

A Glorious Day For Danes, Great or Small

Yes, it was a grand and glorious day in Danevang , June 2, 2001 (the Saturday closest to Grundlov's Dag or Danish Constitution Day, June 5). Our dream of a Danish Heritage Museum became a reality! Since Danevang is a farming community it is only fitting that our museum is barn-like.

The old farm wagon loaned by Gunnar Thyssen, parked between the flag poles (where the U.S. and Danish flags fly illuminated at all times) gave the feeling of yesteryear. New amenities had been added to the Pioneer House by Elaine Wind, Elsie Christensen, Helena Lauritsen and their helpers to give the old house a more "lived-in" feeling.

Our Viking friends from Central Texas brought their Viking Longboat. With the ship's sail hoisted and our visitors in Viking costumes, thoughts of early Danish roots came to mind. Instead of the usual ribbon cutting, one of the Vikings who truly is Danish wielded his sharp axe to sever the red ribbon

Adding to the festive occasion were the Scandinavian dancers from Houston. Two times during the afternoon the dancers performed and included willing participants from the audience to join them. The accompanying accordion and fiddles kept up the lively pace of the dances.

During the afternoon a strolling musician added to the ambiance with a background of folk tunes. The program was short. Not everyone could get under the tent and it was "warm". Anna Thomsen Holliday, Vice-Consul of the Royal Danish Consulate/Houston brought Official Greetings from the Government of Denmark. The Rev. Laird Engle offered the Prayer of Dedication. President Homer Smith, Major General ret., gave some meaningful dedicatory remarks.

A special gift of two Georg Jensen clocks (one with Copenhagen time and one with Danevang time) were presented by the Danish Club of Houston, represented by Niels Kastrup, president, and Hannes Hofer, treasurer. (It must be noted that the club had earlier given the Museum Visitors Registration Book for which we are also thankful.) Jette Buhl Smith presented, on behalf of the Danish Society of Texas, a plate of dinnerware once used by the Royal Family of Denmark on their Royal Yacht.

After the unusual ribbon cutting, the crowd of more than 400, filed through the Museum with most making a direct path to the refreshment table amply stocked by Elsie Christensen's committee with Danish pastries and cold drinks and coffee.

Just inside the museum door, past the membership tables manned by Sherry Green and Mickey Christensen, the visitors were greeted by a female figure in Danish costume, dressed by Patty Jensen. In future articles we will have Patty describe the various pieces of the costume. Patty also organized and directed the group of ladies who decorated the "Danish Christmas Tree" which will be used to acquaint touring school groups with "dancing around the tree". We'll have Patty recognize her helpers.

Thanks to Lawrence Petersen, assisted by Elsie Christensen with input from Evelyn Hansen and Gwen Praytor Wendenburg, for the extremely popular display on the Danevang Schools. Lawrence was also responsible for obtaining the loan of the old "Standard" Farmall tractor from Joe and Terry Hlavinka who have the CASE dealership in East Bernard. With help from Carl Larsen , Irvin Wind and others, the difficult job of getting the tractor inside was accomplished!

Laurance and Lana Jensen and Hans and Marie Jensen made and labeled the new display boards for the portion of the Harold Hansen Barbed wire Collection on display. (There will more about that in future newsletters.)

Throughout the museum are numerous artifact contributions by many members, including very recent donations by Virginia Anderson Hall and Doris Anderson Gray, descendants of Mads Andersen. Also included were items of handwork of Elizabeth Juhl and her daughters Clara and Pearl, as well as bibles from several families, a cotton sack from the Schaers and many more items too numerous to mention now. Keep reading future newsletters for more information. Now is a good time to mention that we really need to know if we have mislabeled anything or anybody in the museum. Let us know so we can make the corrections and have a better museum!

Of course, none of this would have been seen except for Kenny and Mickey Christensen screwing in the many light bulbs late on Friday evening before the opening.

We are so fortunate to have the "Saving of the Danish Jews" exhibit on loan from the Danish Immigrant Museum, Elk Horn, Iowa. We have established quite a cooperative rapport with that museum!

A Chance to Get Involved

Our Museum is a "work in progress". There is so much to do on an ongoing basis. Our next work-day will be Saturday, July 28, beginning at 10 am. Along with upkeep items, Lawrence Petersen will be giving a workshop on cataloging with our new computer. We hope many of you will join us. It is a fine opportunity to meet some of your fellow members.

Oversights!!!

We have received much guidance from Tom Shelton of the Institute of Texan Cultures in San Antonio and from Shannon Hansen of the Museum of the Gulf Coast in Port Arthur. Both of these fine individuals were at the opening and your Master of Ceremonies failed to give them public recognition of their help and their presence. Shannon is "one of Danevang's own" (daughter of Dennis Hansen and grand-daughter of Melvin Hansen) and we've "adopted" Tom as one of our own, particularly after he spent so much time (and patience) with us during our "Historic Photo Project" at two different times a couple of years ago. That Project prompted Tom to inform us that ours was the most complete ethnic photo collection in the entire state.

To Shannon and Tom we apologize and thank you, all at the same time!!!!!!

A General Receives a Promotion and a Gentle Wind Blows In!

At its June 30 Board Meeting Major General (retired) Homer Smith was promoted to Chairman of the Board (a position set forth in the by-Laws but never filled). Irving Wind was elected President and, per our By-Laws will serve as CEO of the society, taking care of every-day business as a resident of Danevang. Someone jokingly suggested that Homer's pay be doubled, but since the pay is \$0, such a motion would be of no effect.

Our Museum Receives More Publicity

Publicity Chair Elsie Christensen has been busy! *El Campo Leader-News* has run several articles, a Bay City reporter came by and took several pictures and received information, (but I haven't seen his article) and Beverly Burmeier (Myrtle Waldman's daughter) had a great article in the *Austin American-Statesman* the Sunday before the opening. That article prompted a visit that Sunday afternoon by a gentleman who had been in Austin for a computer school and had to return to Copenhagen the next day. He came into the museum looking for Danevang's "Main Street". It was explained to him that he had driven in on the "Main Road" but the "street" he had turned onto is the "Main Street of the Danevang Community", since, on it are the church, cemetery, meeting house and the museum. He was an interesting individual and explained that he had taken the name "Agerskov" as his last name in honor of his ancestors who had come from Agerskov. Well, this took Al Jensen by surprise who quickly pointed out that his Bedstefar Petersen had done likewise with his middle name and had, in fact, given his three children that same middle name. He even went so far as to add that middle name to his wife's tombstone even though she had no ties to Agerskov, Denmark. When this new "Agerskov" learned that there were Agerskovs buried in the historic Danevang Cemetery he could hardly wait for a tour of the cemetery. (We'll write more in the next newsletter about the cemetery guide aids in the museum.) No one had a camera and that, along with a suggestion from Susan Berndt when she, Elvin and Andrew Berndt toured the museum one day has prompted Gift Shop Chairman Elaine Wind to add a disposable camera to the list of items in the gift shop.

Another interesting article appeared in the June 15 issue of *Church and Life* formerly *Kirke og Folk*, as follows:

"A Danish Heritage Museum was opened and dedicated in Danevang, Texas on Saturday, June 2, 2001. The Danes first came to settle the colony in 1894, under the auspices of the Danish People's Society. The pioneers faced many hardships and the outlook for the colony was not good. It is said that when Pastor F.L. Grundtvig and a friend returned to Clinton, Iowa, after visiting Danevang, they actually sat in the train and "wept over the prospects for the future of the colony." Nevertheless, the hardships and difficulties were overcome and the Danevang settlement became one of the bright spots in the history of the Danish Lutheran Church in America (emphasis added by newsletter editor)."

The least we can do is give information on subscriptions to this fine monthly publication!

Annual subscriptions of \$15 should be sent to:

Hazel Serritslev
3526 Vossevangenvej
Askov MN 55704

Another tidbit from the aforementioned issue: Four verses of a hymn by N.F.S. Grundtvig (Gud's Skaberkraf) were followed by the editor's thought-provoking summary: "God created both the heavens and the earth and we can follow His lead in

smaller things. God be praised for His gifts given in love.”

CORRECTION

The last newsletter gave credit to the wrong person for the the wonderful Lemon Fluff prepared for the Queen’s Birthday. Recognition should have been given to Laverne Harton! It is rumored that this correction is an attempt by a certain un-named individual whose initials are ALJ to get Laverne to do this again with a generous personal tasting sample prepared in advance.

OUR SOCIETY BECOMES MORE INCLUSIVE

The 2001 Annual Meeting of the Society Members was held on June 2 prior to the dedication of the Museum, and was presided over by Irvin Wind at the request of Homer Smith. One of the significant actions was a vote to broaden the scope of the Society by changing its name to “Danish Heritage Preservation Society, Inc.” with the proviso that in publicity and wherever else it is appropriate to add the words “in Danevang” or “in Danevang, the Danish Capital of Texas”. By this name change persons of Danish descent anywhere in the world will know that it is the Society’s mission to preserve Danish Heritage and everyone can feel a part of this activity and can participate by becoming active members and by donating artifacts as well as sharing the pride of having the Danish Cultural Center in Danevang.

At this same meeting four incumbent (I) Board Members and two previous (P) Board Members were elected for three-year terms, namely:

Kenny Christensen (P)
Sherry Larsen Green (I)
Al Jensen (I)
Laurance Jensen (I)
Helena Lauritsen (I)
Carl Lester Wind (P)

(other Board members were listed in the last news letter)

The Meeting was followed by the Danish hot dog meal for members only (as stated in the last newsletter and the dedication ceremony invitations). The plan was to have a simple meal since there were a lot of volunteer hours going into the dedication ceremony and, also, there had been a “real Danish meal” including roast pork, etc. served in conjunction with the Queen’s Birthday Celebration in April. A group of ladies led by Jette Buhl Smith served the meal to over 300 persons. The hot dogs are made to a Danish recipe and were (with the buns) graciously donated by the Danish Society of Texas (Jette Smith, President). Mange Tak! for the donation and the work expended!

Up On the Roof Top



When the plans for the Museum were just being started, one of the Westerhoms said “we must have cupolas”. So an internet search produced manufacturers of cupolas. Most of the photos showed weather vanes. So another internet search produced many vane designs (horses, roosters, cats, dogs, birds and a few ships). This naturally led to a more detailed search for the obvious; a Viking ship! Two artists were located who included Viking Long Boats in their work. We chose Richard Bernier (Crosswinds Gallery) and we call your attention to his fine piece of art which is atop the Museum. The foreman for our roofing subcontractor, Weatherguard Roofing from Wharton, donated his time to set the cupolas and the weathervane. Thank you for that contribution! Literally, no one else around, would or could, have gotten up there to do that!

Recently Marty Ross wrote an article in the *Houston Chronicle* and we’ve borrowed some of his views:

“We don’t really need weather vanes the way our ancestors did in the day before round-the-clock weather forecasts. Yet while meteorology may be more reliable now, technology can’t replace the subtle pleasure of watching a weather vane ‘take the breeze’.

“Every civilization has had a keen interest in knowing which way the wind blows. The changing wind announces the arrival of fair weather and foul, influencing the decisions of farmers, fishers, travelers and tradespeople. Weather vanes are extremely practical but they are not purely utilitarian. They have always been artful expressions of the style and substance of the people whose roofs they adorn.”

So, for us, it’s a Viking Ship!

Let There Be Grass

Just a week before the opening of the Museum, Ralph Petersen and Earl Fisher (the Grass Company) donated a very appreciated full truck load of San Augustine grass planted. A big **THANK YOU FOR THE GRASS!** The Danevang Volunteer Fire Department took this opportunity to return a favor. During the museum construction our framing subcontractor, Ebenezer Construction, unloaded a large new fire water tank. So when we needed the initial water for the grass, the Fire Department and Lawrence Petersen with one of his portable water tanks responded with 1300 gallons. Then Irvin Wind, James Petersen (our new Property Chairman) and Carl Larsen kept the grass watered until it “took hold”. These troops may be called on many more times if we ever get dry weather. Mickey Christensen, James Petersen and Merle Jensen (who drives in from the Houston area) do a super job of mowing and trimming. Our entire grounds look so neat, just like the Danes do it!

A Glimpse Into The Museum

From time to time in your Newsletter we plan to tell the stories behind certain artifacts being displayed or used in the Museum. In this issue we are featuring two items.

First, we need to tell the story of the stairs leading up to the library/work room area. Surrounded by otherwise new construction, you might not have noticed the old well-worn stairs. Their story goes back to the colorful person in Wharton and Matagorda history known as Shanghai Pierce. Pierce was the the owner of the enormous ranch of over 250,000 acres east of Danevang. When the New York, Texas and Mexican Railroad (dubbed the Macaroni Line because of the more than 600 Italian laborers on the Rosenberg to Victoria section) wanted to run their line through the northern portion of Pierce's ranch, part of his deal was to include a stop which he insisted , to no one's surprise, be named Pierce's Junction (now simply Pierce, 3 miles east of El Campo). Anticipating a thriving center of commerce, and maybe even the county seat, Pierce, in 1894, built a lovely Victorian hotel. Yes, the hotel was built in the same year Danevang was settled. Over the years the hotel was used sporadically by cattle buyers and traveling salesmen. In later years the hotel fell into disuse and was demolished in 1980. Certain fixtures and architectural features of the hotel were sold. Danish Heritage Society member James Petersen felt a certain attraction to the old stairs in the hotel. Not knowing what he would ever do with it, James dismantled the stair case and stored it in his attic. When the plans for the museum included a second-floor work room and library, James, in his quiet manner, mentioned that,stored in his attic was a staircase of some interest to the history of the area.

The reason the museum stair is called the Pierce/Harton stair is that the landing flooring and the railing at the lower landing are from the Carl Harton House. The Harton's were married in 1899 and came to Danevang in 1918. Their progeny included Dora Harton Wind, Anna Harton Fler, Bill, Dolla, Einer, Otto & Walter Harton and Marie Harton Swendsen. Grandchildren are too numerous to start listing but it is interesting to note that 3 of those grandchildren, Irvin, Carl Lester and Ellis Wind are current members of the Society Board.

An explanation of the stair's history is posted on the stairs and evokes many thoughts when it says, "Think of all the trips up and down these stairs by cowboys, traveling salesmen, grandparents, children and grandchildren!"

Another interesting tidbit is pointed out on the "history card". During reconstruction of the stairs, it was noted that on the reverse side of one of the steps, the nephew of Shanghai Pierce, Abel Pierce Borden had affixed his "autograph". Borden was responsible for the early importation of Brahma cattle to this country from India.

Ellen Strarup was always considered one of the sweetest ladies in the Danevang community. However, attending the meetings of the Danish Ladies Aid was one activity that never caught her fancy. When the members of the Ladies Aid were to raffle off their hand-made quilt to raise funds for the church and for mission projects, Anton and Ellen Strarup were enthusiastic supporters and willingly bought raffle tickets. Much to her surprise Ellen was the winner of the quilt raffle.

Perhaps it was because Ellen felt a little guilty that she had won the quilt she didn't help sew or perhaps it was that the quilt was being saved for a special occasion that never seemed to occur. Never-the-less, the Ladies Aid quilt was carefully packed

away.

Frances Strarup Reece was the next generation who carefully cared for the quilt waiting for that special time when it was to be used. Now all who visit the Danish Heritage Museum can appreciate the hours of hard work put into that pink, blue and yellow quilt hanging high to the right of the second floor wall as you enter the Museum. The "special time" has come!

So to James and Frances, "Mange Tak!" for these gifts and the stories that go with them.

Future Temporary Exhibits

Much of your Heritage Museum will have permanent exhibits reflecting the history and growth of the Danevang Community, however, we plan to keep visits to the Museum fresh and interesting by having rotating exhibits every few months.

Our first such exhibit "October 1943: The Rescue of the Danish Jews from Annihilation" by the Resistance Museum in Copenhagen on loan from the Danish Immigrant Museum in Elk Horn, Iowa, has been a great success! Groups from Wharton, Bay City, Palacios, and two groups from Houston will have made special trips to view this exhibition before it is returned on August 16.

The next traveling exhibit sponsored by the Nordic Council of Ministers (The Prime Ministers of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) is entitled "Scandinavian Roots/American Lives; Scandinavian Emigration to North America". The exhibit will open with a reception sponsored by the Royal Danish Consulate/Houston on the evening of August 18th. The emigration exhibit will continue into the Fall. It will be followed by a colorful exhibit of posters from the children's story book The Yellow Star. This book for young children carries the message of brotherhood and sisterhood for all peoples. It is based on the heroism of the Danes protecting their Jewish citizens during WWII. We already have one tour group of children ready to view this exhibit.

In the late Fall (perhaps by St. Morten's Day, November 11) vintage (WWI or before) Christmas cards and post cards will be featured in the winter exhibit. The Museum has some cards already, but if you have cards you are willing to donate or loan to the Museum, please contact Bridget Jensen 3030 Reba Dr. Houston TX 77019 or 713-524-2328.

Word was circulated at the Museum Opening that at least once a year we would like to feature one of the early Danish families and their history to the present time. Such an exhibit would be developed by the extended families themselves with the cooperation of the Museum. It might include loaned or donated furniture, heirlooms, pictures, etc. We are pleased to announce that the first group (the combined families of Carl and Peter Harton) has committed for an exhibit next May, June and July. As you other families decide please contact our new Museum Chairman, Lawrence Petersen at 979-543-3005. Such an exhibit could take more than a year to plan and to present the material so we encourage groups to start planning now and reserve space! Your exhibit can be a "drawing card" for your family reunion. Surely family ties will be strengthened plus fellowship and a sense of accomplishment will result from honoring those who brought us to this great land.

Museum Schedule

Until we get our volunteers organized the Museum will be open every Sunday from 1 until 4 pm and by special arrangements for groups of 8 or more. If you know any groups who will want to have a tour of the museum, special arrangements can be made by contacting the following:

From Houston area, contact Al or Bridget Jensen
713-524-2328

From Austin area, contact Sherry Green
512-346-9717

From San Antonio area, contact Homer Smith
210-558-6865

All others, contact Elsie Christensen
979-543-2106

It's your museum and we're trying to make it accessible to all kinds of visitors.
We have a story to tell!

MAILING LIST S. O. S.

We're making a real effort to get our mailing list in order. If there's anything on your address that needs changing, including a new address to which mail is being forwarded, please mail us the correction.