

Spring 2002  
Newsletter  
Danish Heritage Preservation Society  
P.O. Box 386  
Danevang TX 77432

## Celebration of Queen's Birthday: Huge Success

On April 20, a capacity crowd filled the forsammelingshus to belatedly celebrate the birthday of Queen Margrete II. As a practical matter, the Society celebrations are on a Saturday near the actual date. In the case of the Queen's Birthday the actual date was April 16, but that didn't matter to the assembled group! Joseph Wiseman, Priscilla Preas, and Ken Stillman of *Texas Highways* were present to cover the event, so, hopefully, the rest of Texas will soon be able to follow the celebration that occurred in the Danish Capital of Texas! We're certain the Queen would be pleased.

The Museum was opened early (and stayed open for an hour and a half after the conclusion of the celebration). Activities were begun with games for the young and young at heart plus coffee for those who just wanted to meet old friends. The old friends (or should we say friends out of the past?) included Delores Jespersen from Des Moines, Iowa, and her three grown children, Dan, Donna and Dianna. We understand that the "kids'" spouses stayed home to keep from making the "kids" seem older than they really are. Delores' late husband, Ronald, served the Danevang Lutheran Church as its pastor from 1954 to 1958. The Jespersens were popular members of the community. Elsie Christensen captured some of this spirit in her introduction of Delores prior to her widely-acclaimed presentation on Hans Christian Andersen, making use of panels of a quilt on the subject of his fairy tales.

Delores had made this presentation throughout the United States and elected to use this Danevang celebration to turn The Ugly Duckling into her "Swan Song". This was the final presentation of Delores' act of love, and as another act of love presented the quilt to your Museum! It is prominently displayed for all to see together with a tribute to the Jespersens

Following the meal, Anna Thomsen, Danish Vice-Consul from Houston, led the tribute and toast to the Queen in front of her portrait. We're certain it equaled or surpassed any toast given in Denmark just a few days before!

Donna, not to be outdone by her mother, gave a slide show on a recent family trip to Denmark. She has presented this show throughout the Midwest and the write-up has previously been published in *Church and Life*. These two presentations were fantastic and enjoyed by all, old and young!

To cap off the program, the Scandinavian Dancers from Houston, on a return engagement after the opening of your Museum, entertained with a rousing selection of dances.

Coffee and Danish desserts from Newman's Bakery in Bellville (arranged for by Events Chairman Leo Westerholm) followed. Specially-invited former 4H Club and dance group members were recognized and held a reunion recalling the activities of 45 or so years ago. Persons baptized, confirmed, or married during the "Jespersen" years were also recognized.

## Virgil Harton's Show: Another Huge Success

On the late afternoon March 16, there was an opening preview of Virgil Harton's artwork show which will hang until June 22. Vigil is a son of Danevang and is a water colorist of some note. For the renovation of the prestigious Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach, Florida, the owners elected to put prints of Virgil's work in the guest rooms and original pieces in the suites. Virgil's sister, Ramona Lesak provided a copy of *Architectural Digest* showing a view of one of the suites with Virgil's work prominently displayed. This article was mounted in the museum.

Virgil donated 29 pieces of his work to your museum, with the sales proceeds going to the museum. All 29 pieces were sold at the opening preview, bringing in \$3960! His works usually sell for at least double the posted prices but a decision had been made to keep the prices affordable to permit wide-spread ownership of Virgil's work in the Danevang/El Campo area,. The problem has been that regular viewers of his show are unable to purchase any of his works, since this was deemed by Virgil to be his last show. We have received permission from buyers to reproduce three of the pieces as note cards. You'll be hearing more about that project.

The preparations for hanging the show required the help of a lot of people. The center part of the museum was reconfigured and the movable panels required carpet facing. All of this happened with the efforts of Irvin Wind, Rev. Laird Engle, James Petersen and his brother Charles. Quite a cooperative effort! Then the hanging of the pieces was handled by Irvin Wind and Al Jensen, with considerable advice from Elaine Wind and Bridget Jensen and anyone else who happened by. The final touches were added by our "lighting experts", Kenny and Mickey Christensen. Approximately 80 "patrons" showed up for the wine and cheese reception and "a good time was had by all". Doyle and Ann Schaer sent

comment cards and congratulatory cards to Virgil signed by many attendees. Virgil has commented on how much these cards meant to him.

## Wildflower Report

Sherry Green, Carl Larsen and Gunnar Thyssen are breathing a sigh of relief--the wild flowers along the front of the property are beginning to show their colors. The bluebonnets planted by Lawrence Petersen on the east side of the museum have survived the accidental rolling by Eddie Vacek. The plants are small but over 200 of them are proudly showing their "blue". So the "cotton farmers" feel vindicated. They can, too, go flowers! For a while many of us were convinced that Sherry's wildflower seed purchase included a lot of red clover seed because the clover was thriving and showing a lot of "red"—colorful, but not what was intended.

James Petersen and Merle Jensen continue to handle the grass mowing and they know enough to stay out of the "flower areas". James handles the trimming using Carl Larsen's donated trimmer. I know they could use some volunteers to handle these chores. Please step up and help!

## Horseshoes Anyone?

We needed two permanent horseshoe pits down at the Pioneer House for the fanatics, particularly on April 20. Irvin Wind with help from Carl Larsen set the stakes to regulation distances and removed grass and dirt. Irvin took his trailer to the sand pit in Louise, loaded and unloaded it and spread the sand. So we don't have the excuses any more of "non-uniform" landing surfaces and non-regulation conditions. There will be those of us who will come up with new excuses, though.

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## Harton “Families Reunion” Upcoming on June 22!

Your museum is embarking on a program of featuring, each year, one of the early Danevang Families. This first year, the Harton Families are being featured. This reunion covers such a large part of the “Danevang Group”, so we will not attempt to delineate. If you’re a “Harton”, you know it, so June 22 is your day, and in the museum there will be a special exhibit of Harton artifacts. If you want to loan or give an item to the museum, please contact Ramona Lesak (979-543-6703 or Irvin/Elaine Wind (979-543-3332). The Virgil Harton Art Show will remain up for this “Harton Display”

In each issue of this Newsletter we have presented an article or writing “From the Past”. To honor the Hartons, this time we are presenting the notes used by Peter Harton for a presentation to the El Campo Rotary Club in May, 1944. Mr. Harton entitled his presentation, “When I Came to the United States and Why I Have Made the United States My Home”. Just as a side note we have to mention that the program chairman that day was the venerable “Johnny” Morris, the well-loved El Campo Pharmacist, whom many of you may remember.

Peter Harton said:

“On February 23, 1897, my brother Carl and I landed in New York after having spent 21 days crossing the Atlantic from our native country, Denmark. A few days ago I saw in the papers that an airplane has crossed the same ocean at about the same latitude in less than seven hours. Comparison of these two trips gives an apt illustration of the difference between then and now. The world as a whole has gone through an enormous evolution in the last fifty years, and by recalling in memory some of the conditions we met on our arrival and in the first few years thereafter, we can better realize how much the world and we have changed since then. (Editor’s Note: Just think of the changes in the last 58 years since Peter Harton made this presentation.)

“We had straight tickets to Austin, Texas, where we had some kinfolk on our mother’s side. And, we have lived in Texas ever since, so the following remarks have only special reference to Texas conditions, as we found them.

“We were young, Carl was 20 and I was 22. We had lived in the rural sections of Denmark most of our lives, but had also spent several years in Copenhagen. Denmark was already then a highly-developed country. It was about one half agricultural and one half city/industrial, but it was crowded. In an area less than one twentieth the size of Texas there lives a population almost as large as Texas had at that time, so, with encouraging letters from our relatives in Austin and our inborn desire to get out into the world and try our luck, we decided to move to Texas.

“Already in New York (where we spent four hours resting up after our hard ocean trip) we were told that Texas was a wild country, “still full of Indians and brigands” We were told that train robberies were daily occurrences, so we felt a little uneasy, and we arranged that one of us should keep awake and watch out while the other slept during the 5 days and nights it took to reach Austin by train. Well, we did not lose our scalps nor our possessions in these years. Texas was, thus, a frontier country. Austin did not have a single paved street, nor Travis County a single improved road. The city water was pumped directly out of Lake McDonald, and, when the Colorado River was on a rise, it was often thick mud! Sanitary conditions were bad, few houses had screens to keep out the flies and mosquitoes, and many people suffered with malaria and stomach troubles of various kinds. Houston had the reputation of being ever much worse off.

“We came in the middle of a depression. McKinley took office a few days after we reached Austin. The “Gold” cause had won out over the 16 to 1 “Silver” cause of William J. Brogan. But, it took several years before business improvements reached Texas. Common labor

in Austin was paid \$0.75 for a 10 to 12 hour day. I started a \$1 per day at the ice factory where a friend and countryman of mine was foreman. But then, living expenses were in proportion: meat was plentiful and cost \$0.05 per pound and you could generally get some meat scraps and bones for your dog, free of charge when you made a purchase. Coffee was \$0.25 for 3 lb., roasted, not ground. Flour was \$0.015 per pound. Fruits and vegetables were comparatively high as most of them had to be shipped in from California and Colorado. Heavy black prairie land could be bought for \$20 gold per acre, but interest rates were 10% or more and foreclosures were common. (Editor's Note: At about that same time, as an incentive for the start of the Danish colony of Danevang, land could be purchased for \$9 per acre, with terms: 1/8 cash down and the following year only interest of 7%, thereafter 1/8 paid yearly for 7 years.)

"I have never been homesick for the old country. I liked so much of the "living conditions" I met here in Texas: the sunny climate; the friendly people, free of snobbishness; and the wide open country, that I never seriously thought about going back. Besides, I, who came from a country which had been poorly endowed by nature, could see that Texas was rich by comparison, in natural resources. It only needs more enterprising people and time to develop into a very prosperous country. So, as soon as the laws at the time permitted, I became a naturalized citizen of Texas and of the U.S.A. (1904). I married, raised a family of seven children, and invested my small savings in farm land. I gave up city life in 1910 when I moved onto my farm near Austin. In 1918, I moved to Danevang where I bought a farm, my present home.

"I have now spent more than 25 years in this country, have seen Danevang change from an isolated oasis on these flat prairies into a fully-integrated part of American life. Timewise, we are now as close to Houston, Austin or San Antonio as we were to El Campo 25 years ago. Good roads have been built, drainage in our territory has vastly improved, farm life has been made much easier due to improved machinery, and all this has given us an opportunity for a more cultural life. In short: we have been making progress all the time and on all "fronts". And, I am confident that the future holds still more improvements in store for us and the coming generations. (Editor's Note: No Kidding!) What seemed to be almost impossible attainments only 25 years ago, are now established realities. I see no valid reason why the future should prove to be different than the past in this respect.

"The Future looks good to me, giving proper allowance for "Time"."

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## Renewed Reminder for Fall 2002 Exhibit

If you have any Danevang Fire Department artifacts or photographs, please contact Bridget Jensen (713) 524-2328.

## Future Family Exhibits

As mentioned in the previous item, your museum is working on future Family Exhibits. So, any self-appointed, or otherwise, "Family Representative" out there who wants to honor a Family, we're anxious to hear from you. Please understand that "reservations" for space must be made a year in advance. We are open for reservations for 2003 and beyond. Several families have mentioned the desire to be included but we need firm commitments. We will assist you in the preparation of the exhibit. Museum policy is: if a person does not wish to contribute an item to the museum, that item may be "exhibited through the courtesy of..." and returned when no longer exhibited. We are always very appreciative of any gifts of items to the museum, but, we're not in the temporary storage business. However, we have great needs for donated items and/or time!!!! We strongly encourage you to make outright gifts of items to the museum. We cannot have a viable museum without your outright gifts

What better way to preserve your Danish heritage? Don't count on some future family member, who may not be born yet, to preserve your artifacts.

So if you wish to line up space for an exhibit or if you wish to donate items to the permanent museum collection, or if you wish to volunteer as a docent or accessions person please contact the Museum Committee Chairman, Lawrence Petersen (979)543-3005 or lpetersen@wcnet.net Presently, we are only able to have the museum open on Sunday afternoons from 1 to 4 and by appointment for special groups. We would like to expand the hours, but we need volunteers!

Also, if you know of groups who want a fine "field trip", contact Elsie Christensen, (979)543-2106.

## Additions to the Library

Mrs. Sybil Duus Needham, who will be our Grundlovsdag speaker, has sent us two books by her late brother, Erling Duus. Since these books are now out of print, it is a real treasure to have them in our library.

The first book, The Tragic Sacred Ground is a moving explanation of the land, life and religion of the Lakota Indians as experienced by this Grundtvigean Dane.

The second book, Jesus Walks in the Garden of Parque Central and other Honduran Essays is exactly what the title implies, a collection of short essays. It should be noted that Erling identifies himself as Erling Duus Christensen. When asked why the name changed, his sister, Sybil, explained that the book was written for and about the peoples with whom Erling lived and worked in Honduras. It is the Hispanic tradition to use your mother's surname for children; therefore his mother's name "Christensen" was used.

Both of these books are highly recommended as delightful, yet moving reads. If they sound interesting to you, please get your name on the list to borrow.

The most recent addition to the library is The Complete Encyclopedia of Stitchery. Our faithful "resident seamstress", Marilyn Chappell, handling the sewing of labels for our needlework collection, had borrowed this book from the El Campo Library as the museum was endeavoring to identify the handwork which is now on display. The book was so invaluable that your museum felt the need to keep such reference works on hand. It must be noted that as the Pioneer House was being restored, Hans and Marie Jensen donated several reference works dealing with the proper methods of domicile restoration.

So, remember these volumes if any of you need such works personally or while you're working at the museum.

# It's That Time Again --- Time for Membership Renewals !!!!

Memberships in The Danish Heritage Preservation Society run from Annual Meeting to Annual Meeting, i.e. June to June. Fees sent in now will be for the period June 2002 to June 2003. (Yes there was a "typo" in the last newsletter. We didn't mean June 2002 to June 2002!) Membership Fees are only \$10 per year per individual. As you can easily understand, the funds raised by membership fees cannot possibly fulfill the cash needs of the Society, but it's important for you and for the Society to have a group of interested persons.

So, please take the time to write a check, payable to The Danish Heritage Preservation Society and mail this page and your check to:

Mickey Christensen  
P.O. Box 386  
Danevang TX 77432

Names:  
Address:  
Phone:  
Email:

Amount: \$10 per individual = \$\_\_\_\_\_

Note: Members receive unlimited free admission to the Museum

Also: If you wish to have someone in your family (child, brother, sister) or a friend receive a copy of the newsletter as an additional service at no charge, please include a sheet with names and addresses.

We need to "spread the word" to another generation and to others who may be interested in preserving Danish Heritage!!!!!!

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## Reservations for Grundlovsdag Fest and Annual Membership Meeting, June 1, 2002

Since it's a catered meal, it's important that we have a "head count".

List Names

Children	9 and younger	_____	Free	
	10-15	_____	@ \$5	\$ _____
Others		_____	@ \$6.50	\$ _____
		Total:		\$ _____

We only have two Celebrations a year. Try to attend both .

Enjoy yourselves-----in true Grundtvigean fashion!  
(Danevang was founded as a Grundtvigean Colony)

Part of Grundtvig's theology was "God made all things....

Therefore, enjoy all things!"