

# America Letter

Sept 2005

Vol. XIX, No. 3

An International  
Cultural Center



**THE DANISH IMMIGRANT MUSEUM**

*Her Majesty Queen Margrethe II of Denmark, Protector  
Member of the American Association of Museums*

Your Museum in the  
Heart of the Continent  
BOX 470 • ELK HORN, IOWA 51531



## Hans Christian Andersen Parade's U.S. Tour

As part of the world-wide celebration of the bicentennial of Hans Christian Andersen's birth, the Museum is pleased to sponsor the U.S. tour of the well-known and popular *Hans Christian Andersen Parade* from Odense, Denmark. This is the company's first U.S. tour, which will take place from October 7-18, 2005 and include performances from Boston and New York to Omaha, Des Moines, and Chicago.

The cast of 25 actors, ranging in age from 10 to 19, present scenes from such well-known tales as "The Ugly Duckling," "The Little Match Girl," "The Emperor's New Clothes." Led by actor/director Torben Iversen, the *Parade* has performed for more than 15 years and given several thousand performances. Children and adults alike have been entertained by the storytelling, the music and the elegant costumes.

Thanks to the generosity of former Museum Board Member, Dennis Andersen of Atlanta, Georgia, the Museum is able to be a national sponsor of this popular show that has been seen by thousands of people in Denmark, Europe, China, and Japan.

"We are absolutely delighted and pleased to assist in bringing the Hans Christian Andersen Parade to the U.S., and we are especially grateful to Dennis for his wonderful support assisting us in bringing the Parade to this country," said Dr. John Mark Nielsen, Executive Director. "We saw a performance this summer in Odense, and those who can see it here are in for a treat."

Members of the Odense City Council and Cultural Department will be accompanying the Hans Christian Andersen Parade, along with a journalist from the newspaper, *Fyens Stiftstidende*. The Museum's Director of Development, Thomas Hansen, himself a native of Odense, will also be traveling with the group.

For more information about the Hans Christian Andersen Parade's U.S. Tour, please call the Museum at 1-800-759-9192. Staff members, Thomas Hansen, [dkdevdir@metc.net](mailto:dkdevdir@metc.net) or Terri Johnson, [dksec@metc.net](mailto:dksec@metc.net) can assist with the group's travel schedule, performance places and times, and any other questions you may have.



## Director's Corner By John Mark Nielsen

For the past year, the Strategic Planning Committee has been meeting to review the Museum's past, assess our present situation, and prepare for important future actions. At the June Board of Director's meeting in Seattle, the committee presented a number of important motions for consideration by the full Board.

Among these was a motion to change the mission statement. While I am skeptical whenever planning committees begin by focusing on revision of mission statements as somehow solving the problems of an organization or institution, I believe there are compelling reasons for revising the Museum's mission statement.

Following is the mission statement that has directed the activities of our Museum: *The Danish Immigrant Museum will tell the story of the Danish American experience and is organized to collect, preserve, study and interpret artifacts and traditions, which express the experience of the Danes and their descendants in America.*

Among the important considerations that shaped the Strategic Planning Committee's discussion was the need to make our mission statement active and forward looking. Furthermore, patterns of immigration have changed. There are fewer Danish citizens who are immigrating to the United States. As we evolve into a greater global economy, many Danes come to work and to live here for a time, but they do not intend to become American citizens.

The immigrant experience is dra-

matically different than it was when Danes began to emigrate in large numbers during the last half of the Nineteenth Century. Telephones, computers and electronic sharing of texts, photos, and even film clips, make staying in touch with family and friends in Denmark and around the world easier. With the ease of air travel, many can return annually to visit loved ones.

A mission statement provides important direction for collecting, exhibiting, and narrating this evolving story. If we are to document the changing nature of the immigrant/global experience while celebrating our Danish cultural heritage, the Strategic Planning Committee believed we needed a statement that incorporated these goals. I am pleased to share with you the mission statement that was discussed and adopted.

*The Danish Immigrant Museum shares the legacy and continuing influence of Danish culture as realized in the experiences and contributions of Danish immigrants, their descendants and Danes living in America.*

We will continue "to collect, preserve and study the artifacts of the Danish American experience," but this statement summarizes what we are and what we wish to become. It recognizes the important legacy of past generations while embracing the energy of today's Danish Americans and Danes living and working here in the United States.

I am excited by this statement, but more importantly for the opportunities to reach out to those who more recently have come to this country. The story of peoples on the move is at once one of the oldest in the human experience and yet this story contin-

ues to unfold. We will be a Museum that celebrates the past and the present, even as we look to the future; we will be a living Museum.

Carrying out our mission takes resources. I am thankful for the support and generosity each of you provides. I invite your continued support. As we look to the future and as you learn more about our vision and our dreams, I invite you to consider making a significant investment, whether this might be through gifts of cash, securities, life insurance, or by providing for the Museum in your estate planning. I would be most grateful.



### Current Exhibits at the Museum:

- *Hans Hansen: A Study in Danish American Ingenuity* (to February 2006)
- *Contemporary Illustrations of Hans Christian Andersen's Fairy Tales* (to December 2005)
- *Americans at Work and at Play: Danish Influences in Everyday Life* (to October 2005)
- *Hans Christian Andersen 2005* (traveling Odense City Museum exhibit – to October 2005)
- *Across Oceans, Across Time®*; weekly and semi-weekly radio and print programming.

**See you at Julefest  
(Nov. 25-27)**

# From A Curatorial Perspective . . .

by Barbara Lund-Jones

*A recent gift to our collection dramatically demonstrates the continuing allure and power of immigration stories within family constellations. The full significance of this gift is best understood through the family's immigration narrative and through the artifacts in our collection, which allow us to share this story.*

## Dakota Territory

The story begins with the emigration of Peter O. Nielsen from Denmark in 1878. Peter first settled in Chicago but later moved to the Dakota Territory. He established a homestead there and in 1882 sent to Denmark for his fiancée, Maren Kjestine Græsbøl. She was 21 at the time. Maren left Denmark accompanied by Peter's sister, Marianne. Peter's homestead was near Lake Albert in the Dakota Territory or just north of what is now known as Badger, South Dakota.

Maren and Marianne took the nearest train, which let them out at Arlington in Dakota Territory. From there, they had to walk 14 miles across the prairie to Peter's homestead, carrying their trunk between them. The trunk contained all of their clothing and Maren's spinning wheel.

In 1890, Maren's brother, Jakob Græsbøl, visited his sister and her husband on their homestead. Before returning to Denmark, Jakob made a wooden dresser which was presented to his sister as a gift. The dresser was carefully crafted of wood pieces carved to fit together and secured primarily with the use of glue. One of the drawers was equipped with a writing table and secret compartments. Over the years, this important piece of furniture occupied a place of prominence in the Nielsen's homestead house.

## Homestead Paper

We have in our collection the signifi-

cant objects that document these dramatic moments in Maren's and Peter's life. In 1990, a grandson gave us the homestead paper signed by President Grover Cleveland that granted Peter Nielsen his 160 acres under the Homestead Act of 1862. Later that same year, we were given Maren's spinning wheel by another grandchild, the spinning wheel that had been carried in a trunk 14 miles over the Dakota prairies. During the 1930s the spinning wheel had fallen into disrepair, as it was used as a toy in outdoor sandboxes. One of Peter Nielsen's sons salvaged its parts and had it restored. The son, in turn, passed it on to his daughter, who later gave it to the Museum.

In 1991, the same grandson, who had earlier given us the homestead paper, gave to the Museum the chest of drawers built by Maren's brother, Jakob. And in June of 2005, we received another piece of memorabilia relating to Maren and Peter Nielsen, rounding out and adding additional dimensions to their story.

A grandson of Maren's brother, Jakob, visited the Museum and brought with him a page from a Minneapolis newspaper dated November 26, 1897. It was a Norwegian language paper which also related Danish immigrant news. It contained a section on the Dakotas and Maren and Peter had sent it to family in Denmark so they would have an idea of what their life was like in America.

## Speaking to Subsequent Generations

That clipping was retained by family members in Denmark and now, more than 100 years later, it joins our collection and helps us to fill out the immigration story of Maren and Peter Nielsen. The grandson, who brought the clipping, resides in Denmark and visited the Museum so he could see the chest of drawers made by his grandfather, Jakob Græsbøl. His visit and gift demonstrate that immigration stories, with their attendant emotions and intensity of experience, live on in families and often speak to subsequent generations.



## Americans at Work and at Play: A Study of Danish Influences in Every Day Life

The exhibition, *Americans at Work and at Play: A Study of Danish Influences in Every Day Life*, began as a gathering of Danish products in American homes. It emerged as a discrete, but fascinating, study of Danish design. The interior visual dynamics of the exhibit became such that interpretative intervention was withdrawn and the objects, with their distinctive blend of form and function, were allowed to speak for themselves. In their totality, they document a highly sophisticated sense of design, elegant in their simplicity of line and remarkably immediate in terms of their use.



# Lace Maker Honored at the Nebraska State Fair

In Denmark when only six years old, Elie Steffensen was taught the art of bobbin lace making by her mother. She still has the very first piece of lace she made. At the age of nine, the family came to the United States. Soon she and her mother continued the making of lace, sending for necessary supplies from Denmark. Elie became a proficient lace maker and began to demonstrate this art especially to broaden the awareness of Danish culture. This she has continued to do throughout her life.

At area ethnic festivals, including many Tivoli Fest celebrations at The Danish Immigrant Museum, she has been present, sharing her talent. She began to teach in her home and husband, Poul, an engineer whose hobby has been woodworking became involved in making pillows for the students.

It was because of Elie that lace makers gathered together in 1992 to form a lace guild called *Living Lace of Omaha*. Since then the art of lace making has spread throughout the community and continues to grow.

This year *Living Lace of Omaha* has dedicated an award in Elie's honor for the Nebraska State Fair. It is called "The Elie Steffensen Award for *Best Use of Lace*." This award will continue to be given as long as the Nebraska State Fair exists. It is just a small way to say thank you for sharing this wonderful cultural and historical art.

Both Elie and Poul have been loyal members and generous supporters of The Danish Immigrant Museum, Poul having served two terms on the Board of Directors and Elie volunteering numerous hours to demonstrate her art. We congratulate Elie on this honor and celebrate and thank them for their many contributions to the Museum.

## BOBBIN LACEMAKING

Bobbin lace making derives its name from the dangling wooden bobbins wrapped with thread. It is made into a



*Elie Steffensen demonstrates bobbin lacemaking at the Museum during Tivoli Fest.*

beautiful cloth by twisting and crossing the threads. Danish bobbins are wider at the bottom and in this way the threads are nicely tensioned.

The pattern or pricking is attached to a pillow that is stuffed with small pieces of hay. Many pillows have cylinder shaped

roller pillows attached to them. This allows for yards of lace to be made. You can then attach it as an edging to many fashion pieces.

Elie enjoyed sewing her lace to her Danish folk dancing costume and is truly a master at her craft.



## Danish Heritage Seminar Held at Dana College

The Federation of Danish Associations in Canada's annual Heritage Seminar was held at Dana College in Blair, Nebraska, from Sunday, May 29 to Wednesday, June 1. Headmaster was Dr. John Mark Nielsen. The participants stayed in a dormitory at Dana College, and ate in the cafeteria.

The Seminar started with a tour to Fort Atkinson, the first American military fort west of the Missouri River. At the fort John Mark Nielsen and Prof. Peter Petersen gave a lecture on the American explorers Lewis and Clark and on the continental expansion of the USA.

Monday, Peter Petersen spoke about Danish immigration to the United States, particularly to Iowa and Nebraska. This was followed by a lecture by Prof. Jim Iversen on the Danish contribution to wind technology – windmills, wind tunnels and wind turbines.

The afternoon tour went to the Mormon Trail Center in Florence, just north of Omaha. This is where the Mormons wintered in 1846, on their way to Utah. The Center showed a video of the trek. The Center also houses a museum, depicting the early history of the Mormons.

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*Danish Heritage Seminar participants visited the DeSoto Wildlife Refuge and heard about the Missouri River ecology and environment.*

## Danish Heritage Seminar . . .

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Across the street from the Center is a cemetery with most of the graves dating from the Winter Quarters era.

In the evening in the Chapel soprano Kristi Bergland and pianist Philip Everingham presented a recital of Scandinavian songs by Edvard Grieg, Carl Nielsen, Jean Sibelius and others. This was followed by a reception in the Forum.

Tuesday morning Archive Director John W. Nielsen gave a presentation of The Danish Immigrant Archive at Dana College, an active and impressive archive staffed by volunteers. The Archive also publishes books. Afterwards John Mark Nielsen and Peter Petersen gave a comprehensive presentation on The Danish Immigrant Museum, its history, operation and future plans.

In the afternoon the Seminar participants visited the DeSoto Wildlife Refuge and heard about the Missouri River ecology and environment. The Visitors' Center also includes the Bertrand Steamship Museum, which houses the cargo rescued from this large cargo riverboat, which capsized in 1865, and

was salvaged over one hundred years later.

The day ended with the Danish dogma film "Italian for Beginners," directed by Lone Sherfig, her debut, for which she received a Silver Bear in Berlin. It was in Danish with English subtitles.

Wednesday Peder Hansen of Valmont Industries of Omaha spoke about modern wind technology and the challenges of building bigger and better towers for the turbines. The Seminar ended with John Mark Nielsen giving a brief overview of Danish American literature. John Mark Nielsen briefly sketched the outline of Kristian Østergaard's dramatic novel *Anton Arden og Møllerens Johanne*.

Eighteen people had signed up for the Seminar, including one American. But at times the group consisted of 22 people, including the headmaster, as some Conference participants stayed for the Seminar, the program being so interesting. The Seminar was a wonderful opportunity to learn about American history and ecology, Nebraska and Iowa, as well as the Danes in the USA.



*Jim Iversen addresses members of the Federation of Danish Associations in Canada at the banquet held in Atlantic.*

## Federation of Danish Associations in Canada Holds Conference in the USA

The Federation of Danish Associations in Canada held its 2005 Conference from May 26 to 29 at Dana College in Blair, Nebraska. This was the first time that the Danish Federation has held an annual Conference in the United States. Three have been held in Denmark, but conferences are usually held in Canada. The Danish Immigrant Museum hosted the conference, which was coordinated by Dr. John Mark Nielsen. Dana College and the Danish American Heritage Society co-sponsored the Conference. The theme of the 2005 conference was "The Danish American Immigrant Experience." Approximately 55 members attended.

In addition to the daily presentations, speakers and Annual General meeting, conference attendees spent Saturday, May 28<sup>th</sup> in Elk Horn where they enjoyed the Tivoli Fest parade in reserved seating in front of the Family History and Genealogy Center. After the parade they were given a "behind the scenes" tour at the Museum and then a presentation back at the FHGC.

The evening ended with a banquet at the Whitney Hotel in Atlantic, Iowa with more guest speakers, presentations and a wonderful meal. The closing of the conference was on Sunday, May 29<sup>th</sup>

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*Approximately 55 members of the Federation of Danish Associations in Canada attended the 2005 Conference from May 26 to 29 at Dana College in Blair, Nebraska. This was the first time that the Danish Federation has held an annual Conference in the United States. The Danish Immigrant Museum hosted the conference, which was coordinated by Dr. John Mark Nielsen, Executive Director.*

## Conference . . . – continued from page 5

and ended with a church service and luncheon in the Campus Center at Dana. Those who attended the conference both

as guests and speakers all agreed it was a successful collaboration.



## Thomas Hansen Returns as Director of Development

“There is no other place in the United States that has an original windmill from Denmark and a national immigrant museum,” says Thomas Hansen emphatically. “I am excited to be back at The Museum, and we look forward to the challenging opportunities that lie ahead of us in the coming years.”

Thomas is the new Director of Development at the Museum, and is a Dane living in the United States. He came to the United States as an exchange student for the 1986-1987 school year in Celina, Ohio as part of the exchange program called Youth For Understanding. At the end of that year, he returned home to Odense where he completed his degree in business. He came back to the United

States in the fall of 1989 to continue his studies at Kansas Newman College in Wichita, KS. His plan was to be here for one

year, and then return home to finish, but he ended up staying on to earn his Bachelor's Degree. He graduated in 1993.

In August of that year, Thomas began working for Dana College as a Development Associate. It was because of the close relationship between the College and The Danish Immigrant Museum



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## America Letter

Published Three Times Annually By  
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\*\*New Members, October, 2005

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# Meet Our New Board Members

At the June Board meeting in Seattle, Washington, the following four new members were elected to begin three-year terms on the Museum's Board of Directors. Re-elected to a second three-year term were Harold Jensen, Ames, Iowa; Julie Jorgensen, Wayzata, Minnesota; Dagmar Muthamia, Long Beach, California; and Anelise Sawkins, Minneapolis, Minnesota. The new board members are:

## **BRIDGET JENSEN, HOUSTON, TEXAS**

Bridget Jensen has a BA in History from Rice University and an MA from the University of Houston. She taught middle school 5 years before devoting full time to her family and community service. Her husband, Al Jensen, who

died in February 2004, was CEO of a large construction company and very active in Houston as a trustee of Rice University.

Bridget is active in the Lutheran church in Houston, where she is involved in the Lay Eucharistic ministry. She has also been on the Rice University alumni board, and several boards and committees including Friends of the Library, The Historical Society, The Chaplaincy Board of the M.D. Anderson Cancer Hospital, and many others.

She and her husband were very involved in starting the heritage center and museum in Danevang, a Danish settlement in Texas, southeast of Houston. Bridget is active in the Danish Club of Houston where there are many young Danes who have recently come to this country.

## **JOHN MOLGAARD, ATLANTIC, IOWA**

John Molgaard is a graduate of Iowa State University with degrees in Mechanical Engineering and Engineering Operations. From 1961 to 1964, he was a pilot in the U.S. Armed Forces. He began his career with Ingersoll-Rand in 1965. He retired in 1980 as President of Ingersoll-Rand Services for Engineering, having spent most of that time in European and North African operations.

Since 1992 John has been Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Cass County Memorial Hospital. He is also a member of the hospital's foundation board. In 1993, he was elected to the Board of The Danish Immigrant Museum, where he served as treasurer. Following Rick Burn's resignation as executive director, John helped manage the Museum. He continues to be involved in a ARISE (Atlantic-Rock Island Society Enterprise), whose mission is to procure and restore historical buildings in Atlantic, including the old depot and armory.

John and his wife, Karen, have been major donors to the Museum, and they have opened their Atlantic home to numerous museum functions.

## **MARK NUSSLE, PALOS PARK, ILLINOIS**

Mark Nussle received a BA in history from Drake University and attended the Rønshoved Højskole in Rinkenaes, Denmark. He taught gymnastics at Grand View College and folk dancing at both Grand View and the Danish Athletic Club in Chicago. Recently he retired from Viking Metal Cabinet Company where he was President for more than 30 years. Since the company specializes in the manufacture of museum grade shelving and cabinets, Nussle is well acquainted with current trends in museum exhibits and storage.

Mark and his wife, Lori, joined the Museum when it was founded in 1983 and are members of the Museum's Lifetime Leadership Society. They are active at All Saints Lutheran Church where Mark has been choir director for 30 years. Other interests include community theatre (actor and board member) and Danebod Family Camp (dancing director and board member). They have 3 children and 4 grandchildren. Their son, Jim, is a US Congressman from Iowa's 1st district and is seeking the office of Governor of Iowa in 2006.

## **SENATOR HARRIET SPANEL, BELLINGHAM, WASHINGTON**

Senator Harriet Spanel is a member of the Washington State Senate, representing the district that includes the city of Bellingham. A native of Audubon, Iowa, she moved to the State of Washington following her graduation from Iowa State University in 1961.

In her role as a legislator, Harriet has served as Majority floor leader and Majority Whip and is currently Democratic Caucus Chair. She serves on numerous committees and boards including the Washington State Historical Society Board of Trustees. She has served as a member of Bellingham's Planning Commission, and on the board of the Volunteer Health Resources Network.

She has been a generous supporter of the Museum and has placed her grandparents, who emigrated from Denmark, on the Wall of Honor.

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## Hansen . . .

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and because of people involved with both institutions that Thomas was first exposed to the Museum here in Elk Horn. He specifically mentions Jim Iversen, a graduate of Dana College, who was the President of the Board of Directors for the Museum at the time.

He was hired as Director of Development in August of 1996, and remained in that position until he returned to Dana College as Director of Development in January of 1999. During his tenure at Dana, Thomas remained involved in the Museum, serving on the Board of Directors. He returned to the Museum's staff on July 11<sup>th</sup> of this year.

Thomas says, "As a Dane, it is special to be a part of this country and to have Grand View, Dana, the Archives at both colleges, and the Danish American Heritage Society all in one area. I want to give back. I feel I can be of service, be part of a great team to achieve what was initially envisioned when The Danish Immigrant Museum was founded." He adds, "We want to make ourselves known as the place to visit Danes, Danish Americans, and Danes living in America."



## Helene Christensen Interns at Museum

The newest intern from Denmark arrived on August 1. Her name is Helene Christensen, and she is a 28-year-old Masters student at Aalborg University who is spending five months here in the United States. Helene was a student at Dana College in Blair, Nebraska during the spring semester of 2003, and it was during that time she first learned of the Museum. She has since spoken with former intern, Tina Wittorff, and decided to come here to complete this part of her degree requirements.

At Aalborg, Helene is studying tourism with a focus on marketing, and will be able to provide assistance to the Museum in both fields. Already she has developed member and visitor surveys intended to give us greater insight into the opinions and interests of those who support us regularly as well as those who are traveling and decide to stop in to visit. Helene will be busy during her five months here and will undoubtedly learn a great deal, and the Museum will benefit from all her hard work.

When asked what she hopes to do with her degree, Helene answered that she wants to focus on marketing, particularly the analysis and evaluation of markets.



*Helene Christensen of Aalborg University*

She would like to either be part of a large tourism organization such as Visit Denmark or a small one that needs development. The latter would give her the opportunity to develop a small, rural area and encourage tourism. Helene enjoys the research aspect of tourism, digging into a particular topic and determining where the problems are and how to fix them.

During her stay here in the United States, Helene will miss her two horses, which she spends a great deal of time with at home, as well as her family and friends, but she seems to be fitting in well here. She shared recently that "it amazes me every time I come to the U.S. how friendly and welcoming the Americans are." Her time will go quickly here and both she and the Museum will gain from the experience.



## Collections Intern Katherine Keil

Katherine Keil began her internship on September 1. She will be working in the collections area for the next six months, assisting Angela Stanford, Collections Manager/Registrar with a number of specific projects, as well as day-to-day duties within the department.

Katie is a 23-year-old from Bellevue, Iowa, a small town just south of Dubuque along the Mississippi River. She is a graduate student in the Historical Administration Program at Eastern Illinois University, and has just completed her first internship at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, New York.

Knowing she enjoyed history, but did not want to teach, Katie looked into other career choices at her undergraduate

school. She had some difficulty finding other options through the career center there. If not for a chance meeting with an Eastern Illinois alum who had been through the program, she may never have entered this field.

Katie feels either a collections management or education position at a small historical museum would be a good fit for her. At museums, she says, people want to be there, unlike students in classrooms who do not always take an interest in the subject being taught. She likes that people are interested in finding out more about the collection a museum has, and she is excited about helping people learn in that kind of environment.

Outside of the museum world, Katie

has several interests, which include reading, doing cross-stitch, and watching movies. She is quick to share, too, her passion for the Chicago Cubs, calling herself a "diehard fan."

We are excited to have Katie in Collections, as she will be part of our efforts to have a department that is as professional and efficient as possible. She will be a great help to us.



*Katie Keil of Eastern Illinois University*



# Tivoli Fest 2005 Celebrated in Elk Horn

Tivoli Fest celebrated its 25th year in 2005 with the theme "Tivoli: A Fairy Tale Land" in honor of Hans Christian Andersen's 200th birthday. Deb Larsen, Development Associate and Terri Johnson, Executive Assistant co-chaired this year's festival. The 2-day event was filled with food, music, entertainers, crafts, displays and an hour-long parade with over 80 entrants, many with a fairy tale or Hans Christian Andersen theme. The celebration culminated with one of the most fantastic fireworks displays in the state!

Planning for the event begins in late fall and the committee works very diligently to plan and organize all of the events that go into making this event such a success. It's easy to say that several thousand people attend each year and it was heard repeatedly that this year



*Children listen to Hans Christian Andersen (Karl Christensen) on the Museum's parade float.*



## Past Board Members Gather to Honor Merv Bro

Past members of the Board gathered on August 5<sup>th</sup> at the Whitney Hotel in Atlantic, Iowa, to honor former board member Merv Bro of Fountain Hills, Arizona, a long-time, major donor to the Museum. Pictured are: (seated) Norma Lange Nelson (1996-2002), Merv Bro (1996-1999), Leroy Pedersen (1993-1999) (standing) Harold Berg (1996-2002), Eivind Lillehoj (1995-2000), Jim Iversen (1985-1991), John Molgaard (1996-2002, 2005-), Chuck Frederiksen (1989-1995), John Mark Nielsen (1983-1991, 2000-2003).

was one of the best! Deb and Terri have agreed to co-chair Tivoli 2006 and plan to make it another fun and successful celebration for Elk Horn and all of the visitors who attend.



*Roger Buhr, one of the folk artists at the Museum, demonstrates the art of hedebo.*

# Songs of Denmark; Sange for Danskere, Songs to Live By

The Danish Immigrant Museum Shop has a new CD and songbook for sale just in time for the holiday season. Songs of Denmark; Sange for Danskere is a new music collection featuring beautiful songs, sung for generations by Danish Americans. All who love Scandinavian music will love this book and CD!

*Songs to Live By* includes:

- 112 pages with 48 songs
- Songs for Christmas, Children, Morning & Evening, plus hymns, traditional music and folk songs
- Lyrics in both Danish and English
- Piano scores with guitar chords
- 42 gorgeous full-color photographs of Denmark by National Geographic photographer, Sisse Brimberg
- A brief summary of The Future of Grundtvigianism
- Audio CD with selections from all songs, performed by the Grand View College Kantorei and baritone soloist, Karl Christensen



Joy Ibsen, a writer, composer, piano teacher, lay minister living in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, compiled the songbook. As a Danish American growing up in small Midwestern USA Danish communities, she developed a commitment to, and love for, Danish music and culture. She believes these Danish songs have enduring value, great beauty, and are very enjoyable to sing.

A graduate of Grand View College and Shimer College, she studied religion and literature at the University of Chicago.

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## The Museum's Christmas Card for 2005

The Danish Immigrant Museum is excited to announce the 2005 Christmas card designed to honor the 200th anniversary of Hans Christian Andersen's birth.

To celebrate this bicentennial, The Danish Immigrant Museum asked Elizabeth Solevad Nielsen to do a watercolor of Andersen's bittersweet tale "The Little Match Girl." Based on the stories Andersen heard from his mother who had to beg as a child because her family was so poor, the tale reminds us of those who live in poverty, and like "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens, whom Andersen visited on several occasions, we remember how much we are all blessed.

Elizabeth Solevad Nielsen, a native of Watsonville, California, began drawing and painting while in high school. The daughter of Danish immigrant parents, she attended Dana College in Blair, Nebraska, where she studied art with F.W. Thomsen and Elmer Petersen. There she was married to John W. Nielsen who was ordained in 1953 and received a call to Northfield, Minnesota. While raising a

young family of five children and serving as a pastor's wife, she continued to work on her art through the Northfield Arts Guild. In 1962 the family returned to Blair where she completed her B.A. degree in 1964 and taught art at Blair Community High School for many years.

This is the Museum's 17th Annual Christmas Card and the 6th year for the Annual Keepsake Ornament. We hope you will make this year's card and ornament a traditional part of your Christmas holidays. We have made it easy for you to order the 2005 Annual Christmas Card (\$1.00 each) and Ornament (\$12.95 each). You may order online at [www.danishmuseum.org](http://www.danishmuseum.org) and click on Museum Shop, call us at 800-759-9192 or send your order to The Danish Immigrant Museum Shop, Box 470, Elk Horn, IA 51531.

The Museum Shop is already looking for artwork for the 2006 Christmas Card. Please feel free to submit your artwork to:

The Danish Immigrant Museum Shop  
P.O. Box 470  
Elk Horn, IA 51531-0470



# Wall of Honor – May 16, 2005 – August 15, 2005

Robert Andersen, Kansas City, KS – *Danish Brotherhood Lodge #56, Kansas City, MO*

William Andersen, Chicago, IL – *Danish Brotherhood Lodge #56, Kansas City, MO*

Anton Brotherson, Kansas City, KS – *Danish Brotherhood Lodge #56, Kansas City, MO*

Holger & Anna Marie Hansen Christensen, Atlantic, IA – *Mary Nelson, West Lafayette, IN*

Neils Jensen, Kansas City, MO – *Danish Brotherhood Lodge #56, Kansas City, MO*

Jens Peter Rasmussen & Vilhelmine Sophie Madsen, Morgan, Redwood Co., MN – *Brian McNabb & Suzanne Gilbert, Los Angeles, CA; Michael McNabb, Carlsbad, CA; Michele McNabb, Atlantic, IA; Sean McNabb, Salt Lake City, UT; Elna Rodning, Gaylord, MN; Elsie E. Scott, Pipestone, MN*

Hans Christian “Chris” Rasmussen, Morgan, Redwood, Co., MN - *Brian McNabb & Suzanne Gilbert, Los Angeles, CA; Michael McNabb, Carlsbad, CA; Michele McNabb, Atlantic, IA; Sean McNabb, Salt Lake City, UT; Elna Rodning, Gaylord, MN; Elsie E. Scott, Pipestone, MN*

Carl (Johan Karlo) Kjeldgaard, Council Bluffs, IA - *John & Linda Kjeldgaard, Westminster, MD; Loren & Patricia Kjeldgaard, Selah, WA*

Grethe Jensen, Hawthorne, CA – *Tor & Jeanette Jensen, Wilmette, IL*

## BUSINESS – ORGANIZATION ASSOCIATES

A & A Framing

AmericInn

Answers

Bank of Maple Plain

Beverage Consult International, Inc.

Carroll Control Systems, Inc.

Cedar Valley Danes

Childs & Hall, P.C.

Danish American Club of Milwaukee

Danish Brotherhood Lodge #14

Danish Brotherhood Lodge #15

Danish Brotherhood Lodge #341

Danish Brotherhood Lodge #56

Danish Club of Tucson

Danish Mutual Insurance Association

Danish Vennelyst Park

DBIA Lodge #348

Dike Danish Sisterhood #176

Elk Horn Pharmacy

Elk Horn-Kimballton Community

Schools

Elk Horn-Kimballton Optimist Club

Elverhoj Museum

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Hardi Midwest, Inc.

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Investment Centers of America, Inc.

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KNOD

Knudsen Old Timers

Marge's Hair Hut

Marne & Elk Horn Telephone Co.

Nebraska District of DBIA

Nelsen & Nelsen

Olsen, Muhlbauer & Co., L.L.P.

Outlook Study Club

Pacific NW District Lodges D.B.

Proongily

Rebild National Park Society, Southern California Chapter

Rebild National Park Society, Upper Midwest Chapter

Red River Danes

Ringsted Danish American Fellowship

Royal Danish Embassy

Shelby County State Bank

The Danish Villages Voice

The Viking Club of Orange County

Westergaard Farms



## Songs . . .

– continued from page 10

She has served as President of The Danish Immigrant Museum, and is an active participant at Danebod Folk School.

The photos are by Sisse Brimberg, a Danish-born photographer. She has been with National Geographic since 1976. Her photographic studies of Denmark include National Geographic's "In Search of Vikings" (May 2000) and "Civilized Denmark" (July 1998).

Sisse's photographs have been exhibited worldwide, including a long-standing exhibit at The Danish Immigrant Museum. Her ability to capture truth and beauty on camera has won her worldwide recognition, including first prize from the National Press Photographers Association for her reportage on migrant workers, the "Picture Story of the Year."

The Museum Shop has the books for sale at \$34.95 and the CD/Book Set for \$39.95. Remember these would be great holiday gifts!

## MEMORIALS

May 1, 2005 – August 15, 2005

Memorials have been received in loving memory of the following individuals:

Mildred M. Andersen

Elton T. Carper

Guilbert Christensen

Ole Christensen

Dorothy Hansen

Dick Jensen

Katherine Jensen

Dean Johnson

Peter Kroman

Anna Larsen

Norman Larsen

Richard A. Ledet

Annabelle Madsen

Elsie R. McNabb

Helen Mogensen

Laverne Nelson

David Parmley

Eivind Pedersen

Dale Poldberg

Alice Simonsen

Dr. Alfred Lee Sorensen

Wilbur Sorensen

Emmy Stobbe and her son, Bendt Stobbe

Frede B. Strandkov

Janet Anderson Swendsen

Vernon Vrtiska

## New Roof Added to Museum



During the last few weeks construction crews have been adding on the finishing touches on installing a new metal steel roof replacing the older asphalt tile roof which has sustained wind and storm damage over the past several years. The new roof, garnet red in color and having the appearance of clay tiles, gives the Museum building a more authentic, Danish look. This has been a dream project of ours going back to the construction of the building in the early 1990's, and we are especially grateful to several lead donors for making this project a reality.

A heartfelt thank you to the Folmer and Vera Nyby, Michigan City, Indiana; Bill and Berneice Grewcock Foundation, Omaha, Nebraska; Iowa West Foundation, Council Bluffs, IA; Poul and Benedikte Olesen, Eugene, Oregon; Marne and Elk Horn Telephone Company, Elk Horn, IA. We would also like to thank the many donors who have responded through the 2005 Summer Appeal.

The \$125,000 Roof Replacement/Exterior Enhancement

Project is not yet complete, as we have plans to repaint and repair the stucco and wood exterior surfaces of the building. If you wish to assist with this project, please contact Dr. John Mark Nielsen or Thomas Hansen, Director of Development.



## Sankt Hans Aften: Midsummer's Eve

Over 130 adults and children gathered at the Museum grounds on June 25<sup>th</sup> for the annual celebration of Sankt Hans Aften. A picnic supper was available and Dwight "Red" Lamb, an old-time fiddler who learned many of his tunes as a young man from his Danish immigrant grandfather, entertained. Children played games and roasted sno-brød (twisted bread on a stick). The evening ended with a traditional bonfire and burning of the witch, who was sent back to Bloksberg in Germany.

The Elk Horn-Kimballton Danish Brotherhood Lodge No. 341, Rebild Society-Heartland Chapter and The Danish Immigrant Museum sponsored this annual event.



*Visitors enjoy a picnic supper as they listen to old-time music.*



*Children of all ages enjoy roasting snobrød.*



## Events and Programs at The Museum:

- Hans Christian Andersen Parade, Odense, Denmark (National sponsor of the U.S. Tour; October 7-18 2005)
- Co-Sponsorship of the DAHS October conference in Des Moines: "Danish Culture, Past and Present: The Last Two Hundred Years" (October 13-16, 2005)
- Julefest (November 25-27)
- Representation at selected festivals; classes at the Family History and Genealogy Center, and numerous speaking engagements around the country.

## Brotherhood Lodge looking for convention photos

The Danish Brotherhood Lodge #14 in Kenosha, Wisconsin is looking for photographs of past Brotherhood conventions, as their collection is missing the few listed below.

1st ..... Omaha, NE, 1882	7th ..... Davenport, IA, 1891
2nd ..... Racine, WI, 1883	8th ..... Omaha, NE, 1893
3rd .... Clinton, IA, 1884	9th ..... Minneapolis, MN, 1896
4th .... Chicago, IL, 1885	12th .... Council Bluffs, IA, 1906
5th .... Burlington, IA, 1887	14th .... St. Paul, MN, 1915
6th .... Chicago, IL, 1889	

If you have copies of these photos that you would be willing to lend to the Lodge in order for copies to be made, please contact Bob Ibsen, Danish Brotherhood Lodge #14, 2206 63<sup>rd</sup> Street, Kenosha, WI 53143, or call (414) 657-9781.



Chet and Marge Holland are front desk greeters on Sunday afternoon. They live in Atlantic and Chet's family is Danish so that draws them to volunteer at the Museum. Chet's hobby is woodworking and when he heard we needed a coat rack by the front door, he made one! Marge helps him finish his woodworking projects and is also very busy volunteering at their church Marge mentioned one of her favorite times is orientation for a new display because Barbara Lund Jones makes it interesting as she explains all the details.

In May each year 200 fourth graders from the area go to the Hitchcock House in Lewis, Iowa and Chet helps Joyce Petersen, Volunteer Coordinator with the display of the Danish Woven Hearts that the kids so enjoy.

Thanks Chet and Marge for volunteering . . . you are very much appreciated!

During  
JULEFEST in Elk  
Horn-Kimballton,  
come & join us for

# JULESTUE

Friday, Nov. 25 through Sunday,  
Nov. 27, 2005 during regular hours

at The  
Danish  
Immigrant  
Museum!

Spend a "hyggelig" day with your family and friends at The Danish Immigrant Museum.



We will offer refreshments like:

- Glögg
- Coffee
- Æbleskiver
- Danish Christmas cookies

Julemanden (Santa) will come, so be sure to bring the kids!



It will be an eventful day for children and adults of all ages.

Weather permitting, we will have a contest and Santa will award a prize for the tallest . . .

Hear Christmas stories, make Danish Christmas decorations, and even have the chance to fry your own æbleskiver.



## News from the Family History & Genealogy Center

### WISH LIST

The following items are currently at the top of the FHGC Wish List. If you wish to discuss making a donation of the following or contribute money toward their purchase, contact Michele McNabb at 877-764-7008 or [librarian@danishmuseum.org](mailto:librarian@danishmuseum.org).

- *Siftings*, by Jens Jensen (1939; reprinted. From \$11.95 used on Amazon.com). Thoughts and writings from the long career of Jensen, who was the father of the prairie style of landscape architecture.
- Back issues of *The Danish Sisterhood* magazine.
- Vols. 1-15 (1916-1939) of the *Danish Brotherhood Magazine*.
- Microfilm of 1928/29 Chicago city directory (\$149).
- *Strangers in Hollywood: the history of Scandinavian actors in American films from 1910 to World War II*, by Hans J. Wollstein (1994; \$59.50 new on amazon.com)
- *But you can feel it*, by Emil B. Fries (1980; \$9.95 and up used on abebooks.com)
- Back issues of *Saga of the Sanpitch* (Sanpete County, Utah) containing articles about Danish pioneers (Michele has a list; \$5 each, although many are out of print).
- Pre-2000 issues of *Bien*, the weekly Danish-language newspaper published in California.

Our thanks to Spencer L. Holland, who recently 'adopted' three large-scale Danish maps, and Norma Nelson, who added a fourth map. We are now lacking only 14 maps to complete this useful collection. Our gaps are: north and south Bornholm and the areas of Thyborøn, Hundborg, Farsø, Struer, Ulfborg, Ebeltoft, Fornæs-Anholt, Lohals, Reersø, Nykøbing Sjælland, Sejerø, and Saltholm. Each map costs \$20 and will be labeled with the adopting person's name.



*Danish Immigrant Museum members Kurt Klarskov Larsen and wife Joy of Alabama were some of the out-of-state visitors to the FHGC this summer.*



*Members of the Federation of Danish Associations in Canada enjoy the Tivoli Fest parade.*



## 1929 Model A Comes Home to Iowa

A 1929 Model A "Ford Fordor" purchased by John P. Jensen from the Audubon Motor Company that year has been given to the Museum. Jensen was a Danish immigrant who farmed in rural Audubon County, and this was his first car.

After Jensen's death in 1948 the car was given to his son Clifford Jensen, a long-time resident of Audubon, who passed it along to his son, Virgil, of San Anselmo,

*— continued on page 15*

*Deb Larsen, Development Associate, rides in the Museum's 1929 Model A in Audubon's T-Bone Days Parade.*





# Activities and News from the Family History & Genealogy Center

- In May several volunteers and Michele made an **in-service trip** to The Danish Immigrant Archive at Dana College, where Dr. John W. Nielsen and Ron Vig met with the group for an informative tour and overview of the Danish-American collections there. Afterwards the group visited

the Washington County Historical Association in Ft. Calhoun, Nebraska. The trip was a good opportunity for becoming familiar with the valuable resources of both institutions, which both lie about an hour's drive away from the Museum.

- **On the Road:** Volunteer Jeanette

Knudsen represented the Museum as the Danish genealogical resource person at this year's Hjemkomst Festival in Fargo-Moorhead on June 24-25th. And on July 25th in Minneapolis Michele spoke to the brave members of the Danish Interest Group of the Minnesota Genealogical Society who ventured out on a very stormy evening, and was pleased to be able to put faces to the names of several individuals who have corresponded with the FHGC.

- **The Road Even Went to Denmark:** This summer Michele was fortunate enough to spend 14 days in Denmark, visiting countless churches, churchyards, museums and local history libraries and archives interspersed with visits with old friends and haunts in various parts of the country. One highlight was a trip to the sunny island of Samsø, where former immigrant Rita Holm Ibsen kindly acted as guide for the day.

Among other things, we were given special admittance to Skipperværden in Nordby, a 17th-century farmhouse that has remained in the same family for 11 generations. There local archivist Olga Foged Klemensen showed an exhibit of materials dealing with emigration from the village, including a detailed map pinpointing the location of the emigrants' former homes. There was also an interesting display of memoirs and materials from individuals who returned to Nordby after years or decades in the US. – In Jystrup on Zealand Michele met with Pia Viscor, who spent a month in Elk Horn last fall researching several hundred individuals who emigrated from four parishes falling under the jurisdiction of Skjoldenæsholm manor (now a conference center and golf course), and in Svogerslev FHGC patron Erik Høgsbro Østergaard provided lunch and donated several family histories, in addition to offering to be a long-

## Model A . . . – continued from page 10

California. Virgil's son, Steve, who is a senior partner of Direct Management Group in Los Angeles, a company that manages professional music acts, gave this family heirloom to the Museum in May. It is a unique gift as it has remained in one family, and there are many family stories associated with it.

The Museum has been able to accept and care for this 1929 Model A through the generosity of Mike Howard of Liberty Labs located in rural Kimballton and the expertise of Norbert Greving and others employed at Liberty Labs who have reconditioned and store the vehicle.



*A Model "A" Ford Fordor that was originally purchased from the Audubon Motor Company in 1929 was a highlight of the John P. and Mary Jensen Family Reunion held at Mickel's Restaurant on Sunday, June 26. Three of Clifford Jensen's children reminisce about their grandfather's car. Standing are Valonda Breen (Lee's Summit, MO) and James Jensen (Arvada, CO); seated is Virgil Jensen (Palm Dessert, CA), the car's former owner.*

## Admission & Hours

**ADMISSION** (Includes Bedstemor's House)

Current Museum Members: FREE with Membership Card

Non-Members: Adults, \$5 • Children (ages 8-17), \$2

**MUSEUM HOURS:** Mon.-Fri.: 9:00 am-5:00 pm;

Sat.: 10:00 am-5:00 pm ; Sun.: 12:00 noon-5:00 pm

**BUSINESS HOURS:** Monday - Friday: 8:00 am to 5:00 pm

### FAMILY HISTORY & GENEALOGY CENTER HOURS

May-Oct.: Tues., Wed., Fri., 9:00 am-5:00 pm

1st & 3rd Saturday: 9:00 am-5:00 pm

Nov.-April: Tues., Wed., Fri.: 10 am-4 pm

*Other Times By Appointment*

All facilities are closed on New Year's Day, Easter Sunday, Thanksgiving & Christmas.  
(Local weather conditions may cause occasional closures.)

## Activities and News . . . continued from page 15

distance volunteer at the provincial archives near Copenhagen.

- **Canadians & Other Visitors:** The library gave tours to members of the Federation of Danish Associations in Canada who were in Elk Horn for Tivoli Fest as part of the Federation's annual meeting. Special arrangements were also made to be open when members of the Greve and Vig families held their reunions this summer.
- **Genealogy classes** will once again be offered this fall through Iowa Western Community College. A 10-week introductory course in genealogical sources and techniques is scheduled at the IWCC campus in Atlantic on Tuesday nights from September 13-November 15. Two workshop sequences on Danish and Danish-American genealogical research will be held at the FHGC on Saturday mornings on September 10, 17, and 24, and Thursday evenings on October 20, 27 and November 3rd. Contact Michele or the Museum office for further details.
- A reminder that **Genealogical Tote Bags** are for sale at FHGC and in the Museum Shop. The popular bags feature an outline map of Denmark with the legend "Danish Roots ... American Branches," and come in two colors and sizes: an open canvas model w/red design for \$11.50 and a red zippered version w/white design for \$14.50.

### Are You a Danish Immigrant or Long-term Resident?

Many Danes have immigrated to the U.S. since WWII, have been exchange students or resided in this country for longer periods of time. We would like to have some information in our library on more recent immigrants or long-term residents from Denmark. If you would be willing to fill out an Immigrant Information Form or distribute it at meetings of your local Danish-American organization, contact Michele at the FHGC for copies.



*Members of the Federation of Danish Associations in Canada enjoy the Tivoli Fest parade.*



*The Federation of Danish Associations in Canada annual dinner meeting was held at the Main Street Grill in Atlantic.*

### HeritageQuest Online™ Update

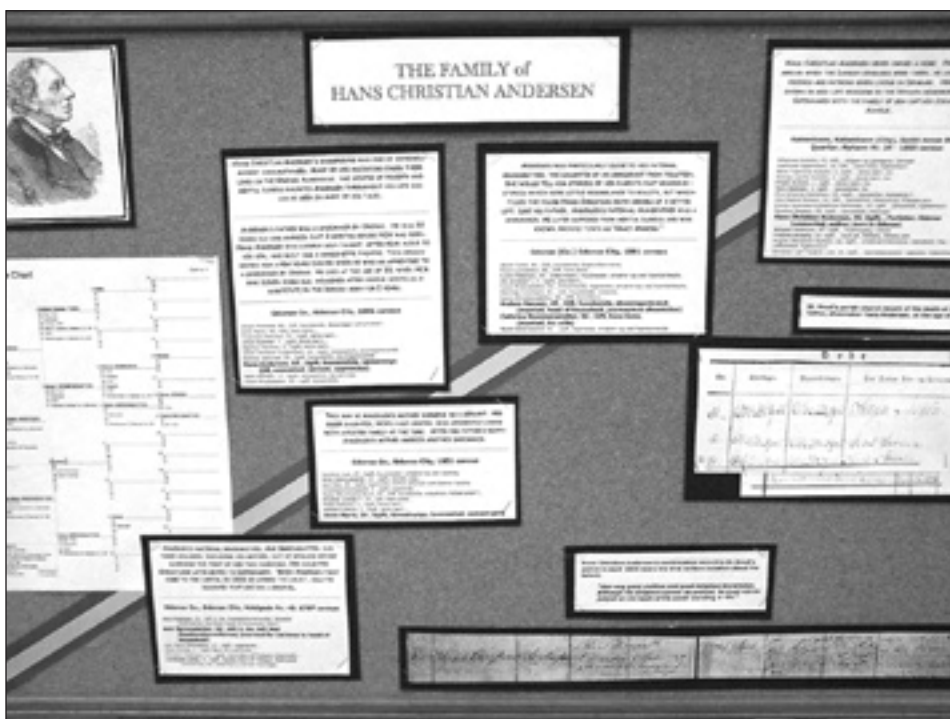
Since September 2005 over 175 Museum members have signed up for remote access to this valuable set of genealogical databases. Access is available to members at the annual giving level of \$100 and above. Members interested in signing up should contact Development Associate Deb Larsen at 1-800-759-9192, or fill out and return the HQO request form sent out with the annual renewal letter.

### Researching Ancestors

Some research inquiries are straightforward; others are not. The following is an example of a research problem that appeared to be relatively simple, but which led volunteer Esther Sand-Henderson to unexpected brick walls, and in unanticipated directions, using a wide variety of sources, with further searching to be done.

Last fall an email was received from a researcher requesting our help with a Danish immigrant. He was writing a biographical piece on early 20th-century opera singer **Alice Nielsen** and was looking for information on her father, **Erasmus Ivarius Nielsen**, born about 1833, who came to the U.S. from Aarhus, before the





*Hans Christian Andersen's genealogy, including his confirmation record, was part of the FHGC Tivoli Fest display.*

Civil War. Information provided by the patron indicated that Nielsen had gone to Indiana, where he married and perhaps was naturalized. He was said to have fought for the Union Army in the Civil War and was wounded in Atlanta, Georgia. He later lived in Nashville, Tennessee, and died there or in Kansas City around 1879 or 1880, leaving a wife Sarah and five children.

It was thought that Nielsen might have come to the U.S. with Scandinavian Saints in 1851 and then left the group in Kansas City. There was an Erasmus Nielsen who led a group of Mormons in Aarhus during this period, who was listed as a passenger on a ship leaving Copenhagen for Liverpool and then New Orleans in that year.

We started our research by checking the online transcriptions of Danish censuses. There we found one-year-old *Rasmus* Ivarius Nielsen in Hundslund parish in Aarhus County in 1834, the son of Rasmus Nielsen, age 29, and Bolette Dahl, age 28. This child was also found in the 1840 and 1845 censuses of nearby Bjergager parish, as Erasmus *Iwarius* Nielsen and Erasmus *Ivar* Nielsen, respectively. His father, Rasmus Nielsen, was listed as a schoolteacher and church

singer, and Erasmus had several siblings. Given his age and unusual name it was felt that this was very likely the person being sought.

Turning to this country, an Erastus Ivarius Nelson was listed in Illinois in the 1860 U.S. Federal Census, along with a wife, Sarah, of Irish-American descent, and a daughter Mary, eleven months old. Further searches of the census located Erastus in 1870 in Nashville, Tennessee. By this time he and Sarah had had four children, Mary (1859), Ann (1866) Hortense (1868) and Kate (1870). The family has not been found with certainty in the 1880 census, so their whereabouts between 1870 and 1900 are unverified.

An Internet search provided a reference in *Women in American History* from the editors of Britannica Online. This gave a short biographical sketch of Erasmus' daughter, singer Alice Nielsen (who must have been born after the date the 1870 census was taken, since her name did not appear in that year). Information in this article led to the online holdings of the Kansas City, Missouri, Public Library, where several articles on Alice Nielsen, her singing career and life were found.

We then contacted the Kansas City

Public Library. The staff there was able to provide us with much information, which furthered our search. We obtained a serialized story of Alice Nielsen's life from the June-July 1932 issues of *Collier's Weekly* entitled "Born to Sing." These articles gave long and detailed accounts of Alice's musical career from the time she was a child until her retirement from the stage. Alice -- a very musically gifted child -- apparently began her public career as a street singer in Kansas City at the age of seven. She was a member of St. Patrick's Church choir and attended St. Teresa's Academy. She studied music with Max Decsi, a leading vocal coach of the day, and had her stage debut in the starring role of *Chanticleer*, a locally written opera, in 1892. She then joined the Chicago Church Choir Company, which took her to California, where she joined a comic opera group in Oakland. From there she went to San Francisco's Tivoli Theater, where comic opera was well established. Alice auditioned for The Bostonians, won a spot, and within a year was its leading soprano. Victor Herbert wrote parts for her in *The Serenade*, *The Singing Girl* and *The Fortune Teller* in 1898.

In 1902 Alice decided to study grand opera in Italy. She appeared in England and Italy and after this had many successful engagements in New York, Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia opera productions. Her debut as an opera singer was made as Marguerite in Faust at the Bellini Theatre in Naples. She appeared in La Traviata at the San Carlo opera house in Naples and was then engaged to sing at the famed Covent Garden in London. There she sang Mimi in La Boheme with Caruso and Gilda in *Rigoletto* with Maurel. She was the first Madame Butterfly to appear at the Boston Opera House.

Alice Nielsen's birth date is uncertain. According to information in *Collier's Weekly* in 1932 she was born in Nashville, Tennessee, ca. 1874-1875, and moved to Kansas City around 1883. No record of her birth was found, supposedly since the relevant records were destroyed by fire.

Through the *Collier's*' articles we learned that her father, Erasmus Ivarius Nielsen, had not been on good terms with his father in Denmark. Erasmus was

somewhat of a wandering minstrel, who loved to play and sing music. He would sing as he played, composing songs he made up without rhyme or meter or theme as he sang. He was also a poet, but none of his poetry was written or recorded. Erasmus' father was reportedly a Protestant clergyman who tried by severe punishments to change the nature of a boy who was born to wander and sing and play, but not to pray. His father wanted him to settle down and get a job and make a life for himself. They were not able to agree about anything, so the first chance Erasmus had he stowed away on a boat to America. Nothing was found in Mormon records that would indicate that Erasmus came with or led a group of Mormons to America. We also do not have a confirmed date of when he arrived in America. He did find his way to Indiana, because it was there he met his wife, Sarah, the daughter of Irish immigrants. Sarah Kilroy was born in Boston, Massachusetts around 1837. Her parents sent her to an aunt in Joliet, Illinois, to be raised. The aunt sent Sarah and her own daughter to South Bend, Indiana, to St. Mary's School at Notre Dame. Sarah had considered entering the convent; instead, she met and married Erasmus Ivarius Nielsen shortly around 1858-59. Erasmus' service in the Civil War is still unconfirmed. A *Rasmus* Nielsen is listed as serving in the infantry of the 15th Regiment, Wisconsin Infantry, "The Scandinavian Regiment." The *Collier's* article stated that Erasmus served in the Union Army in Georgia, but was not specific about his unit. He was wounded in the Battle of Peach Tree Creek in Atlanta, where he was shot through the lungs and arm at the end of the war. His arm was paralyzed.

After the war was over, Erasmus moved to Nashville, where he lived until his death in 1879 or 1880. He worked at whatever jobs he could find, such as carpentry, ditch digger, and contractor's laborer. He reportedly received a pension of \$12.00 per month. We contacted the National Archives for a copy of his military service and pension records, but they were unable to locate a file for Erasmus. No obituary or death record has yet been found for him. Information about his death came from *Collier's Weekly*, June

11, 1932.

Following Erasmus' death, Sarah moved her family to Kansas City, Missouri, where she felt she could better provide for them. This is where Alice's musical career started, dancing and singing on the streets.

While in Kansas City Alice sang in the choir at St. Patrick's Cathedral, where she met Benjamin Nentwig, the church organist. He was born around 1865 in Prussia and was raised in Germany, later moving to the U.S. with his parents. According to *Collier's* Alice and Benjamin were married in 1889, when Alice was only 15 or 16. The marriage was ill-fated and ended in divorce on grounds of cruelty and abuse two years later in 1891, according to the *Kansas City Star* of September 30, 1891, but a son, Benjamin Jr., was born to the union in 1890. Ben Nentwig, Alice's ex-husband, died on August 21, 1905, at the age of 40, according to obituaries in the *Kansas City Star* and *The Kansas City Times*.

Alice later married J. F. Leffler, but no other information or dates were given for this marriage. On December 21, 1917, in New York City, she married Dr. LeRoy Stoddard, a surgeon who treated soldiers who were disfigured in battle during World War I. This information was obtained from an article on their marriage in *The New York Times*, December 22, 1917. This marriage too ended in divorce in 1930, according to Dr. Stoddard's obituary in *The New York Times* of March 20, 1943.

Further research in the federal censuses located Sarah Nielsen and her family in California in 1900, where Alice was pursuing her music career. This census listed Sarah as the head of household. Living with her were daughter Mary, age 40, daughter Hortense, age 31, son Erasmus, age 27, grand-son Benjamin, age 10, and grand-son Thomas, age 7. The 1910 Federal census showed Erasmus Nielsen Jr. living in New York, where he was married and had a daughter, Mary. His mother, Sarah, was living with him, along with a nephew, Thomas Gavin. His occupation is listed as a musician.

The 1920 Federal census shows musician Erasmus still living in New York, married and with a daughter, Mary, 10,

and a son, Benjamin, 8. Sarah is no longer living with him, so we assume she died in the intervening decade.

Alice Nielsen died on March 9, 1943, and her obituary appeared in *The Kansas City Times*, *The Chicago Daily Tribune* and *The Washington Post*. She was 68 years of age and, according to the obituaries, had lived alone in an apartment leading a very modest life after her years of success in the musical world. According to her obituary in *The Kansas City Times*, March 9, 1943, Alice's son, Benjamin Nentwig, Jr., lived in Needham, Massachusetts, at the time of her death. In September 1940, Alice made a gift of selected costumes, musical scores and other trophies of a glamorous professional life to the Kansas City Museum, during a visit there.

### A Story Alice Recalls About Her Father

Alice remembers her father's lovely stories about the moon, especially about the man in the moon. Erasmus told his daughter Alice that he knew the man in the moon well because he was his father. She replied it was too bad they were so far apart—to which Erasmus replied "I can wait. When I die I shall join him and then there will be two of us up there. This may not be good for the world, because we will never agree and the heat of our arguments may darken the moon, if not set it on fire."

After the death of her father, Alice, a young child, ran in terror to her mother because she could see only one man in the moon—the same old familiar face. She cried to her mother, "our father is lost; there is only one man in the moon—the same one—his father." Her mother comforted her by telling her that her father was always a great wanderer. It would take him a year to do a day's travel and she should not worry, because perhaps at this very minute he was hiding on the other side of the moon just to be contrary.



# The Danish Immigrant Museum 2005 MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

Dear Member of The Danish Immigrant Museum

I am a graduate student at Aalborg University, Aalborg, Denmark, where I am completing my Master's degree in Tourism. As a part of my degree I am interning at The Danish Immigrant Museum. During my time here, I am creating this membership survey as part of my intern project. With your help it will not only be possible for me to do my intern project, but also to help The Museum in better serving its members. In advance, thank you very much for your time.

Helene Christensen

Please complete the following questionnaire and return it before **October 10, 2005**. Mail to: The Danish Immigrant Museum, Att: Helene Christensen, PO Box 470, Elk Horn, IA 51531-0470 or Fax to: 712-764-7002

**Please indicate your age group**    ☐ Under 25    ☐ 25-34    ☐ 35-49    ☐ 50-64    ☐ 65-79    ☐ 80+

**What state or country do you live in?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Describe your Danish Heritage:** \_\_\_\_\_  
(Danish citizen living in the U.S. temporarily / permanently, Danish citizen in Denmark, American with Danish ancestors)

**1. Of the nine following statements please choose the four that best describe your opinion, ranking them from 1-4 with 1 being the most favorable.**

**The reason why I am a member/we are members of The Danish Immigrant Museum is:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ I/we want to support the Museum financially
- \_\_\_\_\_ I/we want to be affiliated with a Danish/American institution
- \_\_\_\_\_ I/we want to help to preserve Danish/American culture
- \_\_\_\_\_ I/we believe it is important to help preserve the stories of Danish immigrants and the Danish/American experience
- \_\_\_\_\_ I/we believe it is important to preserve the Danish immigrant history
- \_\_\_\_\_ I/we believe it contributes to a better relationship between Denmark and U.S.A.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I/we want free admission and discounts on purchases at the Museum Shop
- \_\_\_\_\_ I/we want to receive the *America Letter*
- \_\_\_\_\_ I/we want to use the facilities of the Museum (*Family History and Genealogy Center, Bedstemor's House*)

**2. How often do you visit The Danish Immigrant Museum?**

- \_\_\_\_\_ more than five times a year
- \_\_\_\_\_ between two and five times a year
- \_\_\_\_\_ at least once a year
- \_\_\_\_\_ less than once a year
- \_\_\_\_\_ several years ago
- \_\_\_\_\_ have never visited the museum

**3. What was the reason for your last visit to The Danish Immigrant Museum (Check as many as apply)?**

- \_\_\_\_\_ I was/we were attending events in Elk Horn (such as Tivoli Fest, Julefest)
- \_\_\_\_\_ I/we wanted to view current temporary exhibits
- \_\_\_\_\_ I/we visited friends and family in the local area
- \_\_\_\_\_ I/we visited the Family History and Genealogy Center
- \_\_\_\_\_ I was/we were on vacation
- \_\_\_\_\_ I/we paid the Museum a visit spontaneously
- \_\_\_\_\_ I/we attended a lecture, class, open house or other event

**4. When you last visited The Danish Immigrant Museum, what was your impression of the exhibits?**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Excellent
- \_\_\_\_\_ Good
- \_\_\_\_\_ Fair
- \_\_\_\_\_ Poor

# The Danish Immigrant Museum 2005 MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

Please rank the following on a scale from 1-5 based on what you feel to be most accurate:

## 5. During my/our last visit to The Danish Immigrant Museum, I/we thought . . .

The *Across Oceans/Across Time*® exhibit was ..... (great) 1 2 3 4 5 (disappointing)  
 The current temporary exhibits were ..... (great) 1 2 3 4 5 (disappointing)  
 The Museum Shop was ..... (great) 1 2 3 4 5 (disappointing)

### The Museum in general:

The friendliness of the staff was ..... (great) 1 2 3 4 5 (disappointing)  
 The helpfulness of the staff was ..... (great) 1 2 3 4 5 (disappointing)  
 The reception by the volunteer at the front desk was (great) 1 2 3 4 5 (disappointing)  
 The level of cleanliness was ..... (great) 1 2 3 4 5 (disappointing)  
 The Museum grounds were ..... (great) 1 2 3 4 5 (disappointing)

### The facilities of the Museum:

*Bedstemor's House* was ..... (great) 1 2 3 4 5 (disappointing)  
 The *Family History and Genealogy Center* was ..... (great) 1 2 3 4 5 (disappointing)

## 6. Please feel free to elaborate your thoughts on the *Across Oceans/Across Time*® exhibit. All ideas for future exhibits are appreciated.

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## 7. What is your impression of the *America Letter*?

☐ Excellent ☐ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Poor

Please feel free to elaborate

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## 9. What is your impression of the website?

☐ Excellent ☐ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Poor

## 10. Please feel free to elaborate your thoughts of the website - suggestions for improvement

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## 8. Have you ever visited The Danish Immigrant Museum's website? ([www.danishmuseum.org](http://www.danishmuseum.org))

☐ Yes ☐ No

## 11. We welcome your additional comments. Please enclose an additional sheet if you do not find the following space sufficient.

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12. I am: ☐ Female ☐ Male

*Thank you so much for your help. Tusind tak for din hjælp.*