

The Voice



Sharing the story of historic Danevang -- past, present, and future.

WINTER / SPRING 2023



President's Report

Michael Hansen

I am pleased to report that 2022 was an excellent year for the Danish Heritage Preservation Society. It was good to get back to some semblance of normalcy after the two years of COVID pandemic limitations. We hosted a large number of lunch tours for groups from primarily the Houston area. Our guests were glad to be able to get out and go, and we offer a great day trip to leave the city and visit farm country. Our Danish Country Lunch (featuring *Frikadiller* – Danish meatballs) is always a hit. Our tour includes a visit to the Danevang Lutheran Church, a nice video of the history of Danevang, time to browse the many museum exhibits including the popular Pioneer House, and, of course, our wonderful lunch. These tours are a great way to share the story of Danevang and life in the early years of Texas.

We were also able to host the inaugural **Danevang Harvest Festival** after having to cancel the event the prior two years due to the pandemic. It was a fun and beautiful day. We had some fun live music and a wonderful presentation by the Scandinavian Dancers of Houston who are such good friends to the DHPS. We introduced KUBB – a Scandinavian yard game and had activities for children. We had a successful silent auction with some spirited bidding on some treasured items. And, of course, we served our usual Danish Country Lunch along with Danish Hot Dogs. If you weren't able to join us last year, please make plans to come to our event in October of this year.

Rebild National Park Society hosts a big 4th of July celebration in Denmark each year. {Rebild is the first Danish-American friendship association and has existed for more than 100 years}. They will have their annual meeting in Houston March 23-25. We are looking forward to hosting visitors from that assembly to Danevang on March 22. Instead of our usual Danish Country lunch, we will instead be serving a menu featuring Texas Bar-B-Q.

I would like to express my appreciation to **Irvin** and **Elaine Wind** for their many years of faithful service to the DHPS. I have enjoyed working beside them and for those that know them, you already know what a pleasant couple that they are.

Come visit us soon at the Danish Heritage Museum of Danevang.

INSIDE

- Harvest Fest '222
- Letters home to Denmark3
- Historic Stairs.....5
- Around the Museum6
- Donors & Sponsors.....7

Irvin (91) & **Elaine** (89) **Wind** are cherished members of the Danevang community and have been vital to the DHPS since its beginning. Join us after the annual meeting on **February 18** to honor them as they step back from regular volunteering at the Museum.

(photo by David Andrews)



Harvest Fest '22 Drew a Crowd



Harvest Fest '22 featured a delicious Danish lunch organized by Cynthia Thyssen Priesmeyer; music from Keith Junot and Friends; performances from Scandinavian dancers (including Board member Bridget Jensen Howard, white apron close to the stage); and silent and “bag raffle” auctions. Staffing the check-in table (middle left) were Board President Michael Hansen, Julie Barbee, and Board member Laurie Petersen Martin. Young dancers (middle right) included Hazel Priesmeyer in the black shirt and Emma Jo Barosh (green shirt).



Letters Home From Sine Nygaard, a Danevang Pioneer

*Jensine (Sine) Nygaard's letters narrating their lives in America were compiled by Hans Borge Nygaard and published by Funen Times Publishing in Odense, Denmark in 1948 as the book **Nygaard Slægten fra Ulbølle** (The Nygaard Family from Ulbølle) This translation was done by their great grandson Brian Martin. Hans Nygaard died in 1935 and Sine in 1948; both are buried in Danevang. Two of their great granddaughters are on the Museum's board -- Cynthia Thyssen Priesmeyer and Cheryl Donnally Lucas. This is the second installment of Sine's letters.*

A few days after we had moved into our home, a man named **Mads Andersen** came and told Hans that if he wanted to go down into the woods and get firewood, he could do that. In the month of May, **Frederik Grundtvig** came to visit the Colony, which we all greatly enjoyed. A few days before Grundtvig's arrival, I was at home with the children; Hans was up to help **Christian Madsen** and stayed the night there. I had gone to bed with the children and had fallen asleep when a terrible storm came and blew the house down off the blocks on which it was built. The lamp was knocked down and the floor was full of broken glass, but I gathered the children together and put some quilts over them. The blocks that the house was built on had pushed up through the floor, and soon it was teeming with field mice. There was only one shock, however, and for a moment it was the most beautiful moonlight weather.

Hans was worried for us, but they could clearly see the house, so Christian Madsen comforted him that everything was good, whatever it was.

Then Grundtvig came. He consecrated the churchyard, preached, held Altar time, and baptized the first little girl born in the place, **Ingeborg Olsen**. He also read "Ambrosius", sang cheerful songs, among others, "Og Ræven laa under Birkerod" (And the Fox lay under Birkerod) for us.

Drought and fire. The farmers had arrived there early in the fall to get some land plowed, but all fall and winter it was still too dry. Only after we arrived did they get the first rain. A young man, who had land south of Mads Andersen's, was out with some others one day to search for the boundary of his land; he wanted to find the corner, and when he couldn't see it, he set fire to the grass. Oddly enough, older men could carry on like this! The result was that the whole prairie was burned off. When we arrived, everything was black and then a few days later we got snow. There were many creatures on the prairie that should have had their food from the dry grass. Ah, that was a pity!



The poor animals had to die of hunger. Through the colony ran a small river with a rather steep bank; when they went down to it to drink, they did not have the strength to come up again.

We had the house put on some more solid blocks. The neighbors were nice to help us; but my nerves had been damaged, so that every time it looked like a storm, I couldn't be inside the house. We talked about having to leave from there for that reason; but nothing happened, and I gradually got over it.

Uffe's adventure. The first summer the farmers had bought railroad oats, and one evening, when **Uffe** was sent to the post, the postmaster asked him if he could go down to a couple of **Hansen** brothers with a message to pick up their oats the next day, and he would pay him 10 cents. Uffe came home with that message; Hans was not home, and I was not happy to let him go; he was only a little boy of 7 years, now he had gone 5 miles to the Post Office, back and forth, and the other road was just as long; but he kept begging me -- after all, 10 cents was a glory. Eventually, I gave him permission to leave, but regretted it after he left. It was a dark evening and there were only wheel tracks for him to follow.

He had never been afraid of the dark. As the time approached that I expected him, I took an iron pot, put in some shavings and set fire to them, thinking that it might help him find home. He came home well enough, and we were both happy; but he never told me that a snake on the road had twisted around one of his legs. I didn't know that until after he died, when Helga {Uffe's wife} and I once talked about the old days.

A congregation had been established, a Församlingshus {church} was built, and **L. Henningsen** had come to be our pastor. Ida was born in November. Before we left Fresno, all but Uffe had been sick from Typhus. Fortunately, Hans got well before I got sick. While we were all sick, Hans didn't work, so he didn't earn anything either. Medicine was expensive, so it took part of the money we had brought from home. The journey from Fresno to Danevang was also expensive, so when we finally got there, had got our little house built, had a bed, a stove, etc., we had nothing to live on, and there was not much work to do.

One big family. We were probably the poorest in Danevang. The residents were extremely kind to us and we can never be grateful enough to them. First, they gathered and bought a cow that they gave us. There was happiness with that cow; it had a heifer calf the day after we got it, and two years later they both had a heifer calf. We had no horses, so one day some of the neighbors came and plowed two acres of land for us. They even brought their dinner and I made coffee for them. The following year, a man came down and planted cotton. Everyone was helpful to each other and we were almost like one big family.

Hans got work for a surveyor, which helped us well. In the summer he got a job at the hay harvest; he was gone all week and came home Saturday night. It was three Danish Miles away. The man he worked for had no money to pay him, but gave him a banknote so that he could go to a store and buy food for us; whatever he bought he had to carry home. On Sunday evening he had to leave again.

When there was no more work to do, he decided to leave for Galveston to seek work. He traveled the day before his birthday and bought 1-1/2 pounds of chocolate in El Campo that we should have as a birthday present. It was hard for me to be left alone

with the kids. He stayed down there until Christmas; then Christmas Eve came, and we waited. When the door knocked and I opened it, there was a strange man; I could see he wanted to go inside. . . and when he said "Good evening", we knew our father - he had shaved his beard off, therefore we had not known him at once. But, of course, there was great rejoicing.

Then we got help from Denmark again, so we could buy a couple of horses and get a small barn built. Now we could plow some more land and work more on what had been plowed. We got two lovely horses in years 4 and 5. A little later, we got a work wagon, and little by little it was going well for all of us in Danevang.

Friendship with the Wind family. We had a nice neighbor, **Iver Wind** -- we shared very well with them and helped each other many times! Mrs. Wind was raised in the Ubberrup congregation, and they had many interests in common with us. They were sent "Højskolebladet" from Denmark, which we were delighted to read, and we received "Fyn Tidende" from brother-in-law Peder. [Højskolebladet is a Danish journal for the folk high school and free school community. Funen Tidende (Funen Times) is a newspaper published in Odense. Hans' brother Peder Hansen Nygaard was an editor.]

When Pastor Henningsen left us, we got a young priest from Denmark, **Rasmus Kristensen**. He had visited Mother before traveling and had many good times with us. We had another girl, Ingeborg.

It wasn't always easy in Danevang. One time we got a bad horse sickness that nobody knew. Most lost their horses; one of ours fell ill, but fortunately recovered. Then we sometimes got such heavy rains that it was almost like we lived in a lake, and one witty head said that the colony should be called Danevand [Dane water] instead of Danevang [Danish fields]. Some of those who had come to the colony left. After three years, **Pastor Kristensen** left - for the sake of his development, he said, and **Pastor Madsen**, who we knew from Ferndale, came to Danevang with his large family. Before they arrived, a good, spacious parsonage had been built there. They were happy to come to Danevang and stayed with us for a long time, until Madsen died.

*More of Sine's letters will be published
in future newsletters.*

Museum Stairs Crafted From Two Historic Buildings

The stairs in the Museum that lead up to the DHPS office and workroom have a colorful history of their own. The flooring and mid-level landing were reclaimed from the **Carl Harton** home in Danevang. Carl and his brother, Peter, emigrated from Skælskør, Denmark, in 1897. Carl married Kristine, his girlfriend from Denmark, in 1899. After living in the Austin area and in West Texas, they moved to Danevang with their family of eight children in 1918.



The steps came from the Pierce Hotel, built by A.H. "Shanghai" Pierce on the 250,000 acres of land he owned about 16 miles north of Danevang. The hotel was built on the New York, Texas, and Mexican rail line built 1881-1883. The hotel, used by cattle buyers, traveling salesmen, and others, was torn down in 1980, but the building's "widow's walk" and an historical marker remain at the site. The steps were donated to the Museum by **James Petersen**. During the construction of the Museum, an autograph was discovered on one step -- that of **A.P. Borden**, Pierce's nephew who imported Brahman cattle to the U.S. from India.



Carl and Kristine Harton, Danevang, 1924



*(left photo by James Hulsey)
Historical marker and the widow's walk. (right) The old Pierce Hotel*



Around the Museum

Decorating & Dancing with Danevang Lutheran Church

(left) Jericho Narofsky gives Santa his Christmas list. Any resemblance between Santa and DHPS Board President Michael Hansen is coincidental. (middle) Jericho's mom is Karis Narofsky on the left. She's standing with her cousin Corie Lieberman who is holding her youngest, Levi. Karis' mother is Laurie Petersen Martin, and Corie's mother is Pamela Petersen Pope -- both members of the DHPS board.



Madsen Relatives Visit



Relatives of Danevang pioneers **Christian and Kirsten Madsen** visited the Museum and the Pioneer House during November. Left to right: **Anna Belle McCaskill, Jean Kirsten Madsen Kramer, Kirsten Kramer McCaskill, Carol Jean Madsen Schmickrath, and Mac Kraycerik.**



Kirsten Carlsen Madsen in an undated photo. She and her husband are buried in the Danevang Lutheran Cemetery, which is located between the Museum and the Danevang Lutheran Church. (DHPS photo accessed from The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas.)

Thank you to our generous donors and sponsors

Donations to the General Fund: Elisabeth & Kai Nirell; Mary Ann Wind; Robert Olsen; Lupe & Mary Ramirez; United Ag; Ellnora Schliesser; The Trull Foundation; Paul & Kathi Jensen; Alan & Karen Hall Harton; Dubey & Loran Baxter; Denise Flagg; Harlo & Rhonda Atchetee; Beverly Burmeier; Marilyn & Phil Ricman; Dorman Michaelsen; Doyle & Ann Schaer; Dale Atchetee; Ole Galsgaard; Kirsten Ravn Nelson; Ann Starup; Jimmie & Ceci Triska; Dorothy Waldman; Gary L. Petersen; Curtis & Frances Reece; Jack & Darlene Christiansen; Mary Ann Wind; Steven Schmelling; Julie & Jim Turner; Raymond & Shirley Bram; Paul & Carlene Jensen; Ric & Laura Mergenhagen in honor of *Rita Sones Mergenhagen*; Michael Williams in honor of *Kye & Bibi Poulsen*; Dennis Hansen in memory of *Melvin & Marjorie Hansen*; Brendan & Martha Gau in memory of *Al Jensen*; Carl & Linda Andersen in memory of *Carl M. Anderson*; Pamela Hansen-Henton in memory of *Lyle L. Hansen*; Corinna Harton in memory of *Hartton family*; J. Harry & Marcia Westerholm in memory of *Max & Maidie Westerholm*; Danna Insurance in memory of *Joyce & Tony Danna*; Karen & Nicolass Nelsen in memory of *Gil & Suzy Nelsen* and *Hans J. & Emile Nelsen*; Brent & Walta Ocker in memory of *Al Jensen*; Ric & Laura Mergenhagen in memory of *Sam & Kristine Brodsgaard*; Rev. Stephen & Theresa Kelly in memory of *Ruth E. Nelsen family*; DorOthy Hermansen in memory of *Ellwood Hermansen*; Curtis & Dana Skipping in memory of *Herluf & Ruth Westerholm*; Kenneth & Anita Christensen in memory of *Elsie & Mickey Christensen*; Judy W. Tines in memory of *Adolph & Mary Andersen*; Patricia Bruecher in memory of *Pauline & Andrew Berthelsen*; Russell & Sarah Neisig in memory of *Peter Andrew Neisig, Jr.*; Gerald & Carol Richards in memory of *Clarence P. Lauritsen & Anna Jensen Lauritsen*; Carl Wind in memory of *Harold Wind*; Alan & Karen Hall Harton in memory of *Virgil Harton*; Robert & Ramona Lesak in memory of *Bill & Esther Harton*; Linda Donnelly in memory of *Dagmar Thyssen Donnelly Ricketts*; Suzanne & Mike Stanfield in memory of *Joyce & Tony Danna*; Kim & Gary Gardell in memory of *Anne Berndt Gardell*; Norman Thaysen in memory of *Carl & Marie Thaysen*; Valerie Leger in memory of *Ingaborg Atchetee*; Roger & Betty Andersen in memory of *Hans & Anna Andersen family*; Pamela & Paul Pope in memory of *Lawrence Petersen*; Jeanne & James Sralla in memory of *Jamie Sralla*; Claire Wind in memory of *Harold Wind*; Harold Jensen in memory of *Hans Peter & Maren Jorgensen Jensen*; Robert M. Christiansen in memory of *Martin J. Christiansen*; Cindy Steffec in memory of *Laura Larsen Rose*.

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Maintaining Facilities

Facility maintenance is an ongoing (and expensive!) issue for the DHPS. Recent projects include repairs to the sidewalk and porch leading to the Pioneer House, and painting of the front door and the Danish flag on the side of the Museum.



The Danish Heritage Preservation Society
P.O. Box 368
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Members: If you haven't sent in your membership dues, please do as soon as possible (P.O. Box 368, Danevang TX 77432). The Danish Heritage Preservation Society can't survive without you! \$20/year ... or just \$500 for a lifetime membership.

The Danish Heritage Preservation Society

Museum Hours: Tuesday through Saturday, 1- 4 p.m.
call 979-578-0808 for appointment
Closed Sundays, Mondays, and holidays

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