter was ten years old, decided to migrate to United States. His motivation for migration was similar to that of many Danes in that he wanted to leave more than his little
plot of land to his children. Even though 1872 was a year during the early surge of Danish migration, others from Petersen's community had already departed. Like many other Danes the family traveled to Hamburg and after crossing the Atlantic on a ship of the German American Line disembarked at Castle Garden. From there they boarded a train to Chicago and found a home in the Danish community on Milwaukee Avenue. But after a short stay in the city, they again boarded the train for Nebraska to acquire some land promised in the Homestead Act. The train took them as far as Grand Island, and from there they traveled to Dannebrog by an ox-drawn wagon.

Not only did Petersen's journey to America fit the pattern of other Danish immigrants, his experiences as a young man also illustrate or support many generalizations about Danish Americans. One of these issues relates to the rapid assimilation and widespread use of English by Danes. Petersen himself, with limited schooling, learned English readily and became so proficient that he edited and published his newspaper in English and even felt more comfortable with English when writing his memoirs. One agent in his assimilation process was his search for employment. When he was twelve, rather than remaining on his father's farm, he left home to work on neighboring farms in return for a small stipend plus room and board. As he grew older he engaged in seasonal agricultural work and digging wells in the community. And finally he traveled throughout Nebraska and Wyoming working on the railroad, in stores, and on ranches. Other Danes also became part of this large mobile work force, and as Petersen traveled he constantly encountered Danes, both male and female, working in all manner of occupations. English was the common denominator and quickly became a second language for many Danes.

In addition to illustrating his rapid assimilation, the memoirs also refer to institutions of cultural retention such as the Danish Brotherhood, the Danish church, and Danish newspapers. These institutions provided some cohesion for the community and a touchstone with the old country. The Dannebrog Danes continued their contact with their relatives and friends in the homeland and frequently sent money overseas, often to pay for passage to America. In 1910, for example, the Dannebrog post office sent more
international money orders than did the post office in Lincoln. And Petersen himself retained his Danish ties by choosing a Danish American wife and settling in Dannebrog.

Bearing in mind both the American and Danish poles tugging at the immigrant, the memoirs also illustrate a balance achieved between the two worlds. Symbolically, the community celebrated both June 5 and July 4, Independence Days for both countries. Another example of this balance is the role of the Danish pastor, J. Chr. Pedersen. When he arrived at Dannebrog, he preached only in Danish. When some ladies asked him to preach in English, he was hesitant because his training had been in Danish. Yet he was willing to try, and soon he was comfortable preaching in either language. Petersen's own life also exemplifies this balance because Dannebrog remained his point of reference, and even though he traveled to many different places, he always touched base with his community.

Finally, the memoirs regale the reader with many experiences held in common with all settlers of the Northern Plains. There are frequent references to deaths, house fires, prairie fires, runaway horses, blizzards, snakes, grasshoppers, harvesting, and breaking horses. These were not unique to the Danish experience. In the closing pages of the memoirs, the consolidation of the little rural community of Dannebrog into the nation was complete. The Panic of 1893, the monetary problems of the decade, and the resultant unemployment caused hardship in Dannebrog as well. The same dislocations felt on Wall Street in the 1890s were also evident on Dannebrog's Mill Street.

A companion book for Petersen's memoirs is Torben Grøngaard Jeppesen's *Dannebrog on the American Prairie: A Danish Colony Project in the 1870s Land Purchase and the Beginnings of a Town* (Odense: Odense City Museums, 2000).

George R. Nielsen
Elements of *Pauline and Panno: Immigrant Lives Intertwined* may make one think “unbelievable,” or “only in America!” However, this work presents many aspects of the typical immigrant experience such as hardship, determination, and perseverance. While the protagonists certainly share in that traditional immigrant dream of rags to riches, we also experience periods of downward social mobility. Pauline Schou Touzios came from a prominent Danish family. Her husband who she meet in Chicago, Peter Touzios, known as Pano, came from an impoverished Greek family.

Dr. Frederick Baltz, the author, acknowledges that he has “colorized” the stories of Pauline Schou Touzios. This book strikes the reader as too short. While Baltz provides some historical setting for context and transition between the brief chapters, historians may be disappointed by a lack of dates. Nonetheless, when many people recall events in their life, they do so without remembering the specific year. Baltz, an ordained minister, adds observations throughout about faith as well.

An overview of their adventures sounds like a miniseries script: narrow political defeats, theft, the Schou family escapes traveling to America on the ill-fated *Titanic*, two brothers catch a fever that requires the family to be quarantined while Pauline is hospitalized and her mother is pregnant.

Pauline is the seventh child of Jens and Severine Schou of *Bjørnhøjgaard*, near Aarhus. Jens dreamed of becoming Denmark’s prime minister, but loses an election, supposedly by 100 votes. His political career thwarted, he established a brick factory on the family estate. His partner embezzled the company’s money, causing the end of the business and the estate. Having a brother in Omaha, Jens went to see him and find a farm for his family in the United States. Once he secured a farm, his wife and children came to join him. Pauline was four at the time. When she turned six she was nearly killed in accident coming home from her first day of school.
Jens desire to have a dairy farm led the family to move from Nebraska to Morgan, Minnesota, where Gilfillen farms owned 35,000 acres. A small creamery reopened in the town and Jens suggested that its name be “Land O Lakes.” When Pauline became sixteen she left Morgan to train as a hairdresser and when she returned she opened her own business. Finding that the conservative tastes of the farm women limited the number of her customers, she moved to Chicago, where a brother and a sister of hers already lived.

When Pauline started school, World War I began, and Panno left his family and Greece for the United States. His father had gone to the United States to earn money and then returned home. The sixteen year old Panno decided that he wanted to leave his home village for the opportunities of America. He worked six months to earn enough for the fare, and then traveled the 170 miles from his home to Athens, where he boarded a ship for America. However, when the ship docked in Le Havre, France, Panno went ashore and was conned out of his ticket.

Pauline and Panno married during the Great Depression and family connections enabled him to find work in Chicago. Pauline and Panno then operate a small neighborhood grocery store. They provide multiple acts of kindness to their patrons and neighbors, allowing many to buy food on credit, and in one case providing new shoes for two young boys. A professor from the nearby University of Chicago was among their customers. He noted that they had a reputation for kindness and inquired if they would deliver groceries to his residence and let him buy on credit. The professor was Enrico Fermi, one of the key scientists on the atomic bomb project.

This collection of memories contains many gems, leaving the reader wanting to know more details about the events described as well as what happened during the gaps between them. A reoccurring theme is that both Pauline and Panno received help from others at significant points in their lives and they in turn helped many others throughout their lives.

John M. Pederson

Harold Olsen originally published these stories about his mother’s life as an immigrant as a series of vignettes in *Church and Life*. They have now been collected into eight chapters describing Elna Olsen’s difficult transition from a temporary visitor to New Jersey in 1922 until 1943 when her son Harold enrolled at Grand View College in Iowa.

Elna Jespersen was born in 1900 and grew up on a subsistence family farm in northern Jutland, the eldest of nine children. Starting work on a nearby estate at the age of eight, she eventually enrolled in Roskilde folk school and then became housekeeper in Copenhagen to a Member of Parliament. When an aunt and uncle invited her younger sister, Christine, to live with them in the USA, their parents decided that Elna should chaperone the sixteen year-old on the trip across the Atlantic. The plan was that twenty-two year-old Elna would then find a temporary job near Christine in New Jersey and stay only until she could earn enough money for the return fare to Denmark.

Quickly finding work with an American family in South River, near the Danish church and community of Perth Amboy, she learned the rudiments of English. However, the original goal of returning home faded and two years after her arrival, she met and married Carl Olsen. At first the young couple lived in Sayreville, New Jersey, where Carl had a job shoveling coal at a brickyard, a melting pot of immigrants from all over Europe. Sayreville was an unattractive and smoggy industrial town and, although not far from Perth Amboy, it was difficult to retain ties to the Danish community. Harold was born in January of 1926 and by fall of that year they decided to move to Hartford Connecticut. Carl found a job with the Hartford Steam Boiler Company and with the arrival of their daughter a year later, they moved to a larger apartment close to work and only a mile from Vor Frelsers Kirke, the Danish Church in Hartford.

The family appeared well on their way to achieving the American dream when, rather abruptly, Carl Olsen announced that he was
leaving his wife and children. Harold gives few details of the problems with the marriage and does not mention his father again. Elna was left with the triple burden of raising two small children by herself, adapting to a foreign language and culture, and running a rooming house to make ends meet. That this was a formidable task is evident and Harold tells us that his mother met it with fortitude and a sense of humor, strengthened by the support of the Danish community in Hartford.

While not an unusual immigrant story in an urban setting, Harold’s devotion and admiration is evident throughout the chapters. Some of the descriptions of the city of Hartford in the twenties are interesting; however, much of the language is stilted and awkward. In an attempt to be objective about his mother, Harold is hardly present in the story, even referring to himself by name rather than by pronoun and we learn very little about either of the children. The effect is impersonal and the reader longs for dialog to relieve the too much “telling” and insufficient “showing.” In the introduction, the editor says that redundancy, necessarily present in the original series of publications in Church and Life, has been removed, yet much repetition remains. Extensive editing of the original articles and a change to an active rather than passive voice would have made for more lively reading.

Despite these shortcomings, Elna: A Danish Blossom in Urban Blight provides insight into life in Hartford during the twenties and thirties. The story underscores the importance to immigrants of support by their ethnic community and belies the theory that urban Danes melted into the pot of eastern cities without relying on their cultural roots.

Anne Ipsen

This useful and well-illustrated anthology originated from an historical conference commemorating the 175th anniversary of the onset of Norwegian immigration. Four Americans and four Norwegians applied disciplinary insights from American history, literature, church history, folklore and art history to their two-fold task: comparing the Lutheran tradition in Norway and the United States, and exploring exchanges between the Church of Norway and its American offspring.

The comparative perspective makes this collection valuable to scholars and others interested in Norwegian-American history and culture. Editor Todd W. Nichol helpfully summarizes the fruitful interaction of method and material. First, a synoptic perspective is necessary to understand Norwegian Lutheranism and its American descendent. Second, a lively, century-long transatlantic dialogue occurred. Third, previously unexplored popular materials document this exchange. Fourth, the interdisciplinary study of church history is worthwhile. Fifth, incorporating new materials alters accepted historical accounts. If other scholars follow the trails blazed here, then traditional institutional and theological histories of Norwegian-American Lutheranism will become a more inclusive story about laity and clergy, practice and theology, women and men.

Jon Gjerde, a leading practitioner of the new United States ethnic and social history, clarifies Lutheran behavior by setting it within the context of American political freedom. Freedom fostered dual and complementary loyalties to the United States and to the ethnic community. Yet it produced theological divisions that enhanced fears among church leaders that license or excesses of materialism and individualism would result. From his close literary analysis of immigrant letters, Orm Øverland concurs with Gjerde, suggesting that theological splits resulted from Americanization rather than Norwegian heritage. Letters may reveal how popular belief contributed to founding different synods.

The late Marion John Nelson, to whom this collection is dedicated, argues that the Norwegian folk art tradition was not transplanted to the United States. A few exceptional individuals inspired by religious faith produced the only significant works. Not until the 1940s did Americans of Norwegian background rediscover their lost
national tradition. Then, the woodcarving and *rosemaling* revival revealed little religious motivation. Kathleen Stokker employs folklore in examining the healing practices of prairie ministers. She suggests their medical activity may have contributed motifs to folk tales of “the Black Book minister.” In America, many immigrants apparently expected and received health care from parsonage wives and pioneer clergymen even though they were unaided by “the magical Black Book.”

Bjørn Sandvik Vidar L. Haanes, Øyvind T. Gulliksen and Lloyd Hustvedt, armed with new sources and questions, reexamine church history. Bishop Erik Pontoppidan’s *Truth unto Godliness*, an explanation of Luther’s *Small Catechism*, became the foundation of literacy, Christian instruction and public education in Norway. According to Sandvik, it was the basic text for instructing youth in the old and new countries. It gave emigrants a common language to express their aspirations. It enabled the unified functioning of church and school, which ended earlier in Norway than America. Hannes shows how pastoral education in the United States influenced changes in Norway. An independent seminary for the congregations was founded in 1907, even though the state church survived calls for separation. By 1930, it became the largest seminary in Norway. It contributed to keeping the lay movement within the state church. The transatlantic exchanges that produced this reform gradually disappeared during the twentieth century. Gulliksen studies the unpublished sermons of a rural Wisconsin Norwegian Synod pastor, Søren Sørensen Urberg. Treating them as an American literary genre, he maintains that sermons delivered in Norwegian ensured theological orthodoxy, proclamation of the gospel and proper administration of the sacraments in immigrant communities. They also reflect the double consciousness of Norwegian traditions modified by American society. Hustvedt’s “Vignettes from a Norwegian-American Congregation” somewhat weakly concludes this worthy collection. More attention to historical and social context would have enhanced his personal memoir, chronicling the Urland Congregation in rural Goodhue County (Minnesota).

Carroll Engelhardt
Danish American Heritage Society

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