



## Spring 2004 Newsletter

Danish Heritage Preservation  
Society

P.O. Box 386

Danevang, TX 77432-0386

Peter Petersen, Outstanding  
Historian of Danes in America,  
Featured June 5th Speaker



For several years, the Society has eagerly sought to have Peter Petersen as our featured Speaker for our June 5th celebration. We are so delighted that this year he was able to schedule Danevang on his calendar. The lecture, titled "A Society, a Museum, and an Archive: Emerging Danish American Institutions," will begin at 11 a.m. in the church.

The grandson of Danish immigrants, Peter L. Petersen was reared on a farm in western Iowa, near the center of the largest rural settlement of Danes in the United States. Following service with the American military in France and Germany, he earned degrees in history from Dana College, the University of South Dakota, and the University of Iowa. He moved to Texas in 1967 to teach at West Texas A&M University in Canyon. The recipient of numerous honors for excellence in teaching, Dr. Petersen was named the school's first "Regents Distinguished Service Professor" in 1997. He retired in 2000 and now holds the rank of Professor Emeritus. He and his wife, Shirley, who is also of Danish ancestry, continue to reside in Canyon. They have two adult sons and three grandchildren.

Active in Danish-American organizations, Petersen served nine years on the Board of Directors of The Danish Immigrant Museum. Currently he is Secretary on the Board of Directors of the Danish American Heritage Society and serves as editor of *The Bridge*, the society's journal. He has written two books on Danish American topics, *A Place Called Dana: The Centennial History of Trinity Seminary and Dana College* (1984), and *The Danes in America* (1987), as well as numerous articles in various journals.

### Children's Activities

While the adults have the opportunity to learn more about Danes in America, past and present, the children will have a LEGO construction contest. There will be several age groups and prizes will be awarded in each group. Jette Buhl Smith has graciously agreed to bring her huge collection of legos for use in the contest. Later in the afternoon, during the Society's annual meeting, the children will have a threelegged race, a water balloon toss, sack race, and other games. All participants will receive a favor and winners will get prizes.

Send your meal reservations today. (See page 7)  
Reservations are due in Danevang by June 1 st.

## Newsletter

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Membership, June to June

Annual Meeting is held in conjunction with  
Constitution Day Celebration,  
first Saturday in June

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Newsletter Editor

Bridget Jensen

## Danish Prime Minister Visits Houston

A highlight for the Danish Community in Houston was a visit from Danish Prime Minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen. On Wednesday, April 21, Vice Consul Anna Tompsen Holiday and her husband Hal Holiday hosted an afternoon reception at their lovely River Oaks home to honor the Prime Minister.

Later that evening, the Prime Minister was the honored guest at the tenth anniversary dinner of the Houston Holocaust Museum. The over 1,200 guests viewed excerpts from a new documentary film about the saving of most of Denmark's Jewish citizens during the Nazi occupation in World War II. On behalf of the kingdom of Denmark, the Prime Minister accepted the Lyndon Baines Johnson Moral Courage Award.



*Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen,  
Anna Tompsen Holiday and Hannes Hofer  
Photo by Niels Kastrop*

On Thursday morning, the Prime Minister spoke with a group of children from the Houston Independent School District at the Houston Central Library. In recognition of the upcoming bicentennial celebration of the birth of the famous Danish author Hans Christian Andersen, he presented beautifully illustrated volumes of Andersen's complete works to the library.

At noon that day, the Prime Minister, who just recently finished a term as President of the European Union, delivered a major policy speech at the James A. Baker Institute for Public Policy at Rice University.



*Prime Minister Anders  
Fogh Rasmussen,  
Consul Ray Daugbjerg,  
and  
Vice Consul Anna  
Tompsen Holiday*

*Photo by Hannes Hofer*

## Queen's Birthday Celebration

Danevang celebrated the Queen's Birthday (a day late) in grand style. The celebration began with a spirited singing session, ably accompanied by our guest pianist Bob Olsen. Then the always favorite Scandinavian Folk Dancers from Houston performed a varied and lively group of dances. These folks have become so dear to the hearts of the Heritage Society members that we literally consider them part of our group.



*Photo by Helena Lauritsen*

The noon meal was a fantastic home-cooked spread. The two main cooks were Darlene Misik and Elaine Wind. Also assisting in food preparations were Mary Ann Wind, Marilyn Henderson, Bridget Jensen, and Elsie Christensen. (Our president, Irvin Wind, was pressed into duty as meat slicer for all nine pork loin roasts cooked by his wife Elaine.) Accompanying the pork loin were fresh new potatoes, red cabbage, peas and carrots, pickled beets, pickled carrots, cucumber salad, herring in wine sauce, and home baked bread.



*Photo by Helena Lauritsen*

The meal was followed by our featured speaker of the day, Honorary Danish Consul General for the Houston area, Ray Daugbjerg who shared remarks concerning the relations of Denmark and the United States during and since W. W. II. He also shared some of the history of the development of Denmark's worldwide shipping industry. The celebration culminated with the traditional toast to Queen Margrethe II. Coffee and birthday cake were served at the museum.

## Be a Museum Artifact Contributor

In our winter newsletter, we put out a request for your old 8mm or 16mm home movies. Since your response was not overwhelming, we are reminding you again of this most worthwhile history-preserving project. The museum will pay for these old film reels to be professionally transferred to video. The museum asks that you pay for any additional copies that you want to order. Of course, if you have already transferred your film to DVD or video cassette, the museum would like to borrow these to make its own copies. Please include a "script" or description of the people and events that have been recorded.

As many of you know, the area of the Danevang Community was hunting grounds for the Karankawa Indians before it was settled by farmers and ranchers. The habits and lifestyle of these native people provided an interesting and educational study.

In preparation for a forthcoming exhibit about these Native Americans, we are soliciting donations of Indian arrow and spear heads found in the Danevang area. It was not too unusual for the early farmers to find these artifacts as they plowed the virgin land. At present, the museum has been given some arrow and spear heads, but we would like to make our collection more complete.

Do you have memoirs, old letters (before 1930) or other historic documents that you would like to share with other society members? Let us hear from you so we can share more family histories in the future.

**Writings from the Past -** Memoirs of  
Kristine Hansen Allenson (1899-1969)  
Excerpted from History of the Hansen Family

I have always been extremely interested in our parents' background and why they came to the United States. They both were the oldest in large families of nine children. In Mother's family, six of the nine children came to America and none of them ever went back to Denmark, not even for a visit. When Mother left Denmark, her younger brothers and sisters were little tots. Father was the only one in his family who come to America and he returned to Denmark four years later for a visit.

Dad first came to America in 1888 and was sponsored by a cousin living in Michigan. Many of the young Danish men were emigrating at that time because they did not want to participate in the compulsory military training and economic conditions in Denmark were difficult. When father returned for a visit in 1892, he met his sister-in-law's cousin, Emma Nielsen (my mother), who was twenty one years old. It was arranged that the two of them would obtain passage on the same boat when Niels Hansen (my father) returned to America in 1892.

Since Mother's aunt, who sponsored her, lived in Jackson, Michigan, she went to live there and worked as a pastry cook in Hubbard House, a large hotel. Meanwhile, father was working on farms in Michigan, Minnesota, and Iowa. Mother was able to obtain a job with a well-to-do family, Mr. and Mrs. Bernhard Morgensen, who lived in Houston, Texas. When mother moved to Houston, father followed her and found a job working for the Illinois and Great Northern Rail Road.

It was in 1894 that the idea of a Danish Colony in south Texas was conceived by the Danish Folk Society. The location was not far from where father worked on the I.&G.N. Railroad. He journeyed to this locale and to what is now known as the community of Danevang, twelve miles from the railroad

station of EI Campo. Four years before father and mother married, he bought 80 acres of good land for \$9.00 per acre. Mr. Chris Madsen bought the adjoining 40 acres. The men decided to build a one-room house with a "lean to" and lived together, both being single. The "lean to" was shelter for the one team of mules they shared.

Since there was no blacksmith in Danevang up to this time for it was just open prairie, one would plow while the other walked to EI Campo to get extra plowshares sharpened. Dad, never being a person who was fond of "roughing it", soon became disgusted with this type of life and decided to return to the railroad and let Mr. Soren Larsen farm his land.

It was then that Dad was offered the job as section foreman in Benchley, Texas. (Ed. note, Benchley is a small community just north of the present town of Bryan) This job necessitated that he have a housekeeper to operate the section house where all employees roomed and got their meals. So Mother and Dad got married August 27, 1898.

They soon sponsored Mother's brother, Peter Nielsen, to come to America. For a time, Uncle Pete helped Mother in the station house until he learned the English language, at which time he went to Danevang to farm Dad's land.

He then settled in Markham as a rice farmer. After marrying Anna Christiansen, he moved back to Danevang where he lived until his death from a heart attack in 1953. Peter and Anna had six children, Ellen, Katherine, Eda, Myrtle, Emma, and Harold. Mother and Dad also sponsored another of her brothers and three of her sisters during the years they lived in Benchley. These other siblings who came to America settled in the north, mostly in the Chicago area.

It was while in Benchley that my brother died at the age of eight months. I was two years, nine months old, and this is the first incident that I can remember. By 1904, there were three children in our family and I,

being the oldest, would soon go to school. The only way I could get there would have been to walk one and a half miles along a trail by the railroad tracks. Realizing this would not be a good situation, my parents naturally turned their thoughts to their little farm in the wide open spaces in Danevang. Dad tendered his resignation to the railroad in the fall of 1905. They packed their household belongings and boarded the train to El Campo. Mr. Chris Madsen, who was still living in Danevang, had arranged for Mr. Peter Thompson to meet us in El Campo. It took us almost four hours to make the trip to Danevang in Mr. Thompson's mule-drawn lumber wagon. How well I remember arriving in the Thompson home! It was between Christmas and New Years; I saw my first real decorated Christmas tree (yaupon with red berries) and Mr. Thompson was like Santa Claus with his long beard.

There was only a small two-room building on our farm across the road from the Madsens. Another room had to be added and repairs made before the house was habitable. The Thompson's took our family of five into their home until these improvements could be made on our new home. Such hospitality was often displayed by the early settlers.

Our closest childhood friends were the Madsen children who lived across the road and the P.J .A. Petersen children who lived about 3/4 of a mile down the road. The Madsen family was composed of three sons and a daughter. (Martha is a doctor; Frederick died as a young teen-ager from an accidental gunshot wound; Alva is a doctor, and Helvig (H.D.) is a cotton farmer and the one with whom we became especially closely associated). The Petersen family had three children: Elna, Verner, and Ester. We never missed celebrating a birthday in our three families as long as we were at home. Things were complicated by the fact that Frederick Madsen and I had the same birthday, August 30th. One year we would celebrate at his home in the forenoon and at our home in the

afternoon. The following year, we would reverse the order.

It was the custom to have huge Sunday dinners with as many as 40-50 people who were invited sometimes as much as two weeks ahead of time. A whole week was spent in preparation for these dinners and coffees. This was the only social life in the community at that time. Later, the annual church picnic down in the woods on Tres Palacios Creek furnished an additional opportunity for socializing as did the Fifth of June and Fourth of July celebrations at the Meeting House. At these social highlights, which were greatly anticipated, we had programs with speeches, games and races for the children and a big dance at night. In the winter, there was the annual community Christmas Tree at the Meeting House.

For many years, the only means of transportation in Danevang was by muledrawn or occasionally ox-drawn lumber wagons. As the farmers prospered, one by one, each bought a surrey with a span of horses-a real luxury indeed. For several years, Dad drove in a buggy without a top and we just had to hope that we would not get caught in a rain shower when we were dressed in our Sunday best. What ecstasy we had the day Dad brought home a spanking new surrey with fringes all around the top! When Mads Andersen bought a big "Overland" car in 1912, everyone was aghast. An automobile in Danevang! On Sunday afternoons, everyone would gather to see it and Mr. Andersen would take us out for demonstration rides, never driving more than fifteen miles per hour. With the advent of the automobile in the community a new problem arose: the horses were afraid of the cars. There were many runaway teams and buggies demolished as well as many injuries to passengers due to this new mode of transportation.

To Be Continued in our summer issue.

## **Plan a Trip with your Danish Heritage in Mind**

There are several delightful venues where those with a Danish background are sure to have a great time, meet new friends and perhaps even make some family connections with others. The settings are a delightful change to our climate for those of us in Texas. Activities always include stimulating lectures, spirited singing, simple folk dancing, sometimes special musical programs or films, always delightful folks with whom to visit and great food. First time attendees are always most welcomed.

The first of the opportunities each year usually occurs in mid to late February in Solvang, California. This gathering is titled "The Farstrup/Mortensen Lecture Series," although the long weekend includes much more than lectures alone.

If you have never visited Solvang, this community has truly capitalized on its Danish roots. The town is filled with gift shops, restaurants, and a museum all emphasizing a Danish theme. Solvang (Sunny Field) is located in the picturesque Santa Ynez Valley, not too far north of Los Angeles. Air travel is not only available into Los Angeles, but also Santa Barbara. The February climate in California is delightful.

This meeting is hosted by Bethania Lutheran Church ELCA (formerly of the old AELC). Each participant arranges for their own housing at one of the many motels in town. Trailer hook-ups are also available in Solvang. The Saturday night banquet at this event is always a rousing good time with a fun-filled program. There are also several events hosted by Grandview College available to attendees wishing to attend. To receive information, send your inquiries to: Bethania Evangelical Lutheran Church, 603 Atterdag Road, Solvang, CA 93463 ([bethania.lutheran@verizon.net](mailto:bethania.lutheran@verizon.net))

A second opportunity for a Danish heritage experience is the Pacific Northwest Danish Cultural Conference. This year, the event will be held June 25-27, 2004. The setting for this annual conference is the magnificently beautiful grounds of the Menucha Conference

Center overlooking the mighty Columbia River just east of Portland, Oregon. Facilities vary from dormitory-type housing to modern moteltypes facilities. R.V. hook-ups are also available. If one were to travel to this event, extra days should be scheduled to traverse the Columbia River gorge with its breathtaking waterfalls and scenic vistas.

The conference is unique among the ones described here because each day time is scheduled for Danish language classes from introductory beginners to advanced conversation and literature. For more information about the program and registration, contact Inger Olsen, 3607 Pacific Way, Longview, WA 98362, or by telephone 360-425-6688

The event to which Danevang descendants probably have the most connection is the "Fall Meeting," held (usually in late August) in Tyler, Minnesota. Tyler is located in southwestern Minnesota, accessible by air from Omaha or Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The folks from Tyler will pick up and return persons flying into Sioux Falls, thereby making car rental unnecessary. Unless participants choose to make housing arrangements in nearby towns, the housing is in the old Folk School building adjacent to the Danebod Lutheran Church grounds. There are also hook-ups for R.V.s. This campus is shaded by large trees, making "coffee time" in the morning and afternoon a favorite break. For further information, contact Ricke Bly (507-247-3894) or Sonja Hansen Walker (612-781-0696).

Several Danevang families sent their high school age children to the Folk School in Tyler during the 1920's. Other families sent children to Grandview College in Des Moines or to Atterdag College in Solvang. For folks who plan ahead a year or so in advance, there will be an international conference October 13-26, 2005 in Des Moines, Iowa. This will be an excellent opportunity to hear international authorities speak about topics relative to the theme of the conference: "Danish Culture, Past and Present: The Last Two Hundred Years". The Danish American Heritage Society, sponsor of the event, chose this theme because the year 2005 is the 200th anniversary of the birth of the great Danish

storyteller, Hans Christian Andersen, the 150th anniversary of the death of the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, and the 150th anniversary of the birth of Danish-American poet and song writer Kristian Østergaard.

Our closest Danish community neighbors are in the small settlement of Granly, MS. This settlement, begun in the 1930's, was served by the Danevang pastor in the months that had a fifth Sunday. The group built a Meeting House but never had a church building. In recent years, the descendants of the original settlers have restored and improved the lovely setting provided by the Danish Folk Society. There are trailer hook ups on their grounds and the "Work Week" they are sponsoring this year sounds like a "Fun Week" too. These friendly folk would love to have a long or short visit from you. We have just received this notice of their June activities which is copied here. To get directions and further details, contact Ray Nygaard (228588-2279; [mygaard@bellsouth.net](mailto:mygaard@bellsouth.net)) or Else Martin (228-588-6520; [elsejensine@msn.com](mailto:elsejensine@msn.com))

# Granly 2004

The property has been surveyed and the new Fence is up around the 2 acre cemetery. THANKS to *Davis Mortensen for the fence*

- June 18-Fri 5:00 p.m. Canoe Gang Meets*  
Set up plans for all who want to canoe Saturday
- June 19 - Sat 9:00 a.m. Dog River Canoe trip*  
For all who want to camp overnight on river sandbar
- June 19 Sac p.m. overnight campout on river*  
June 20 - Sunday - tired campers come back  
*Father's Day - Picnic for all*  
Remember Father's Day at Bergerson's
- June 21 - 26. Mon-Sat - Granly work week*  
WORK on trails, landscaping, photos,  
New fence, painting, eat, camp, ENJOY!
- June 23 - Wed - Fishing Day for the young fry*  
Trip to *Bellingrath Gardens* for others  
*Fish Fry Wed at 5:00 p.m.*
- June 26 - Sat - Canoe trip on Dog River*  
Choice of half day or full day trip
- June 27 - Sunday - 2:00 p. m. Open House*

## REGISTRATION FORM for June 5, Constitution Day Celebration and Annual Meeting

Reservations must be received by June 1

You may detach this form and mail it to: Danish Heritage Preservation Society  
P.O. Box 386  
Danevang, TX 77432

You may call 979-543-3332 or 979-543-2106 or You may email [iRVWind@wcecnet.net](mailto:iRVWind@wcecnet.net)

Number of adult meals \_\_\_\_\_ at \$7.50 a meal \_\_\_\_\_  
Number of youth meals \_\_\_\_\_ at \$3.00 a meal \_\_\_\_\_  
(under 12 years)

Total for meals \_\_\_\_\_

Annual Dues for Membership in Danish Heritage Preservation Society at \$10 per person

Other Donation \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL \_\_\_\_\_

Please provide your

Names \_\_\_\_\_ Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Alternate Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Email address \_\_\_\_\_

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Debra Scholz  
George & Harriet Sellnau  
Doug & Elna Sheetz  
The Jason Sheetz Family  
Midge & James Sims  
Lawrence & Clara Stablein  
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