



Summer 2003
Newsletter
Danish Heritage Preservation Society
P.O. Box 386
Danevang, TX 77432-0386



Photo by Helena Lauritsen

Myrtle Waldman Honored at Grundlovsdag Fest, June 7, 2003

Myrtle is shown here with a part of her family
(left to right) daughter Dorothy McConachie, daughter Annette Waldman,
grand-daughter Milissa Vogan, (with since-born Becca Lynn), grandson-in-law Mark Vogan

As a tribute to her mother, from the Danevang Community, Dorothy read selected passages from a booklet, *Recollections of Myrtle Hansen Waldman*, compiled in November, 2002 by another of Myrtle's daughters, Beverly Waldman Burmeier. Myrtle will be 90 years young this November so she has many interesting "recollections" as the youngest of the 9 children of Niels and Emma Hansen, who were among the first settlers (on 40 acres) in Danevang. It was fortunate that Myrtle's "girls" enticed her to start talking about the "old days" and it is equally fortunate that two of her daughters are professional writers. Annette may be a writer, too, but she's entirely too busy with her Girl Scouts. And she has been a faithful every-day care-giver to her mother.

The tribute was made more complete by the presence of the Vogans and the "Vogan-to-be" after a 2-year stint with the Christian organization, "Young Life", in the southern part of what once was Russia.

Also, as part of the tribute, Annette O'Driscoll, the Danish songstress, sang Myrtle's favorite song, "Evening Star". (see a related story on pg. 3 in this newsletter about Annette.) It was a wonderful part of the day's celebration!

Newsletter

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And is available through Annual
Membership, June to June

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

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EX OFFICIO

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Funding Kermit Westerholm
Gift Shop Elaine Wind
Museum Lawrence Petersen
Newsletter Al Jensen
Publicity Elsie Christensen

Board and Office Changes Made At Annual Meeting – June 7, 2003

Marilyn Chappell and Elvin Berndt were added to the DHPS Board to serve until June 2006 with reelected incumbents Mickey Christensen, James Petersen, Lawrence Petersen and Ellis Wind. Gerda Thyssen Stuart, incumbent eligible for reelection, chose not to run for personal reasons. Gerda was thanked for her years of faithful service.

Marilyn has served many, many volunteer hours working with our “clothing collection” and along with her daughter, Martha, has worked diligently on our museum’s book collection. Martha also has spent many hours at the museum. She is the librarian at El Campo High School, and has her Master’s Degree in Library Science, so we are very fortunate to have this “team” which has spent a good part of “summer vacation” at the museum.

Elvin Berndt, long-time Danevang farmer and son of Andrew and Emma Berndt, provided the majority of the funds for the “Historic Danevang” highway sign and has furnished many Berndt artifacts for the Museum. If you haven’t seen Andrew and Emma’s matching black bathing suits in the Museum, you’ve really missed a “treat”.

At the Annual Meeting there was the creation of a title of Chairman Emeritus. This title was bestowed on our founding Chairman, Mickey Christensen and on our immediate past Chairman, Homer Smith. Mickey and Homer provided valued leadership to the Society in its formative years. The Membership in attendance showed their thanks by a rousing applause honoring both gentlemen who continue to provide leadership as Board Members.

Irvin Wind was elected to serve in the dual role of President AND Chairman, providing important “Danevang-based” leadership.

Committees are listed just to the left and all you need to do to serve on one or more of these committees is to call the committee chairs and VOLUNTEER!



Photo by Helena Lauritsen

**Annette O'Driscoll (Danish Ballad Singer)
With David Henry, back-up from Houston
Performed June 7, 2003
At Grundlovsdag Fest**

Thanks to the efforts of Jette Buhl Smith, we were able to enjoy the delightful singing by Annette of some of the songs she composed. Annette is very Danish, but married an Irishman which explains her non-Danish name. While she was in the United States, Annette performed in Houston at the Danish Club's Grundlovsdag celebration and in San Antonio at the FolkLife Festival. The Houston Club arranged for David as "back-up" at their function and they worked so well together that Danevang made similar "arrangements". This has now encouraged the two to collaborate on an English-language CD. We'll keep you posted on the progress of this effort.

Niels and Emma Hansen Museum Exhibit

Coinciding with honoring of Myrtle (Hansen) Waldman your Museum has as its current "Family Exhibit" one honoring the "Niels and Emma Hansen Family", which includes "daughter Myrtle". The Family Tree researched and displayed by Irvin Wind (husband of Elaine Hansen, one of Niels' and Emma's many grandchildren) is a fascinating "road map" of the relationships of many of the Danevang families including Allensons, Schulzes, Engelkings, Kidwells, Dannas, Berndts, Srallas, Waldmans, McGaugh's, McConachies, Winds, and, of course Hansens, and others we've failed to recognize.. Anyway, the entire exhibit is quite a show in itself.

Myrtle is one of 4 senior "Danevang ladies" all about the same age (shall I say it---well 90's). One of these fine ladies is one of the aforementioned "Hansens", Myrtle's sister-in-law, Zella Hansen, long-time school teacher in Danevang.



Each Hurricane Season, Danevang Remembers 1945

This is what St. Ansgar Lutheran Church looked like prior to August 27, 1945.

During the days of August 26 and 27, it was obvious that a hurricane was “coming our way”. Winds and rain picked up and shortly before midnight the center of the eye of the hurricane passed just to the east of Danevang. By daybreak the storm had passed and people started to assess damage. Imagine the shock when people looked in the direction of the church and realized that the building was no longer there.

The winds had been strong, but no one imagined that they could have destroyed the fine, old, beloved church building completed in 1909.

(Any idea who these four well-behaved youngsters might be?)

Well, this is what people saw as they ventured out on August 28, 1945, to investigate the hurricane damage.

The steeple and bell tower were gone! The remainder of the building except for the altar, altar rail and altar painting lay in scattered heaps! BUT, there was an eerie situation---the silver, long-stemmed, communion goblets which had been brought over from Denmark were sitting on the altar in their upright positions, unmoved by the tremendous force of the winds that had destroyed the building!

The Community House had been moved approximately 30 feet off its foundations. Crops were devastated. Every house in the community had damage.

So, it's understandable that Danevang folk think about 1945 each hurricane season!

But, the community rebounded from this, the latest of "obstacles" in the path of the continuation of the little "Danish Colony" on the Gulf Plains of Texas. The sequel to the drama of August 27, 1945, was that World War II had ended and the U.S. Army elected to decommission Camp Hulen, in Palacios, approximately 30 miles south of Danevang. This meant that there were surplus buildings for sale, cheap. One of these buildings was the Chapel. The congregation in Danevang jumped at the opportunity. Well, it wasn't an immediate reaction because of the desire of some of the members who wanted to build a stone church near the highway (where the Museum is now located). Then there was the slow, bureaucratic progress to deal with, but the congregation did buy the former Chapel, dismantled it, and moved it. Records indicate that the building was purchased for \$1,500. It cost \$5,900 to dismantle, move it and re-erect, plus an additional \$2,170 to complete the work for the new church building, dedicated in 1947.

Elsie Christensen does an excellent job of giving Museum tour groups the story of the non-denominational Army Chapel recycled as the Danevang Church. Also, the Museum has as one of its exhibits an abbreviated version of last year's Hurricane Exhibit. Make an effort to see it!



Among other things, learn the names of storms in any given year. By the way, in 1945, storms were not named yet. So "our" hurricane was simply #5. Starting in 1953, hurricanes were given female names, alphabetically. This continued until 1979, when storm names alternated between male and female. Names are selected for 6-year cycles, i.e. names repeat every 6 years (unless a name is "retired" because of severity). This July, we had a visit from "Claudette". Let's hope we don't hear from Danny, Erika, Fabian, Grace, Henri, Isabel or Juan!

Writings from the Past- -F.P.J. Lund

(continued from last issue)

This is a translation by the late Verner Petersen of Lund's 3-part article "The Danish Colony in Texas" in the April, 1912 issues of *Times Weekly* published by J.C. Christensen. Lund sets forth some of the history of the colony, Danevang, first of many to be later founded (more successfully) in this new land by the Dansk Folk Samfund. Lund continues:

"In 1896 the Danish Folk Society (DFS) constructed, on land owned by the DFS, a large meeting house for the use of the colonists. This had to serve as church, school and assembly hall until the congregation became strong enough in 1908 to build their own church.

The DFS sent L. Henningsen down as the Colony's first pastor. For several years the Society paid \$100 annually out of the commission from the sale of land to help defray the pastor's salary. Later, DFS paid the expenses of the Church Synod President for a visit to the colony.

During the period of the first 3 years approximately 13,000 acres of land were sold. At the present there are more than 80 families.

In 1906, the DFS donated 20 acres of timberland on the Tres Palacios Creek (in the easterly part of the Colony) to be used as picnic grounds and they donated the land on which the meeting house had been built.

The congregation now owns 45 acres in the center of the Colony, including a sizable parsonage, a cozy, comfortable church, meeting house and cemetery, besides the 20 acres of timberland for picnics. The parsonage and church were financed by voluntary contributions and there are no debts against them. Yes, we also could afford to purchase a beautiful altar table from Denmark and a copy of Dalsgaard's painting (entitled "Ansgar

Baptizing a Young Woman and Her Child") which hangs in Vallekilde High School. This copy is painted by a son of Ernest Trier. The frame and altar itself is made by a "Sonderjudsk" craftsman, Jes Schmidt, who lives in one of the Northern States.

Now about the New Colonists' lives: For the most part these people had their eyes open for what the spiritual interest could mean to them and they were hoping that conditions in the first DFS colony should be especially favorable towards the preservation of the ancestral language and faith, so the rising generation can follow in the ancestral path.

The new colonists in Danevang came from different places in the Union, from the Central States (Minnesota, the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, Kansas), from the Remote Western (California) and from the East (Connecticut) and a few came later directly from Denmark.

It became hard times for new settlers. Most of them had only enough finances to pay the first installment and few had very little for necessary buildings. Income was almost none for the first year.

The reason for the difficulties that made it so hard for the colonists' first years was because people came to the South with the thought they could cultivate the same products and work the soil in the same manner as they did in the northern states.

In the beginning they did not want to grow cotton. This idea proved in the mean time impractical. The soil had to be cultivated several years (at least two) before it could be adapted to grain, while cotton and other products could have given a fair yield at once. A few did plant some cotton on a small scale, but did not know the proper methods to grow this crop.

Since these people were intelligent it did not take many years for cotton to become a pattern for the surrounding area.

Several catastrophes hit the colony these first years. All the land near the Gulf of Mexico is very flat and the rivers and creeks have only a few feet of fall per mile. Midfield, Danevang's nearest railroad station is only 50 feet above sea level, and is only about 8 miles from the mouth of the Tres Palacios Creek. Danevang is a few feet higher than Midfield and the colony's center is 7 miles north of that town. This gives an average of about 8_ feet per mile and is sufficient to provide good drainage of the land. When the Danevang Colony started, almost the entire surrounding area was cattle range and in order to provide enough water for these thousands of cattle that ranged the prairie, large dams had been made across several of these streams in order to hold drinking water for their cattle. These dams had not been removed when the colony was established which often resulted in severe flooding of the cropland several times until these dams were removed and several more small ditches were built.

At this point the translator, Verner Petersen, added quite a bit of "editorial comment" to the effect of "lecturing" the County Commissioners about common sense handling of ditches, bridges and culverts and to be aware of the fact that "drainage is still a vital problem".

Lund continues:

"In 1895, an epidemic of anthrax spread among the horses, mules and cattle. Many animals died from this illness and caused a serious loss to the colonists.

In June, 1899, a large portion of Texas was hit by a severe storm cloud. Danevang was in the southwesterly corner of the cloud that burst and produced 14 inches of rain. Much of the cotton in the lower areas was lost.

In September, 1900, a West Indies hurricane hit the colony. This storm is connected with the unusually severe tidal wave that destroyed a large part of the city of Galveston that lies on the Gulf about 85 miles

east of Danevang. More than 7000 people lost their lives. In Danevang a barn was blown down, but no lives or residences were lost. However, most of the cotton was destroyed!

These unfortunate occurrences, together with several years of low cotton prices made it impossible for the colonists to fulfill their obligations with respect to payment on the land when due, but the land owners (the sellers), Kountze Brothers, rich bankers from Omaha and New York gave prompt extensions to the colonists ranging from 2 to 4 years. The interest was added to the principal and a new contract was entered into on the land. One of the original land owners visited the colony several times, observing that the Danish people were thrifty people and were trying very hard to till the soil by their best efforts and means. He promptly extended the payments as arranged. Once he was asked by an "American", "Why don't you foreclose on all the property when they are not able to pay?" He answered, "Why would I kill the goose that will lay golden eggs for me?" With this he meant that the Danes were energetic and capable farmers and their future would be the best asset to enable him to sell the balance of land he owned in the vicinity of Danevang. The facts have proven him to be right!

The results that the Danes had achieved became one of the most important factors in the sale of the remaining land. Even until this day, land agents tour Danevang with their "land seekers" who are quickly convinced that it is practicable here in this vicinity to create one of the most fruitful agriculturist districts in the United States, and thereafter it was easy to sell land.

Again, in 1909, the colony was hit by a West Indies hurricane that almost completely destroyed the crops and many of the poorly-constructed homes. The colony is now so prosperous that the damage from this 1909 event is not even noticed!"

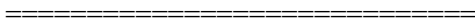
(Lund's 1912 comments to be concluded in the next issue)



The Last Confirmation Class in the “Old Church”

(Can you identify the members of this class?)

Answers are elsewhere in this newsletter



Are You Ready for Christmas ? (Probably Not)

Our Museum’s Merchandising Madam, sometimes called “The Gift Shop Lady”, Elaine Wind, and her “Jolly Helpers” are hard at work for our Society’s participation in El Campo’s **Christmas Mall**. The event will be held in the **El Campo Civic Center, on Saturday Dec. 6 (10am to 5pm) & Sunday Dec 7 (11am to 4pm)**.

This will be a fund-raising opportunity for our Museum through the sale of baked goods (Elaine has jars for your “pebbnødder”), hand-crafts, including Christmas decorations, plus any items, handmade or otherwise, that people will want to buy for Christmas gifting. If you have any general items suitable for sale as gifts (they do not have to be Danish in nature) or if you are willing to donate baked goods, preserves, etc. please contact Elaine at **979-543-332** or at **irrwind@wccenet.net** Also, if you are able to work a shift at the booth, Elaine wants to hear from you!

The event is sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce and to cover their costs of rental, advertising, etc. they have set entrance fees of \$2 per adult and \$1 per child over 2. The Chamber is expecting between 1500 and 2000 people, so this could be a “fun” event!!

Please help our eager crew by volunteering time, talents and “things”. And “Mange Tak” to all who have already agreed to help in this endeavor!

Memorials, etc.

Your Board has deemed that all monies donated in the memory of or in honor of individuals shall go into the Society's Endowment Fund and the interest off those funds will go toward operating expenses of the Museum. In this way, the donated funds continue to "live"!

This being grain harvesting time our Treasurer is putting in a lot of hours at the grain storage facility, so, understandably, we'll just have to wait until next issue to get an update of these donations. Therefore, we'll play "catch-up" and we'll be able to recognize new donations in detail in the next issue. Go ahead and send them in, now.

We're Not By Ourselves !

Being down here out of the Danish-American "mainstream", it is easy to lose sight of all the "Danish Heritage Preservation" going on in the rest of the country.

Yes, in earlier issues we have mentioned the fine work being done by the Danish American Heritage Society which had its beginnings in the Pacific Northwest, but now is being run out of Ames, Iowa, and Grandview College in Des Moines, Iowa. James Iverson, who, with his wife, visited Danevang several years ago as our own Society was just getting started, has just assumed the presidency of its 11 person board. The Society publishes semi-annually a newsletter and a wonderful booklet of around 100 pages, *The Bridge*, and, guess what? The editor is a **Texan**, Peter Petersen, recently retired from the faculty at West Texas A&M University in Canyon. Let's show support!

Membership Levels are:

General	\$20
Associate	\$50
Patron	\$100

Mail to :

Danish American Heritage Society
c/o Grand View College
Third Floor West Old Main
1200 Grandview Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50316-1599

Of interest is the fact that the **first** issue of *The Bridge*, 25 years ago had an article about Danevang! We have all 50 issues in our Museum Library. We must quote from their statement of purpose, because it also speaks to those of us in the "Danevang Society": **"Many Americans are becoming aware of a desire to perpetuate their cultural heritage. Although some early immigrants wanted to blend into American society and did not emphasize their cultural traditions, succeeding generations of Americans of Danish and other descent have discovered an interest in their intellectual, cultural, and social heritage."**

The DAHS has 4 sites on the Web listing "Danish organizations and Events".all over the U.S. The site addresses are identical except for the "alphabetical" choices which give you the listing by states.

Try www.gvc.edu/dahs/addresses_a_d.html
and www.gvc.edu/dahs/addresses_f_l_m_n_o_z.html

We think you'll be amazed at the length of these listings! While you're at your computer, be sure to go to the Danish Club of Houston whose site is www.dkhouston.org

Check out some of the links including the one for the *Danish Pioneer*, the oldest Danish-American paper in the U.S. (\$35/year, 26 issues). Also, we have a great working relationship with the Danish Immigrant Museum. Their site is www.dkmuseum.org Check out their "links".

If you're interested in meeting Danish-Americans, we commend three "events"; the Fastrup-Mortensen lectures in Solvang in February; the Danish Cultural Conference just outside Portland, Oregon in June and the Dannebod Folk Meeting in Tyler, Minnesota in August. Ask the "editor" (713-524-2328) if you want more info.

Carolyn and Kermit Westerholm and Jette and Homer Smith attended an "Immigration Conference" in Omaha last October. We'll keep you posted on the schedule for the next conference.



Photo by Janet Born

Elaine Wind and Elsie Christensen With A Choir (the Byrd Ensemble)
 From St. Morten's Church, Randers, Jutland, Denmark
 Directed by Ulrik Damm, (upper right)

Elsie couldn't help but get "chummy" with Jimmy because he was another **Christensen!**
 Ulrik has been in this country before, but this was the first experience for the rest, AND
 they just HAD to see the museum!

The group sang in several venues in Houston, Victoria, & the Dallas Area



One of many visiting families from Denmark (and they all use our map to show us their home!!)

This is the Stig Larsen Family from Sæby, North Jutland.

Recent tour bus groups (of Texans) have included 2 groups from the NASA area, the "Bay Area Sunshine Seniors" plus a bus load of "Happy 55'ers" and from southwest Houston a group from College Park Baptist Church.

ETC.

While we're directing you to other sites and publications, we just have to tout a wonderful little monthly 16 page "newsletter", *Church and Life* which has a little about the churches in the "Danish" areas in the U.S., but, mostly, it's about "Danish-American LIFE". The editor of this newsletter is one of the finest elderly "gentle men" you can imagine. It's an inspiration to realize his many years of dedication to keeping alive our heritage! Thorvald Hansen, we salute you for your efforts!

So, one way you can help yourself and salute Thorvald is to subscribe. Give it a try for a year. Subscription rate is a very reasonable \$15/year. Send it to: Hazel Serritslev
3526 Vossevangenvej
Askov MN 55704

While we're saluting others, we must mention the folks over in Granly, Mississippi. We of the FIRST colony set up by DFS remember the LAST colony (established in 1930) and the only other colony in the South. For many years our Danevang pastor would go to Granly on each "fifth Sunday" to conduct worship services. The colony struggled and finally the congregation disbanded, BUT, thanks to the efforts, mainly, of Else and John Martin and their family, there is now "community". Else was a "Nygaard", related to the Carl and Ida (Nygaard) Thyssen family of Danevang. So that makes her a cousin of Gerda, Gunner, Holger and Dagmar. Granly has gone to great efforts to refurbish their "Forsamlinghus" and now, indeed, use it for meetings! This includes a fine Christmas get-together complete with dancing around the tree. This June, the group had their Annual Summer Reunion complete with a day-long Saturday canoe trip and a Sunday breakfast which included "æbleskiver"! We learned from their last newsletter that they are working on cemetery renovations. So, good things are happening in Granly. Their newsletter masthead includes the phrase, "Preserving your Danish history", and it's encouraging to see their efforts.

Publicity in Denmark- Just after the "Enron Story" broke, Poul Husted, covering the story for the largest newspaper in Denmark, *Politiken*, brought his family to the Museum in Danevang. With help from some current Irvin Wind photography, a fine article recently appeared in that paper's "Travel Section". Two weeks later, a family from Denmark arrived at the Museum with an English translation of the article for us and told us that they learned of the Museum through the article just a few days before leaving for the USA. So, they added Danevang to their itinerary. That's efficient publicity!

Oh Yes—From page 8--The last confirmation class in the "old church":

Back row (l to r) Donald Lykke, Pastor Vagn Duus, Gunner Thyssen, Irvin Wind

Front row (l to r) Vernon Swendsen, Barbara Strarup, Carl Hansen, Lillie Jensen,

Lawrence Petersen, Irene Hansen, Leroy Strarup

Now About Us: Important Notice !! Look Beside Your Address Label

Several persons, including a couple Board Members, have said, "I can't remember if I've paid for my membership this year". So, to help with that, we've put a red "check mark" next to your address label, **if paid**. **If you don't see a red check mark, we ask you, we urge you to send your \$10 per person (\$20 per family) memberships NOW (checks payable to DHPS) to:**

Kenny Christensen P.O. Box 386 Danevang TX 77432

Yes, we can use the money, but just as importantly, WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT of the efforts of the Society to preserve our Danish Heritage. As you read on page 9, "We're Not By Ourselves", BUT we're the only Danish Heritage Preservation Society in this part of the country!



Christmas in
August??

Not Really---See Inside for El Campo Christmas Mall
Details!!

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