

# DANISH HERITAGE NEWSLETTER

## DANISH HERITAGE PRESERVATION SOCIETY

P.O. Box 386

DANEVANG, TEXAS 77432-0386

(The Danish Capital of Texas)

### Generally Speaking

The President of our Society, Homer Smith, retired Major General, is recuperating from back surgery and is unable to work on this newsletter so this is the work of “amateurs”. We are pleased to report that Homer is coming along fine in his physical therapy.

### Dues: June to June

For several years the dues structure was such that membership was on a calendar year basis, but a couple of years ago this was revised so the dues year runs from one Grundlovs Dag (June 5) Celebration to the next. So, in the next newsletter you will be reading a “pitch” for Membership Renewals.

### Upcoming Meetings and Celebrations

The next Society Board Meeting will be held at 2:30 pm on December 23 to coincide with the date of the Christmas Program and Tree Celebration of the Danevang Lutheran Church. The Program will begin in the church building at 6:30 pm. All Society Members and interested parties (young and old) are encouraged to attend. This is always a meaningful and fun experience!

There will be a Society Board Meeting in March (probably March 17, and if so, we'll wear red that day instead of green)

In recent years, the Society has celebrated Queen Margrethe's Birthday on the Saturday nearest the actual date, April 15. We have invited members of the Danish Club of Houston to join us in those celebrations. In 2001, the Queen's birthday falls on Easter Sunday and your board elected to have a “belated” celebration on April 21, rather than

interfere with Easter celebrations. The next newsletter will have more information, but plan on a noon meal and program on April 21.

We have been carrying on the long-standing Danevang tradition of celebrating Danish Constitution Day (Grundlov's Dag). Many of our members have fond memories of the early “June 5th” Celebrations in Danevang! We will have our Grundlovs Dag Celebration on the Saturday nearest the real date, which makes it June 2. This year we will have a special celebration since we will be dedicating our new Museum on that date! Plan to attend and bring guests. We're getting ever closer to our goal of preserving our Danish Heritage in this little piece of Denmark called Danevang!

### Cooperation with Danevang Church

The Society Board, at its last meeting voted to invite, as guests, the Pastor and the President of the Danevang Lutheran Church to future board meetings. For over 100 years the Danevang Church and the Danevang Community have cooperated and we want to continue that fine tradition!

### Pledge Reminder

You may remember that in an earlier newsletter this year we commented on the fact that our CPA and others said that all organizations “discount” pledge amounts when planning income. However, we also pointed out that those “other organizations” were not Danish, because our pledges for 1999 were paid 100%!!!! We are now at the end of another pledge year and we ask that you continue your excellent record of payment!! Also, of course, we must point out that pledge increases are welcomed.

## Museum Progress Update

As we go to press, we are happy to report that the new Museum Building has taken shape! It should be “dried in” by the first of the year. You’ll be able to see the progress when you come for the Christmas Program.

The construction has been a real multi-cultural effort. We can’t name all the people outside the Society who have been involved, because they are too numerous to remember, but any recognition has to start with our wonderful neighbor across from Heritage Park, Eddie Vasek. Eddie (aided by his wife, Betty) has done so many neighborly deeds that we’ve talked about making him an Honorary Dane. The least we can do is have him join the ranks of “BoDanes” with Wesley Miksek and others. On the day the slab was poured, Eddie jumped in and pulled one of the concrete trucks out of the ditch and then brought over his pump to get water out of the foundation pier holes. These good deeds have been numerous, even to the extent of enlisting his Thanksgiving Dinner guests to help cover up some of the lumber before a downpour. Vaseks, we couldn’t have done it without you!

Other diverse cultures were represented by: Dr. Vijay (short for a long, unpronounceable Indian name) whose firm did the underground soil investigation; Don Naiser, Manager of Wharton County Electric Co-op, his right hand Blake Lurker, who designed the plumbing and electric systems, all free of charge; MCM Systems who poured the slab; Rudy Martinez of El Campo Ready-Mix who furnished the concrete (at a discount); B.K. Harrison of McCoy’s who furnished the lumber (at a discount), his assistant Kenneth Kram who coordinated the lumber deliveries (Harrison’s mother lives in Danevang); Gary Tupa, whose plumbing company was very competitive; Paul Kucera and Chris Merta, whose El Campo Electric Co was also very competitive; Buddy Woods, an Afro-American, who did the masonry work for the vault, and Vicente

Torres, whose crew did all the framing and exterior siding work.



Also, a friend of Al Jensen’s, a Danish Jew, came down to fill in as superintendent one day when Al was undergoing medical tests. Now, we can truly say our building was the joint effort of many nationalities and cultures working together to further the recognition of our Danish Heritage. Also, we must commend our Treasurer, Mickey Christensen during this flurry of activity. Yes, it has been several months since groundbreaking in April, but we had to overcome the delays of the foundation redesign and the hospitalization of our “superintendent” Al Jensen. Everything is now under control and the Museum Committee is hard at work to partially utilize our space for the June 2nd dedication. Irvin Wind and Lawrence Petersen have taken on a project of cataloging all of our photographs and identifying them in various ways so the computer can “sort” in a number of ways for the purpose of exhibitions according to different categories. Lawrence also has photocopied the old church records, has computerized the old census data, and has computerized the map and records of the Danevang cemetery, all of which will be invaluable to anyone doing any sort of research or just wanting to satisfy a curiosity. Don’t forget, one of our projects is going to involve the “family trees” of the original settlers.

You'll hear more about that in later newsletters. We have a grant application in to a foundation in Dallas which may help bring that project to the front.

### **Wish List**

As we start setting up the Museum and completing the interior of the Pioneer House we have a few "needs":

- Old style Metal Beds
- Large Screen TV
- VCR

### **Funding Up-Date**

Kermit and Harvey Westerholm have spent countless hours (and miles) "beating the bushes" for funding assistance. Recent major additions to our capital campaign include:

Gulf Coast Medical Foundation, in response to a written grant proposal \$15,000, plus a matched \$7,500 from the renewed matching gift proposal. (The presentation was covered by the *El Campo Leader-News*. At the same time, the Foundation contributed \$10,000 to the Danevang Fire Department)

- H-E-B Grocery Stores, \$2,000  
(also covered by *Leader-News*)
  - Danevang Farmer's Co-op \$5,000
  - Texas Farm Bureau \$2,500
- Cardell Kitchen & Bath Cabinets donated the kitchen cabinets with a value of approximately \$6,000.

We are particularly heartened by the fact that Evelyn Holland has followed the example of her father and mother, Harold and Ella Hansen, by becoming a major financial supporter. You may recall that, earlier, Evelyn made available the "Hansen Shed" and its museum contents. (As a side note; at the last Board Meeting, Gwendolyn Praytor, daughter of Larue Praytor, former principal of the Danevang school, and a long-time friend of Evelyn's, was a guest of Gerda Thyssen Stuart and was making an effort to re-bond with Evelyn after being "lost" for several years. We hope they have been able to join up again.)

### **Publicity in Randers, Denmark**

This past summer we had visitors from Randers at two different times. First, Ulrik Damm, an organist and "bell ringer" was in Texas to give several concerts and to appear at the Bach Festival in Victoria. Elsie Christensen arranged for Ulrik to speak to the Vacation Church School about "Danish Holiday Customs." While he was in Danevang, Mickey Christensen gave him a tour of the farming operations in Danevang. A few weeks later, a newspaper correspondent, Erik Høgh-Sørensen, from *Randers Amtstavis* visited Danevang and in the process was able to join "The Coffee Gang" at the Co-op. Upon his return to Randers he wrote an article, which has been translated by Jette Buhl Smith (and published in her Danish Society of Texas newsletter.) A great photograph accompanied the article. It showed Carl Larsen and Gunnar Thyssen "reading" the Pioneer Monument beside the church. By permission of Jette, we are using excerpts from her translation as follows:

#### **"The Coffee Gang in Danevang"**

With their dusty cowboy boots, the coffee-gang arrives in the back room of the Co-op to get a cup of Texas coffee and to talk about the weather, etc. They stop for a half hour or so between 9AM and 3PM except on the days when their duties in the fields or other places take precedence over this tradition. For at least four decades the changing members have gathered in this place west of Houston and about 30 miles from the Gulf of Mexico. The place is Danevang and the members of the gang are men with such names as Christensen, Andersen and Jensen. They are the descendants of a group of Danish immigrants who in 1894 made their home here on the flat swampy Texas prairie and started a colony. The colony grew big enough that like Solvang, California (which was settled in 1911 with people from Danevang and elsewhere) it could keep its Danish culture. But here the similarities with Solvang stop. Only a few

people live in Danevang, which today consists of a main street with a single light crossing, a dozen or so houses, a small post office, a church, a memorial marker, a meeting hall and then the coffee gang's meeting place called the Co-op. And what can be more Danish than this company, which could be compared to a Danish Farmer's Market? After the Texas Co-op started in 1920, the Co-op idea has spread over the whole state, a piece of Denmark as torn out of the Danish Co-op history.

Even though time might have stopped in Danevang, the coffee gang's existence is in a way a more authentic picture of the Coop history than we see in many places in Danish farming communities where DLG (Dansk Landbrug Grovvarereselskab) has closed many small offices around Denmark. Not only does the Danevang Co-op have a yearly production of over \$15,000,000 and employs over 25 people, it is a place where the farmers from the surrounding area have a chance to meet every day.

With a smile on her lips, Mary Bain, one of the two female employees says, "They talk about everything except politics, and often they shut up completely when we pass." With needling voices the Texas farmers talk about everything but usually with more interest in local matters than Washington politics. You might hear a comment like, "Is this candidate not the daughter of so and so?" Another local election is about a slot on the commission, which oversees the pump association and the drainage in the area.

One thing the coffee gang takes seriously is history. During a visit to the town's marker of the first immigrants, Carl Larsen remarks that Danevang gave its help to free Europe. "There were 150 men in service from Danevang. Only one died!" says Carl Larsen, who was lucky enough to survive his airplane being shot down, but the crew parachutes into neutral Switzerland.

History is very important and, though it seems that time has stopped for everything, the people of Danevang have laid the foundation for Danevang's new local history museum. Next to the museum are a couple of wooden houses where we can find collections of old Danish stuff like the Æbleskiver cookers, irons, and photos of the original farmers who fought tornados, storms, flooding and lack of rain too. Furthermore, there is the museum's collection of barbed wire, which is said to be the USA's biggest, according to Carl Larsen and another of the gang's members, Gunnar Thyssen. They both hope that the museum will open next year so the Danish culture can live on in Danevang. Until then, a bit of Danish culture survives in the daily meeting of the Coffee Gang.



Efterkommerne af de danske nybyggere i Danevang lader sig ikke hidse op af årets præsidentvalgkamp. Til gengæld går de op i lokalhistorien. Her står Gunnar Thyssen (til venstre) og Carl Larsen ved mindestenen for de første danske immigranter, der i 1894 kom til denne øde og uopdyrkede del af Texas.

## **From the Pen of Sybil Duus**

In a recent letter to her friend, Elsie Christensen, Sybil Duus sends greetings to the folks from Danevang. You may recall that Sybil's father, the late Vagn Duus, served as pastor at the Danevang Church.

Sybil sends the sad news of her brother Erling's death on August 31, 2000. Only a month before in July, Erling had visited Lawrence Petersen and Wilbert Hansen as he passed through Danevang. Sybil writes, "He (Erling) was so delighted about the Danevang Museum. I've found some photos and also Dad's movies...I'll get the video made soon!....Let me know when you have the dedication or some related event. I'd like to come."

And we would like to have Sybil and any folks you readers think ought to be on our mailing list. Please send names (and Danevang family connection if any) and addresses to the Society at P.O. Box 386 (zip.77432-0386).

## **In Memoriam: Queen Ingrid**

Excerpted from the Texas H.A.T.S. news from Denmark

Queen Ingrid was the most royal of all royals. Not for one second did she forget her role from the moment she came to Denmark in 1935 as the new Crown Princess until she died on November 7, 2000 at the age of 90. For her, her duty to Denmark and the Danish Crown preceded everything else.

When her eldest daughter succeeded King Frederik on the throne in 1972, Queen Ingrid understood how to step back with natural dignity. Her role was now a different one. But at the same time Queen Margrethe and the then government agreed that Queen Ingrid should be able to act as Regent during the Queen's absence.

The sense of loss will be great, in the family---- and in Denmark. She was the incarnation of everything royal. She was the Swedish Princess who became Queen of Denmark, but she was also the Queen who became one with Denmark.

## **Danevang Native Authors New Book**

Dorothy Waldman McConachie's latest book "Our Texas Heritage and Recipes" was inspired by her early years growing up in Danevang, "The Danish Capitol of Texas". The book includes traditions and recipes from all ethnic groups who have had an influence in Texas.

Dorothy realized her children were missing the rich ethnic heritage she had enjoyed as a child. "As my aunts and uncles got older and began passing away, I also realized that the celebrations and customs of my childhood were also passing on to oblivion. The time had come to preserve this legacy."

"Throughout Texas there are many ethnic communities that, like Danevang, are losing their identity. It needed to be recorded before the first generation born in this country was gone."

On a recent Danevang visit with her sister Annette Waldman and her mother Myrtle Waldman, Dorothy gave her mother 20 copies of her new book. Although the book is on sale at Borders Books and Waldenbooks, Myrtle has donated the books Dorothy gave her to the Heritage Society. The books will be on sale for \$19.95 at upcoming Society events and at the museum when completed. MANGE TAK Myrtle!!