

DANISH HERITAGE PRESERVATION SOCIETY
P.O. BOX 386
DANEVANG, TEXAS 77432-0386
(The Danish Capital of Texas)

GRUNDLOV DAG FEST

The annual Grundlov Dag Festival be held on 5 June, Danish Constitution Day. This will mark the 150th anniversary of the Danish Constitution.

The annual meeting of the Danish Heritage Preservation Society of Danevang will begin at two P.M. In the Danevang Lutheran Church. The Danish Consul of Houston, Ray Daugbjerg, will bring greetings from Denmark to open the meeting. A separate sheet is included in this newsletter for your information. Please note that advance reservations for the meals to be served need to be made so that we can plan properly.

The meeting will be held in the church beginning at 2:00 P.M. on 5 June. As in the past we will hold an election to fill the vacancies created by the expiration of the terms of five Directors and the resignation of a sixth Director. Recommendations will be available for those slots. We would also like for any member to feel free to nominate another member to run for the Board of Directors or volunteer to run himself or herself. If you wish to nominate someone or yourself, please contact-

Mrs. Helena Lauritsen
HCR 62, Box 3
Danevang, Tx 77432
(Tel: (409) 543-2052)

by not later than 29 May 1999)

After the meeting adjourns we will move to the Community Hall stopping enroute at the Pioneer Monument to pay tribute to those who have left us.

Coffee and aebleskiver will be served at 3 P.M. and at 3:30 Mr. George Sellnau of Houston will address us. The Pioneer House will be open from 4:00 to 6:00 P. M.

There will be games for children throughout the hours of the meeting and for adults (horseshoes) in the late afternoon.

Dinner will be served at six P.M. and dancing will begin at 7:30.

SUCCESSFUL QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

Although it was the day after her majesty, Queen Margrethe II's birthday, Danes and Danish descendants celebrated the event on April 16th in Danevang, the Danish Capital of Texas.

The Danish Club of Houston was well represented by several families. The formal program began around the flag poles and Settlers' Monument. Homer Smith, President of the Society's Board of Directors, gave the welcome. Niels Kastrup, Vice President of the Houston Club gave a response and a tribute to the Queen. Danish Consul, Ray Daugbjerg, introduced the newly named Vice Consul for the area, Anna Thomsen, and the office Administrator, Heather Schmidt. Ray and Anna gave a repeat performance of a bit they had done for international TV programming, "Ten Things I Bet You Didn't Know About Denmark". With a rousing singing of "Der er et yndigt Land" (There Is a lovely Land) and the waving of hand held Danish flags by all the group entered the Community Hall for the noon meal. At the conclusion of the meal the toast to the Queen was proposed and the anthem "Kong Christian stod ved hoejen mast", (King Christian Stood by the Lofty Mast) was sung.

In the forenoon part of the group bicycled in the countryside of Danevang which another spirited group participated in the horse shoe tournament and others were entertained at card or domino games while children's crafts were led by Annette Waidman.

During the meal our professional disc jockey, Jack De La Grange, husband of Inga, played Danish recordings, both old and new. In the afternoon he played dance music. The country westerns were the favorites. The delicacy of the afternoon was the service of Danish aebleskiver prepared by Jette Buhl Smith. The more energetic of the group engaged in a lively volley ball game.

By day's end both Danes from Houston and Danevang had experienced a meaningful day of celebration and fellowship. Let's do it again!

MAY 10TH WAS A "MIXER DAY"

The Danish Heritage Preservation Society of Danevang became a member of the local Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture in El Campo, Texas recently.

The Westerholm brothers, Leo, Harvey and Kermit and their wives were greeters for the open house that was hosted in the Community Hall on Monday, May 10th from 5 to 7 P.M. Chloe and Clarissa Christensen were dressed in Danish costumes similar to the original costumes first introduced about 1956 when the girls' 4-H Club did Danish Folk Dancing. They assisted at the registration table.

Alvin Jensen made a three foot model of the planned museum complex which displayed in the Hall. It is a most impressive model of the proposed structure shown in the "Little Bit of Texas" brochure.

The refreshment table was highlighted with a large swan, Denmark's National Bird, that was made by Carl Larsen and painted by Ruth Bradley. The swan rested in a base of sheer material red geraniums and other greenery.

A wine and Danish cheese table was arranged on the side with a background of ferns, geraniums and the 1950's stage curtain with its many local businesses and community names..

At vantage points in the hall many historical items had been placed. They included a lot of hand made items such as bell pulls, framed pictures and table cloths, items used for cooking were included and many decorative

pieces of china graced one table. We are grateful to Jetta Westerholm Jette Smith for these displays.

The refreshment table was covered with typical Danish open-face sandwiches of the pioneer days and included pastries such as coffee cakes, turnovers and an assortment of cookies, pickles and dips. Coffee and punch were also served.

It was a typical Texas day of unexpected showers and inclement weather but the American and Danish flags flew, the Pioneer House was open to the public and the site for the Danish Culture Center was staked off.

It was a good day for those in attendance and presented a good example of the pioneering spirit that remains so prevalent and is so necessary for the success of the ongoing efforts.

STUDENT RESEARCH FOR EDUCATION

Elaine Wind and Elsie Christensen appreciate the interest Tanya Immaraj brought from Katy, Texas where Tanya is a seventh grade student. Tanya asked well-formulated questions that made it easy for us to give her information.

Tanya came with her parents and brother. Their support was quite evident since they joined Tanya with questions of their own. Tanya called us later to say her studies required that she make an oral report and she qualified for a grade of 100!

We welcome Tanya and her family as new members of the Danish Heritage Preservation Society. They were grateful when Elaine shared a bag of Danish Pebernodder when they inquired about foods.

Tanya gave us a beautiful collage that was in full bloom so we took it to the church to share it with others who have helped to produce the history of over one hundred years.

My observation is that none of us is an island unto ourselves but when we reach out with spirit, teamwork and cooperation we can do good things. The Immaraj family came to America from southern India. They expressed their appreciation for the many cultures about which to learn in this country.

What better feedback to the questions today with regards to the recent Colorado incident.? Support the children. Build healthy youth and healthy communities.

Elsie Christnsen

DANEVANG, TEXAS

Thomas P. Christensen

The history of the Danes in Texas occupies but a small place in the history of the Danes of the United States. Texas, however, is, in an interesting way, connected with the beginning of Danish immigration to the United States and it has the larger settlement in the whole South.

The first permanent Danish settlement in the United States was founded near Hartland, Wisconsin, in 1845. But before that time a company of Danes had evidently planned to settle in the Lone Star Republic. These emigrants sailed from Aarhus, Denmark, in 1838, on a ship which they had purchased themselves, bearing the German name "Die Elbe" (the Elbe). The immigrants consisted of several families, destined, it seems, for "somewhere" in Texas, possibly Matagorda Bay. The voyage was an Odyssey of woes. In the Bay of Biscay, Die Elbe sprang a leak and had to put into a Spanish port. There the passengers had difficulties because of a revolution then raging in that distracted country. With the assistance of the Danish Consul in the port, the aid of the home government was invoked and the emigrants returned, much disappointed no doubt, for not having effected the purpose of the voyage.

During the following decades individual Danish immigrants are mentioned not infrequently as trying their luck in Texas as planters, business men and in other capacities. But no attempt at

settlements appear to have been made until in the middle nineties when other Scandinavians - Swedes and Norwegians also sought and found homes on the fruitful plains of Texas.

At that time the Danish Lutherans in the United States split into two factions, the Grundtvigians and the Inner Mission people, which organized separate associations or synods. Both were straining their efforts to win adherents and to organize and consolidate their interests. In this, a favorite method was to collect their followers in rural settlements

mostly in the northern western states. But only the Grundtvigians turned toward Texas.

The leader of the Grundtvigians in the United States from 1883 to 1900 was Reverend F. L. Grundtvig, son of Bishop Grundtvig. After his graduation from the University of Copenhagen he married and the newlyweds went to spend their honeymoon to the wild woods of Wisconsin. There Grundtvig became interested in the spiritual welfare of his immigrated countrymen and resolved to do what he could to raise the spiritual level of their lives. Becoming a minister seemed the best way of doing this. But as he had not studied theology at the university, he had to go through a brief theological course before he could accept the call from the Danish congregation in Clinton, Tenn., where he remained during the following seventeen years, preaching, writing, lecturing and entertaining friends in his hospitable home.

Grundtvig imbued the Danish immigrants with a stronger desire to perpetuate and develop not only their religious life but also their social (folkelige) life so far as that would harmonize with the duties of American citizenship. Such a religious-social program Grundtvig proposed to realize through the church and through the Danish People's Society (Dansk Folkesamfund) which he and his friends organized in 1887.

The People's Society and the Grundtvigian Church (also called for short the Danish Church) both established settlements, and the first venture of the People's Society was Danevang (meaning Danish field), Wharton County, Texas, though Grundtvig at first personally disliked the idea of going to Texas but other influences prevailed. The land committee (Landudvalget) of the People's Society was authorized to investigate Texas land in 1894. They looked over the country near Port Lavaca, but feared it was too dry and sandy, though the coastline had "the most beautiful beach like the shores of Denmark". In the neighborhood of El Campo, Wharton County, they found a different country with small creeks and grass so tall that it touched the bottom of the wagon box. About 35,000 steers were grazing there, all sleek and fat. The members of the committee concluded that this would be suitable land for Danish farmers. Accordingly, an option was obtained from the Texas Land and Cattle Company on 25000

acres to be sold to Danes during the next three years. Before the close of the year 1895, ninety-three Danes had purchased 9,000 acres. Not all of the 25,000 were sold to Danes but practically none but Danes have settled in the Danevang settlement.

Already in 1894 settlers began to move in. Among the first were S. P. Larsen, Christian Rasmussen, C. Madsen, Niels Hansen, N. C. Krag, N. Thomsen, L. J. Lykke, Mads Andersen, J. P. Olson, C. A. Nygaard, John Treument, Soren Christensen, Iver Vind, Peter Ravn, Hans Nygaard, Theodor Andersen, H. B. Hermansen, H. J. Rasmussen, Helvig Berndt, Kresten Pedersen, Peter Pedersen and Jorgen Jorgensen. Some were bachelors but most were married. Originally most of these people had come from Slesvig, the southern part of Jutland and the Danish islands Funen (Fyn) and Seeland (Sjaelland), but nearly all parts of Denmark were represented. This made it necessary for the settlers to use, to a great extent, the national Danish as a community language in addition to their dialects. Most of them did not come directly from Denmark but from the northern states, especially Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska and Kansas where they had learned English before their coming to Texas.

Pioneering in Danevang was a severe test of the survival qualities of Danish character. Being unacquainted with southern crops and their cultivation the settlers first tried to produce mainly northern crops. Unsuccessful in this, fodder for horses and cattle had to be shipped into the settlement and the consequent scarcity was one of the causes resulting in the loss of some of the stock which the settlers had brought with them. Another cause is said to have been the climate. Practically nothing was raised the first two years and little the third. In 1897 an epidemic among the horses killed off about seventy animals. Then there were rains, storms and floods.

Finally the Danevang farmers turned to the production of cotton with good results so far as the yield was concerned but the price was sometimes as low as four cents a pound.

In those trying days the strong group sense

of the people was a source of strength and comfort. They felt, as one of them later wrote, "as one big family far away from home", and the lean years (fattige tider) left in spite of all "bring and beautiful memories" of mutual aid and encouragement. This impressed itself so deeply upon the settlers that some of them have later doubted whether the so-called good times are really preferable to the hard times if prosperity makes people self-sufficing and averse to congenial social intercourse.

During the hard times the payments due on the land could not be met. The banking firm which held the contracts sent a representative to look over the settlement. He was so favorably impressed with the thrift and industry of the Danish farmers that they had no difficulty in obtaining extensions on the payments. When this representative was asked by an outside why he didn't drive the defaulting settlers away he replied that he would not kill the goose which in time would lay golden eggs. His prediction proved correct. The Danevang settlement prospered after the few terrible pioneer years and became a synonym for what great things could be done even by northern people on southern land. Danish dairy farmers in time because successful cotton farmers and better cotton prices brought the deserved economic reward. (To be continued)

Editor's Note -Thomas P. Christensen's article is in Southwestern Historical Quarterly, Austin, TX, in volume 32 dated July 1928. Mr. Christensen was a man interested in history of the Danish people in the United States. This article refers to the Danish immigration and on page 67 of the above mentioned Quarterly, Mr. Christensen has written about the Danevang community.

He has never been a resident of Danevang and to my knowledge never visited Danevang. His story is taken from articles written by P. J. A. Petersen in the Danish newspaper Dannevirke published in Cedar Falls, Iowa. P.J.A Petersen wrote several news items yearly about Danevang also several historical reports.

V.A.P.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Please enroll me as a member of the DANISH HERITAGE PRESERVATION SOCIETY of DANEVANG, TEXAS.

GENERAL **MEMBERSHIP** \$10.00

I would like to support the Danish Heritage Society of Danevang with an additional contribution of \$

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP CODE _____

Send membership dues and/or contributions to O. V. Christensen, Treasurer, Danish Heritage Preservation Society, P. C Danevang, TX 77432.03 86. Dues and contributions are deductible for income tax purposes.