

# America Letter

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**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  
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## Across Oceans, Across Time, Across Generations®: The Lauritzen

By Eva Nielsen

This story involves – among others – a ship builder, an artist, a banker, and a master painter. It links a house by the sea in Denmark with a bank in Omaha, Nebraska with The Danish Immigrant Museum in Elk Horn, Iowa. It's a story connecting past to present – and a story about making something beautiful to remember the journey.

Let's start with Bruce Lauritzen. He is the

banker, the chairman of First National Bank of Omaha and the Honorary Royal Danish Consul for Nebraska. First National Bank is 150 years old this year. Established in 1857, it is the largest privately held bank holding company in the U.S.

Lauritzen and his family own the Shelby County State Bank which has an office in Elk Horn. His son Clark owns Landmands National Bank which has an office in nearby Kimballton.

Further, Lauritzen and his family's support through the Lauritzen Corporation have been essential to The Danish Immigrant Museum. Over the past eleven years, their generosity has retired the debt on the present museum

*The sculpture created by Danish goldsmith and designer Helle Jørvad. The sculpture is a gift meant to thank and to remember.*



*Bruce Lauritzen's great-great-grandfather, Carl Christian, would have seen this view of the sea from his home in Ærøskøbing, Denmark. Carl Christian was a ship builder and skipper. He immigrated to America in 1891 at the age of 77.*

building and laid a foundation for the Museum's future growth.

Now here's where the artist comes into the story. Earlier this year, The Danish Immigrant Museum contacted Danish goldsmith and designer Helle Jørvad, commissioning her to create a sculpture for Lauritzen, a thank you for the role the Lauritzen family and the Lauritzen Corporation has played in building the Museum – a thank you, too, that would capture something of the Lauritzen family's Danish past.

Jørvad began to work, starting with a basic concept: "If I was going to make a sculpture," she says, "I would like to make something from the place where Lauritzen's people had been. I really wanted a stone from the family's garden – because stone would have been there always. And I very much wanted to get a flint stone because I know that flint is usually created where you find it."

Jørvad also wanted to find some wood – "...a piece of wood," Jørvad says, "that grew up where the family grew up."

To get stone, to get wood, Jørvad needed to find where Lauritzen's ancestors had lived. Starting with a few

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## Director's Corner By John Mark Nielsen

Next year The Danish Immigrant Museum celebrates its 25th anniversary. I was a late addition to

the committee that had been named by the Danish American Heritage Society to investigate the feasibility of a Danish heritage museum and a location. The committee took its work seriously, debating and discussing many issues. Ultimately, important decisions were made that continue to impact us today: a rural over an urban site was selected; the word "immigrant" was incorporated into the name.

In 25 years we have worked to build a museum, beginning with an idea and then, through hard work and perseverance, making it a reality. This has been due to the generosity and loyalty of many, many individuals. Among these are Bruce and Kimball Lauritzen who the Board of Directors recognized and thanked at its June meeting in Omaha.

The generosity of the Lauritzens and the Lauritzen Corporation has enabled The Danish Immigrant Museum to retire a debt of over \$1.6 million. Indeed, the last payment will be made in the early autumn of 2008, 25 years and a month after the museum was incorporated. I believe the Danish American community, whether Museum members or not, owe the Lauritzens a great debt of gratitude. Their confidence and support has assured the preservation of over 35,000 artifacts and hundreds of family histories and enabled thousands of visitors to share in the Danish American story.

Twenty-five years is not a long time and yet the world has changed since the Museum became a reality. In 1983 the globe was divided "East versus West" and a "Third World" clambering for attention. Despite international tensions, travelers passed through domestic airports freely and were only subject to scrutiny crossing borders overseas. The internet was only a theoretical idea and computers in most homes seemed farfetched to many.

Interest in genealogy and ethnic heritage among many Americans was evident, largely inspired by the 1977 television series based on Alex Haley's *Roots*. Indeed even the word "immigrant" had more popular connotations. Rural America was struggling to emerge from another "Farm Crisis," and though there had been an energy crisis in the mid-70s, paying \$3.00 for a gallon gas regularly was unimaginable.

Locating a museum in Elk Horn, Iowa in the heart of a significant Danish American population and along Interstate 80, a major east-west thoroughfare acknowledged the importance of the rural settlement patterns of the 19th Century. It was an investment in a community that had demonstrated initiative by moving and reconstructing a Danish windmill as a bicentennial project, and it was a celebration of the pride and spirit evident in so many individuals living in the surrounding communities of Kimballton, Exira, Audubon, Atlantic and Harlan.

The factors that led to the selection of Elk Horn for the site of The Danish Immigrant Museum remain, but twenty-five years later there are

new realities, new challenges and new opportunities. Over the next months and as we enter our 25th anniversary year, I look forward to sharing steps that we will be taking to assure that we continue to fulfill our mission to share "*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.*"

An important first step is redesign of our present exhibit "Across Oceans, Across Time." Since 1994 visitors entering the museum have met a photograph of an immigrant family arriving in America. It is a wonderful picture and reflects an important part of our story. Unfolding on panels on the main floor is a story of immigration beginning in the mid-19th Century and concluding in the early part of the 20th Century. Little attention is paid to the experiences of World War II and we do not explore the experience of the many Danes who came to this county in the 1950s, 60s, right up to today. Yes, we have Victor Borge's piano (for which we are grateful), but it is an artifact without a context.

Our plan, as we celebrate our 25th anniversary year, is to unveil two important exhibits. Our annual exhibit on the mezzanine level will be called "Across Oceans, Across Time, Across Generations" and will narrate the stories of three or four extended families as examples of immigration and assimilation. The other will be an expansion of our present permanent exhibit, but it will have a broader focus and incorporate state-of-the-art exhibit technologies. The

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## Director . . . continued from page 1

possibility of planning for this is due to the generosity of Rita Neergaard-Hansen of Kenosha, Wisconsin who has provided initial funding for this project, but of course funds will be required to complete this project.

In a global community drawn more closely together by travel, trade, work and communication, the migration of peoples is a reality. I believe we have a responsibility to raise important questions about the opportunities, challenges and even the conflicts that arise from the movement of peoples. I hope visitors will leave informed about the Danish immigrant experience through the redesign of our present permanent exhibit, but will also leave, considering the implications of immigration and how it contributes to the reshaping of regional, national and global culture.

This is not an American experience. Anyone familiar with the social and political turmoil arising in Denmark following the publication of the 13 cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammad and the subsequent reactions elsewhere in the world recognizes it is global. A museum is more than a tourist attraction; a museum should at once engage, inform and encourage thought. If we do not inspire informed reflection on issues of migration, then I believe we are failing our visitors.

As we are able to achieve these exhibit goals at our Museum, we can then incorporate them on our website as we develop our virtual museum. Twenty-five years ago that was not possible. As we realize these goals, I hope we will merit the faith and the trust the Lauritzens and so many of you have placed in us.



## Museum Receives Humanities Iowa Grant

In late June, The Danish Immigrant Museum received a \$4,700 grant from Humanities Iowa for the "preservation of audio interviews." The letter, signed by Christopher R. Rossi, executive director, states, "Your project was deemed particularly meritorious by this select group of Iowans, who are charged with the responsibility of promoting and enhancing an understanding of culture throughout the state."

The grant allows the Museum to transfer over 400 hours of recorded oral histories from cassette tape to digital format. Once transferred, the data will be available for research-

ers and selected segments will be used for public presentations. The interviews were initially recorded in 1983 through an earlier grant from Humanities Iowa.

Dennis Andersen, a newly re-elected member of the Museum's Board of Directors, took the lead on submitting the grant application with assistance from John Mark Nielsen, the Museum's executive director. A committee made up of former residents of Elk Horn, including Sonja Larsen, Karolyn Ortgies, Marc Petersen (current vice-president of the board) and Dorris Hedgcock, initiated the process, convening to find a way to preserve the tapes.



# Lauritzens . . .

continued from page 1



*This is a farm building – part of the Søbygaard estate – on Ærø, the home of Duke Hans the Younger whose brother became King Frederick II of Denmark and whose nephew became King Christian IV of Denmark. The timber Jørvad used in her sculpture was part of one of the estate's buildings before it was taken out and replaced during restoration.*

biographical details, Jørvad scoured old church records and consulted local archives, slowly piecing together Bruce Lauritzen's Danish heritage.

She learned that Bruce Lauritzen's grandfather, Max, was born in Copenhagen in 1888. And he immigrated to America – to Minnesota – in 1891 as a 3-year-old, along with his parents, Peter Lauritzen and Nicoline Rønnow (Lauritzen's great-grandparents).

Jørvad dug deeper, discovering that Bruce Lauritzen's great-great-grandfather Carl Christian Lauritzen had lived on the island of Ærø. Carl Christian was a ship builder and a skipper (meaning he owned a ship) who lived with his mother in a house by the sea in Ærøskøbing until he married in his early thirties.

Finally, Jørvad had found one of

Bruce Lauritzen's ancestral homes, a place to find a stone – if the current owners would allow it. With an address as well as the name of a woodworker who might help her find some wood for her sculpture, Jørvad set out for Ærø.

And, then, as Jørvad explains it, things began to come together. The current owner of Bruce Lauritzen's great-great-grandfather's home is a director of a folk high school. To Jørvad, this meant he was an open-minded person, a person who wouldn't mind an artist poking around, looking for a rock in his garden.

Jørvad was invited into the house. She got to see things that Bruce Lauritzen's ancestors would have seen: the beautiful brass doorknob on the front door, the home's original pump, the view of the sea from the



*Bruce Lauritzen pictured with his wife Kimball.*



*Clark Lauritzen, son of Bruce and Kimball, is a senior vice president and division head of investment banking at First National Bank of Omaha.*

garden. And, finally, just at the edge of the old cobblestone pavement in the garden sat a loose flint stone, just waiting for Jørvad's sculpture.

And the wood? Well, it turns out that the woodworker – the one whose name Jørvad had gotten before coming to Ærø – is the brother of the current owner of Bruce Lauritzen's great-great-grandfather's home. "Isn't that fun!" says Jørvad.

Also, this woodcutter just hap-



*Bruce Lauritzen's great-grandmother grew up in this home in Rudkøbing, Denmark. A statue of Hans Christian Ørsted, the Danish scientist who discovered a connection between electricity and magnetism, stands in the square outside. Ørsted's family lived in the square, too.*

pened to have the perfect piece of wood: a piece of structural building timber from an estate on Ærø that he was helping restore. "That was coincidence," says Jørvad. "Sometimes things happen that have to be."

Jørvad also visited the childhood home of Bruce Lauritzen's great-grandmother, Nicoline Ronnøw, in

Rudkøbing on the island of Langeland. Nicoline's father was a *malermester* – a master painter – there. And Nicoline's mother? Her name was Martha Mathilde Flindt; "Flindt" – yet another reason, Jørvad felt, to include a flint stone in the sculpture.

Armed with wood and flint and a

sense of Bruce Lauritzen's heritage, Jørvad began to design. Thinking both of the family's 1891 journey to America and their maritime heritage, Jørvad crafted a ship's sail out of pure silver; she used the timber as a stand. The sail can be turned back and forth in its place. "If Bruce Lauritzen wants to go home," Jørvad explains, "to find the stone where he came from, he has to go east. You then turn the sail around the other way. That was the way the family went...to the west."

And the flint stone? Jørvad set it near the base of the timber. "But," says Jørvad, "I didn't fasten the flint; so Bruce Lauritzen can pick it up or set it down or put it in another way and have it in his hand and touch it and know that his great-great-grandfather might have walked on it."

And that is the story of the sculpture – the sculpture to remember a family's past and to celebrate all they have given in the present. The sculpture that, Jørvad says, made itself. "I was just the worker; I was not the creator...it created itself."



*John Mark Nielsen of The Danish Immigrant Museum, Jørvad, and Lauritzen surround the sculpture.*

## Faith, Family Heritage and Future Visions

In presenting the sculpture to Bruce Lauritzen, Dr. John Mark Nielsen of The Danish Immigrant Museum noted how the materials of stone, wood and silver convey symbolic meaning.

The rock suggests the ballast that filled his ancestor's ships and represents the faith that has provided stability to confront inevitable storms. The oak beam speaks of the family's heritage, rooted in the Danish islands, and the silver sails communicate an ability to harness the winds of fortune and navigate towards charted goals.

A plaque on the bottom reads, "This work created by the Danish artist Helle Jørvad is presented to Bruce and Kimball Lauritzen, their children and the Lauritzen Corporation in grateful appreciation for their support of The Danish Immigrant Museum and in celebration of the 150th anniversary of First National Bank of Omaha. June 8, 2007, First National Tower, Omaha, Nebraska."

# Festival Atmosphere Fills Museum

The Danish Villages celebrated another successful Tivoli Fest. Numerous on-site handcrafters and four new exhibits attracted a record number of visitors to The Danish Immigrant Museum.

In royal fashion, the Memorial Day weekend festivities began Friday evening at the Museum with the crowning of Tivoli Fest's prince and princess. Parents, siblings and friends crowded in the Museum lobby to hear Tom Potts of Elk Horn interview each of the young candidates. The moment was tense as Potts reached into the hat to announce the new reigning royalty: Princess Kailley Britton of Elk Horn and Prince Josh Pettepier of Walnut, Iowa.

Saturday morning's sky brought rain, but cleared in time for the popular annual parade. Executive Director John Mark Nielsen rode with Museum member and driver Norbert Greving in the 1929 Model A car gifted to the Museum by

Steven Jensen of Washington.

Visitors of all ages were treated to an array of handcraft demonstrators and exhibits. Upon entering the Museum, visitors were captivated by the spinning of wool by Wayne McFadden of Atlantic, Iowa.

The Museum's featured artist-in-residence, Danish goldsmith and designer Helle Jørvad, performed a popular demonstration. Guests of all ages listened intently as Jørvad explained her expertise while creating a memento name pin for the spectators.

Local artist Melissa Dinesen of Harlan, Iowa demonstrated her hardanger talents (hardanger is a kind of handwork). Aveline Marks of Omaha, Nebraska exhibited high quality Danish cross-stitching. Meanwhile, Bev Mendenhall of Atlantic, Iowa and her sister, Nadine Dobbe of Ames, Iowa illustrated how to make the traditional Danish ribbon stars and red and white woven paper

heart baskets to hang on Christmas trees. Annette Andersen of Kimballton, Iowa displayed her *papirklip* (intricate paper cuttings).

As visitors strolled the lush green Museum grounds, they discovered a small forge set up with third generation Danish immigrant and master blacksmith Steve Nelson of Marne, Iowa heating metal and hammering it into a desired shape.

Two new attractions were held in the Museum's Bro Dining Room and the new conference room. The Tivoli Café possessed a festive décor for the hungry, complete with white tablecloths adorned with fresh flowers provided by the Outlook Study Club. In the conference room, the Danish Film Festival's popular feature was the 3D computer graphic and animated Hans Christian Andersen story, *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*.

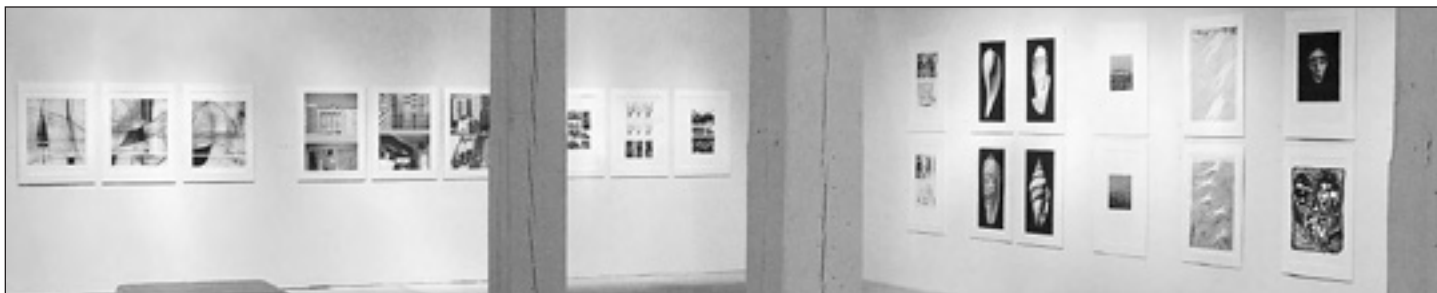
Visitors leaving the Museum were heard to say, "That was fun!" and "We'll be back."

## The Danish Immigrant Museum: Upcoming Events

The Danish Immigrant Museum is participating in or sponsoring the following upcoming events:

July 25 ..... Western Iowa Tourism Region Bi-Monthly Meeting, Atlantic, Iowa  
August 15-19 ..... Danebod Fall Folk Meeting, Tyler, Minnesota  
August 26 ..... Our Savior Lutheran Church Anniversary, Plainview, Nebraska  
September 2 ..... Danish American Fellowship, Minden, Nebraska  
September 9 ..... Scandinavian Day, Vasa Park, South Elgin, Illinois  
September 23 ..... Cedar Valley Danes, Cedar Falls/Waterloo, Iowa  
October 6 ..... Car Show in The Danish Immigrant Museum parking lot  
October 10-13 ..... Høstfest, Minot, North Dakota  
October 18-20 ..... Board of Directors Meeting, Elk Horn, Iowa  
October 26-28 ..... National Convention of the Danish Sisterhood in America in Chicago  
November 10 ..... Scandinavian Club of Sun City, Arizona





*A glimpse of the exhibit at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Art in Omaha. The Danish Immigrant Museum and the Funen Graphic Workshop of Odense, Denmark cosponsored this traveling exhibit.*

## **"Immigrants: Graphic Images from the Funen Graphic Workshop" Concludes**

In late June, The Danish Immigrant Museum concluded a successful partnership with the Funen Graphic Workshop of Odense, Denmark, and museums and galleries in Des Moines, Minneapolis, Omaha, Seattle and Solvang. The exhibit was so successful that when officials in Columbus, Ohio—Odense's sister city—learned of it, arrangements were made to add Columbus to the tour. On its return to Europe, the exhibit will be seen in Sweden before closing at the Workshop's gallery in Odense.

The exhibit of over 240 works by 84 artists represents a wide range of styles and print making techniques. Jeremy Stern, curator and assistant director of the Bemis Center for Contemporary Art in Omaha, said that he really didn't anticipate the scope of the show until he

and staff began unpacking the crates. "It was like Christmas. What was amazing was the range and quality of the work." He was especially pleased to discover prints by Eli Ponsaing, an innovative Danish printmaker who developed the technique of using polymer plates in the intaglio process.

A 48-page catalog including 31 full color prints has been published with essays by Søren Møller, president of the Danish Cultural Institute; Ole Lejbach, artist and exhibit organizer; Torben Grøngaard Jeppesen, director of the Odense City Museums, and John Mark Nielsen of The Danish Immigrant Museum. It is available from The Danish Immigrant

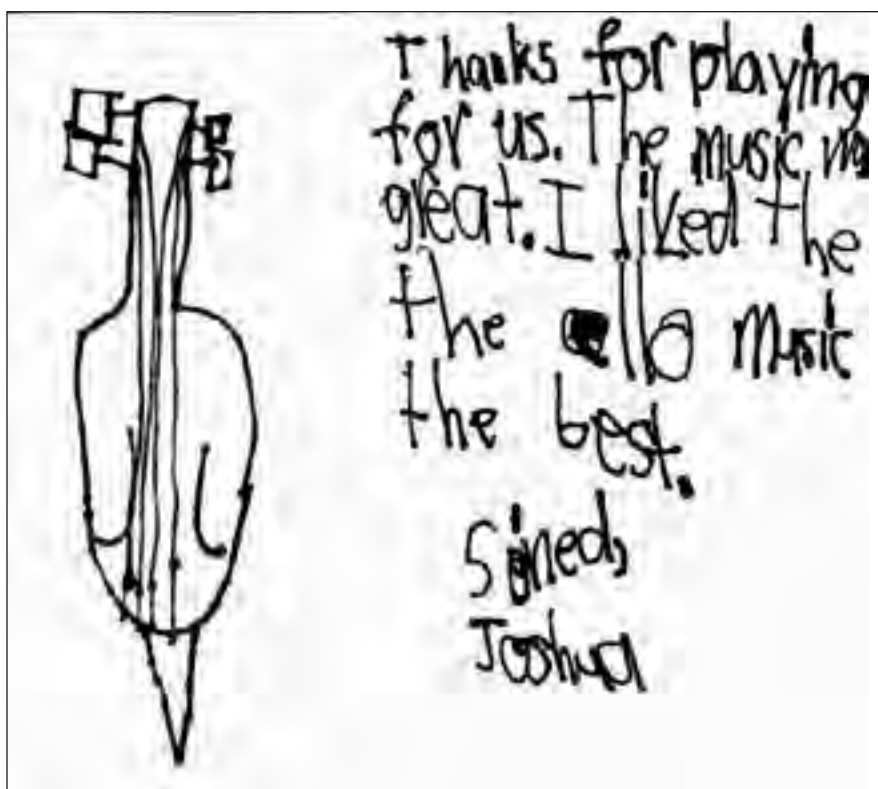
Museum Shop at a cost of \$10 plus shipping and handling.

This partnership marks the first time The Danish Immigrant Museum has cosponsored such an extensive traveling exhibit and the first time the Funen Graphic Workshop has exhibited in the United States. Staff members at both institutions have learned much from the experience and plans are already underway for future traveling exhibits.

The organizers are most grateful for the generosity of Steen Sanderhoff and Le-man USA for making arrangements and providing transportation from Denmark and throughout the United States.



*Eli Ponsaing, a former faculty member at Denmark's Royal Academy of Art, created the process of using polymer plates in the intaglio process. This is an example of one of his prints featured in the exhibit.*



*This card from an Audubon Elementary School student was one of many thank you notes the Museum received from children who experienced the music of the Maia String Quartet. The quartet recently completed an extended residency with The Danish Immigrant Museum.*

# From a Curatorial Perspective

By Barbara Lund-Jones

In this column, I am extending to readers an invitation and a challenge wrapped in one. Are there adventurous souls among you who will take up my challenge for intellectual exploration and growth?

The crux of the matter is this: we need research assistance in the development of our exhibits. Our exhibition program has grown dramatically within the last two years, creating new needs as we plan our exhibits further and further into the future. One area in which the need is particularly strong is that of research. Research is required in the preliminary planning stages as well as throughout the development of an exhibit.

In consultation with the curator, specific research topics will be undertaken on a volunteer basis. An individual's

location is not an issue as computers and phones allow immediacy of communication. Topics will relate to upcoming exhibits, but in some cases, may be suggested by the researcher if they think a particular topic is especially relevant to an upcoming exhibit.

There are two exhibits currently being researched in this manner. One exhibit focuses on Denmark's remarkable contributions to hearing aid technology. The researcher for this exhibit has put together initial information and has made remarkable contacts in Denmark, securing for the Museum actual examples of early Danish hearing aid technology. Development of the exhibit continues as more hands-on aspects of the technology are sought for public presentation.

The second exhibit focuses on the

Elim Children's Home in Elk Horn. Little of this Danish American institution's history is publicly available; the home has been closed for several decades. The researcher committed to this exhibit is gathering information from private sources and arranging for interviews of former residents. The end result will be an invaluable gathering and preservation of historical data—a key aspect of the Museum's mission.

There are many other exhibit projects under consideration that require research. If you are an individual who loves this kind of challenge and enjoys making contributions to the gathering and presentation of history and culture, then I urge you to contact me and we will discuss possible projects. Take the leap and give me a call! I would love to hear from you.



## Museum Strives to Preserve Rare Banner

In June of 2006, the Danish American Athletic Club in Illinois loaned the Museum a club banner dating from 1922 for use in the exhibit, "Fitness, Form and Rhythm in Motion: the Danish Gymnastics Tradition in the United States." Unfortunately, its poor condition prevented its inclusion and it remained unseen by the public.

At the close of the exhibit period, the DAAC converted the loan into a donation and the Museum happily accepted the banner into the permanent collection. The banner is unlike anything in the Museum's collection; it is a piece of the athletic club's history. However, preserving this special artifact properly will require care and funds.

The banner is made primarily of silk, a large part of the challenge. Silk becomes increasingly fragile as it ages. The weight of the banner has put tension on the threads of silk and stretched them until they have broken, creating a "shattering" effect on both the front and back of the banner. In addition, staining is visible on both sides, and there is some

heavy creasing from the fabric being puckered or pinched as it was rolled for storage years ago.

At the end of June, the banner will be delivered to the Midwest Art Conservation Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota where a technician will examine it, provide a current condition assessment, offer a suggested treatment plan, and an estimated repair cost. The estimate will be reviewed by the Museum's development department so that funding avenues can be explored. Conservation projects that involve this level of repair can easily cost several thousand dollars.

Eventually, after conservation work has been completed and the banner's condition stabilized, this textile will be stored flat and unfolded on a stiff, archivally sound surface so that no folds are necessary. Ideally, this surface will be reasonably mobile so the piece can be transported from storage into an exhibit space without direct handling of the banner itself.

The banner from the Danish American



*The Danish American Athletic Club of Illinois donated this rare 1922 banner to the Museum's collection. In order to preserve and display this artifact, major repairs are needed.*

Athletic Club poses challenges both in its care and in determining how best to share it with the public. Preservation and conservation work also can be expensive, but it is our responsibility to all artifacts in our collection to provide this care as best we can when it is needed.





*Jørvad (seated) at work at the table she had built for the exhibit. This table closely resembles the worktable in her Ringsted, Denmark workshop.*

## Museum Exhibits Work of Helle Jørvad

Those who admire fine jewelry and superb craftsmanship will be delighted by their visit to The Danish Immigrant Museum this summer. Gold and silver rings share the stage with handcrafted silver bowls, pendants, elegant hand-wrought metal bookmarks and a gathering of tools used to make these unique pieces.

The Museum is pleased to exhibit the work of Helle Jørvad, an independent Danish goldsmith and designer. She has produced commissioned one-of-a-kind works for the royal Danish family and for members of the Danish government (prime minister, secretaries of state). Photographs of some of these commissions are featured in the exhibit.

Jørvad is a member of the association of Danish silversmiths approved to carry out works of art for churches. The exhibition includes miniature reproductions as well as photographs of some of her remarkable work for churches on the islands of Sjælland and Fyn.

Jørvad has studied her craft in Denmark, Germany and Scotland. Her workshop and studio is located in Ringsted, Denmark, a sister city to Ringsted, Iowa. The two Ringsteds maintain ongoing

communication. Jørvad travels to the United States frequently in her capacity as a liaison in this sister city relationship.

Because of these travels, Jørvad will be spending time at the Museum as an artist-in-residence. She commissioned a worktable to be built for the exhibit, which closely resembles her worktable in Ringsted, Denmark. During her visits to the Museum, she will work at this table, demonstrating to visitors various aspects of her craft. Her demonstrations during the Tivoli Fest were exceptionally popular.



*The work of Danish goldsmith and designer Helle Jørvad displayed at the Museum. Jørvad has created numerous one-of-a-kind pieces for the Danish royal family.*

## Matwijkiw's Work Enlivens Bro Dining Room

This summer the Museum's Bro Dining Room is awash with color and vibrancy. It is filled with original artwork by Edward Matwijkiw, a contemporary Danish artist. The exhibit's title, "Kaleidoscopic Colors of Scandinavia—Artwork by Edward Matwijkiw," conveys some of the energy generated by the display.

On a trip to the U.S. last summer, Matwijkiw visited the Museum and studied its spaces. He offered to do a special exhibit that would be featured in the Museum's dining area so that visitors could relax and enjoy their coffee and pastries surrounded by art. His original oils, acrylics, watercolors and photographic studies arrived in late May and have transformed the coffee area.

Matwijkiw was born in Denmark and received his formal education as an artist from The Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen, Denmark and Accademia Di Danimarca in Rome, Italy. He works in several mediums including oil, watercolor, drawing, lithography, sculpture, photography, and ceramics.

Matwijkiw has the distinction of being in *Kraks Blå Bog* (Krak's Blue Book). The book is an annual Danish publication listing prominent living people in Denmark who have influenced Danish society culturally, politically or through business. To be chosen for such a listing is a high honor.

The artist and his work are featured in a large number of catalogues, books, articles, interviews, dictionaries and biographies. Among the prestigious honors and awards that Matwijkiw has received are The Georg Jensen Silversmith's Art Award (1964); HRH Queen Ingrid's Foundation (1970); The Danish Institute in Athen's Fellowship (2001); Emma of Frederik Kragh's Memorial Foundation (2004); Grosserer L.F. Foght's Foundation, Montana Foundation, Velux Foundation, and Knud Hoejgaard's Foundation (2005).

The Museum Shop offers two publications focusing on Edward Matwijkiw's artwork; They are artist-signed editions.

# Jens Dixer House Opens to Visitors

The Jens Dixer House opened to visitors during Tivoli Fest and will remain open throughout the summer and early fall. The official dedication will be held during the Museum's October board meeting.

A long period of preparation went into the opening of the Jens Dixer House with different individuals contributing their time and talents at various stages. Dr. James Iversen's contributions were invaluable in pinpointing the interpretative time period for the house. Iversen currently serves as president of the Danish American Heritage Society and has previously served as president of the Museum's Board of Directors. A retired professor of engineering (Iowa State University), he has long delved into aspects of Danish American history.

Iversen carefully researched land claims for Dixer in North Dakota and property titles in Dixer's name in the area of Coulter, Iowa. Although Dixer lived in the Kenmare, North Dakota area earlier, he didn't come into possession of the shanty house (now on Museum grounds) until around 1906, after the nearby Brorson Folk School had been built.

It was originally thought that Dixer owned the shanty earlier, using the cabin as a place to house some of the schoolboys he taught. Iversen's research indicated that this was not the case and the house has now been interpreted as Dixer's residence during a time he was very involved with the Brorson School, but prior to his marriage.

Once the interpretative framework was fixed, Ron and Mary Bro were indispensable in researching and securing appropriate furnishings. Ron Bro



*The Jens Dixer House, moved to the grounds of The Danish Immigrant Museum from North Dakota, is now open to the public. Jens Dixer, a Danish immigrant, lived in the shanty around 1906.*

is a member of the Museum's Board of Directors and a retired professor of industrial arts (University of Northern Iowa); Mary is a retired teacher. Ron has been a key force in the Jens Dixer House restoration from the beginning.

Based on the Bro's research, Ron made a special wood bed with a woven rope support for the mattress. He also compiled a detailed list of items needed for the rest of the house and solicited what he could from the Cedar Valley Danes, of which he is a member. Thanks to this group, the Dixer House is now equipped with some wonderful old flour sacks, mattress ticking, clothing and odds and ends appropriate to a Great Plains shanty of that period. The rest of the furnishings were either bought in local antique stores or handmade by Ron himself.

The furnishings, in their entirety, remarkably transform the small space of the shanty. The Dixer House now conveys a sparse feeling of life as it was once lived on the Great Plains, particularly by an austere and deeply

committed religious man, such as Jens Dixer.



*Ron and Mary Bro researched and secured appropriate furnishings for the Jens Dixer House. Ron made this wood bed with woven rope support.*

# "From Postcards to Instant Messaging: Friends and Family Stay in Touch" Opens at the Museum

Museum visitors during the Tivoli and Sankt Hans Aften festivals were treated to the distinctive sounds of Morse Code – metal telegraph keys communicating the characteristic dot-dash-dash-dot-dot-dash of the code.

In connection with the Museum's 2007 exhibit "From Postcards to Instant Messaging: Friends and Family Stay in Touch," Loys and Marjorie Rowens of Denison, Iowa demonstrated how communications were once sent by telegraph. Visitors wrote brief messages, which were sent by Morse Code and translated back into words by the telegraph operator on the receiving end.

The exhibit features four modes of communication: telegraph, postcard, telephone and computer messaging. Each of these communication systems reflects the fundamental desire to communicate as quickly and as directly as possible.

Communication by telegraph established itself as a viable means of communication around the 1840s. It was negotiated on a per-word cost, contributing to the development of the clipped, abbreviated language unique to telegrams.

The postcard, popularized in the 1870s, was clearly a departure from the long established tradition of letter writing at the time. In fact, writers of early cards often mentioned that their communications were "stand-ins" for letters, due to time and circumstance.

The telephone, also developed in the 1870s, allowed business transactions to be done quickly – with a previously unimagined speed. In the personal sphere, long distance usage was, for decades, a carefully budgeted luxury for many families, establishing de facto the rule of short verbal communications over long distances.

The story of the telephone is told through the Marne Elk Horn Telephone Company, which this year, has been in business for 105 years. Visitors will enjoy



*Loys Rowens of Denison, Iowa demonstrates to Karolyn Ortgies, a museum member, how telegrams were once sent. The Museum's new exhibit explores how people in different times and places have tried to keep in touch.*

following the company's history through the many artifacts displayed, including an early telephone switchboard.

The computer, developed in the last quarter of the twentieth century, has redefined time, particularly work-time, compressing the distances and the time traditionally involved in the organization and communication of information. The

exhibit concludes with a computer station set up for Instant Messaging. Visitors are invited to join with friends and family members to participate in the ongoing Instant Messaging dialogue between Denmark and the U.S.

The exhibit runs through February 25, 2008.

## Consider This...

As a tax-deductible donation, give your family members an annual "gift membership" to the Museum. Help us grow our membership and care for and preserve our collections.

For more information contact Deb Larsen, membership coordinator, at 800-759-9192.



## Museum Shop Features Elin Borg Peace Pendant

Elin Borg Hvidt Feldt, a Danish citizen, has designed a beautiful peace sign pendant in which three monotheistic religions are represented: Islam by the hand of Fatima, Christianity by the cross and Judaism by the Star of David.

Blending symbols of Christianity, Judaism and Islam in this piece is meant to express a wish – a wish for a world in which we can live in coexistence with respect and tolerance for our differences.

The surplus proceeds go to the Peres Center for Peace Children's Program – a program where Palestinian and Israeli doctors treat Palestinian children at Israeli hospitals.

These magnificent pieces can be purchased in the Museum Shop in either gold or silver. The gold pendant costs \$80.00, \$60.00 of which goes to the Peres Center; the silver pendant costs \$60.00 with \$40.00 going to the Peres Center. To purchase a pendant, contact The Danish Immigrant Museum at 800-759-9192 or e-mail [dkgift@metc.net](mailto:dkgift@metc.net). Additional shipping charges may apply. Please note that chains are not included.



*Elin Borg Hvidt Feldt, a Dane, designed this pendant. It can be purchased in the Museum Shop with portions of the proceeds benefiting the Peres Center for Peace Children's Program.*



*Viola Sanders of Elk Horn cares for Bedstemor's House three afternoons each week.*

## Volunteer Spotlight: Viola Sanders

Viola Sanders was born and raised in Elk Horn, Iowa and has lived here her entire life. When Viola was 10-years-old, her mother died; three years later her father died. So Sanders lived at the Elim Lutheran Children's Home until she graduated from Elk Horn High School.

After graduation, Sanders worked at the children's home and later at the creamery in Kimballton, walking by herself both ways every day. She also worked at the Elk Horn Egg Company, at Salem Lutheran Home and – for 25 years – at the Shelby County State

Bank.

Sanders was married in 1944 and had three children. She now has eight grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren of whom she is very proud!

Sanders has been a docent at Bedstemor's House for several years and now works there three afternoons a week. She enjoys sharing the story and history of Bedstemor's with visitors. And the Museum staff appreciates her dedication, cheerful smile, and willingness to help. Thank you, Viola, for all that you do for Bedstemor's and the Museum!

# From Our Development Director

By Thomas Hansen

With the recent completion of a productive Board of Directors' meeting in Omaha preceded by a successful 2007 Tivoli Fest celebration, Deb Larsen and I, along with our colleagues, now turn our attention to ending the 2006-07 Fiscal Year on a strong note.

We are most grateful to the thousands of Museum members and donors who renew their membership annually. Since we are a non-profit organization, we rely on your membership and general giving to operate The Danish Immigrant Museum on an on-going and continuous basis. Thanks to you and the diligent work of our Board of Directors, volunteers and staff, we are making good progress in growing your Museum today and into the future.

We do encourage your financial support here in the last months of our Fiscal Year. First, if you have not yet renewed your membership this year, we would appreciate hearing from you. Second, by the time you have received the *America Letter* you will have received our **2007 Summer Appeal**. In 2006, we received over \$50,000 in contributions and it is my sincere hope that we may get close to that amount or perhaps even exceed last year's generous response. Lastly, I'd like to highlight a special gift and to share with you several recent opportunities:

- In the month of April, we were the recipients of a generous gift of \$46,000 from the estate of Elk Horn,

Iowa residents, J. Emory and Edna Frederickson. Both were long-time members and dedicated volunteers at the Museum, and had shared with us several years ago their wonderful intention to support our growing educational and cultural programs.

- If you are age 70 ½ or older, new legislation now allows you to make cash gifts totaling up to \$100,000 a year from your traditional or Roth IRA to qualified charities (The Danish Immigrant Museum is a 501(c)(3) non-profit charitable organization) without incurring income tax on the withdrawal. This is good news for people who want to make a charitable gift during their lifetime from their retirement assets, but have been discouraged from doing so because of the income tax penalty. The Pension Protection Act of 2006 is effective for tax years 2006 and 2007 only, so you must act by December 31 as this opportunity may be to your advantage. Check with your tax advisor or contact us for more information.
- This is the 10th anniversary of the Family History and Genealogy Center and as we look to celebrate this important milestone, we wish to provide members, researchers and the general public with improved research capabilities in future years. To that end, we have raised \$11,000 toward a goal of \$25,000 to achieve several projects, including purchasing microfilms of

selected Danish American newspapers; adding Danish Brotherhood lodge material to our webpage, and to electronically catalog a growing collection of books and other materials. Please contact FHGC Manager Michele McNabb, [dkfhgc@metc.net](mailto:dkfhgc@metc.net) or 712-764-7008 or Thomas Hansen, Director of Development, [dkdevdir@metc.net](mailto:dkdevdir@metc.net) or 712-764-7001 for more information or how to make a contribution towards the FHGC 10th Anniversary Fund.

I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of our Board of Directors, staff, and volunteers to especially thank you for your membership, your Wall of Honor, memorial and general contributions in recent months and throughout this past fiscal year. As I travel around the country meeting with our current and prospective members, I am constantly reminded how important the work of The Danish Immigrant Museum is to you! We have an exciting future ahead of us and we look forward to working with you in making our ambitious goals a reality. Come and visit us during the summer months when you are in the Danish Villages. You can also find us on [www.danishmuseum.org](http://www.danishmuseum.org). *Tusind tak* for your involvement! Have a great summer.



## Gifts Help Make Facilities Improvements

Thanks to a generous gift from Bill and Berniece Grewcock of Omaha, Nebraska, the last unfinished space in The Danish Immigrant Museum has been completed. A conference room with windows overlooking the grounds and a kitchen with spacious storage cabinets has been added. With the addition of Danish furniture and lighting, the project is complete.

At Bedstemor's House, a heat pump has been installed, allowing guests to visit throughout the year without staff having to fire up the wood stove. This addition was made possible through a gift from the estates of Louie and Elsie Hansen of Atlantic, Iowa.

*Staff members from left Terri Johnson, Jane Kite and Angela Stanford make use of the finished kitchen. A serving window and door to the left provides access to the conference room.*





*Board members (past and present) celebrate with Bruce Lauritzen and Helle Jørvad (left and right of the sculpture presented to Lauritzen, his wife Kimball and the Lauritzen Corporation). Seated in the front row are (from left to right) Marc Petersen, current board vice-president; Kai Nyby, current president; Charles Frederiksen, past board president; and James Iversen, past board president.*

## Board of Directors Meet in Omaha

The 76th regular meeting of the Museum's Board of Directors was held in Omaha, Nebraska from June 7-9, 2007 at the Doubletree Hotel in downtown Omaha. Honorary Royal Danish Consul Bruce Lauritzen, who is also Chairman of First National Bank of Omaha, saw to it that the Danish flag was flying at the bank's headquarters across Dodge Street from the hotel to welcome board members.

Thursday was a daylong meeting for the Executive Committee, and then later the Endowment Committee met with representatives of First National Wealth Management who oversee the Museum's Holger Danske Endowment. In the evening the full board was hosted for dinner at the Ironwood Golf and Country Club by the board's vice-president Marc

Petersen and his wife Carlene.

On Friday between committee meetings, board members and their spouses gathered at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts in Omaha's Old Market to view the exhibit by the Funen Graphic Workshop.

Lauritzen, his wife Kimball and the Lauritzen Corporation have been major benefactors of the Museum, providing annual contributions to retire the Museum's debt. To celebrate their generosity and the 150th anniversary of First National Bank of Omaha, the Museum commissioned a sculpture by Danish artist Helle Jørvad. The gift was presented to the Lauritzen family at a reception held on the fortieth floor of the bank's headquarters.

At 7:30 a.m. on Saturday morning,

the 76th Regular Meeting was convened. A key issue decided was the acceptance of a recommendation from the Facilities Committee to retain the architectural firm AHTS Architects of Cedar Falls/Waterloo, Iowa to develop schematic plans for expansion of the Museum's facilities. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:15, and was followed by a luncheon attended by invited guests from the Omaha/Council Bluffs area.

Service on the Board of Directors is a volunteer commitment. Not only do board members support the Museum financially, but they also give the gifts of time and expertise. All expenses incurred during the course of the board meeting are paid for by board members themselves. We are truly grateful to have such a dedicated and supportive board of directors to lead us into the future.



## Memorials – January 16, 2007-May 31, 2007

Memorials have been received in loving memory of the following individuals:  
Leota Andersen  
Merlyn Bald  
Verlee Bernard  
Jan Christensen  
Viola Cook

Donald M. Esbeck  
Laverne N. Esbeck  
Edna Fredrickson  
Marvin Graveson  
Selma Gremstrup  
Marilyn Jensen  
Roger L. Johnson  
Ed Krause  
Alfred J. Laursen  
Bernhard & Kathrine

Wisborg Laursen  
Eivind Lillehoj  
Margaret "Muff"  
Lykke  
Dan Madsen  
Anna Marie Marck  
William Meehan  
Lillian Johnson Moody

Emmert Nelson  
Inger Marie Faaborg  
Noelck  
Pauline Grauteer  
Olesen  
Ollivene Olsen  
Frieda Petersen  
Mae Petersen  
Martha M. Petersen

Esther L. Riis  
Mrs. James C. (Shirley) Rosse  
Helen Shahan  
Ida Smith  
James (Jim) Sorensen  
Marvin Stakey  
Edward Terkelsen  
Holger Thompson



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# Thank You Businesses and Organizations

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These businesses and organizations have contributed annual memberships of at least \$100. We recognize their generosity and support in each newsletter during their membership.

A & A Framing (Annette Andersen), Kimballton, Iowa  
American-Scandinavian Foundation, Central Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa  
AmericInn, Elk Horn, Iowa  
Answers (Rick Tighe), Atlantic, Iowa  
Atlantic Friends of The Danish Immigrant Museum, Atlantic, Iowa  
Carlson Wagonlit Travel (Ted & Barb Stenberg), Omaha, Nebraska  
Carroll Control Systems, Inc., Carroll, Iowa  
Cedar Valley Danes, Cedar Valley, Iowa & surrounding communities  
Childs & Hall, P.C., Harlan, Iowa  
Cutler Funeral Home (Bob & Cindy Cutler), LaPorte, Indiana  
Danebod Lutheran Church, Tyler, Minnesota  
Danish American Club in Orange County, Huntington Beach, California  
Danish American Club of Milwaukee, West Bend, Wisconsin  
Danish American Vennelyst Club, Omaha, Nebraska  
Danish Brotherhood Lodge #1, Omaha, Nebraska  
Danish Brotherhood Lodge #14, Kenosha, Wisconsin  
Danish Brotherhood Lodge #15, Des Moines, Iowa  
Danish Brotherhood Lodge #39, Hayward, California  
Danish Brotherhood Lodge #56, Lawrence, Kansas  
Danish Brotherhood Lodge #84, Lincoln, Nebraska  
Danish Brotherhood Lodge #144, Waterloo, Iowa

Danish Brotherhood Lodge #268, Eugene, Oregon  
Danish Brotherhood Lodge #283, Plentywood, Montana  
Danish Brotherhood Lodge #341, Kimballton/Elk Horn, Iowa  
Danish Brotherhood Lodge #348, Eugene, Oregon  
Danish Club of Tucson, Tucson, Arizona  
Danish Countryside Vines & Wines (Allan & Carol Petersen), Exira, Iowa  
Danish Ladies Relief Society, Santa Rosa, California  
Danish Mutual Insurance Association, Elk Horn, Iowa  
Danish Sisterhood Lodge #102, Johnston, Iowa  
Dike Danish Sisterhood #176, Waterloo, Iowa  
Elk Horn Pharmacy (Tim & Mary Waymire), Elk Horn, Iowa  
Elk Horn-Kimballton Community School, Elk Horn, Iowa  
Elk Horn-Kimballton Optimist Club, Elk Horn, Iowa  
Elverhoj Museum of History & Art, Solvang, California  
Exira Family Medicine Clinic (Dr. Dana & Joan Shaffer), Exira, Iowa  
Faith, Family, Freedom Foundation (Kenneth & Marlene Larsen), Calistoga, California  
Haldor Topsoe, Inc., Houston, Texas  
Hardi Midwest, Inc., Davenport, Iowa  
Harlan Newspapers, Harlan, Iowa  
Heartland District of the DBIA, Ventura, Iowa  
Jacquelyn's Danish Bake Shoppe, Elk Horn, Iowa  
Goldsmith Helle Jørvad, Ringsted, Denmark  
King of Kings (Richard & Bonnie Andersen), Anchor Point, Arkansas

KNOD, Harlan, Iowa  
Knudsen Old Timers, Glendale, California  
Marge's Hair Hut (Kent & Marge Ingerslev), Elk Horn, Iowa  
Marne & Elk Horn Telephone Co., Elk Horn, Iowa  
Midwest Groundcovers (Peter & Irma Orum), St. Charles, Illinois  
Nebraska District of DBIA, Kearney, Nebraska  
Nelsen & Nelsen, Attorneys at Law, Cozad, Nebraska  
O & H Danish Bakery, Racine, Wisconsin  
Odense City Museums (Torben Jeppesen, Director), Odense, Denmark  
Olsen, Muhlbauer & Co., L.L.P., Carroll, Iowa  
Outlook Study Club, Elk Horn, Iowa  
Pacific NW District Lodges Danish Brotherhood, Spokane, Washington  
Proongily (Cynthia McKeen), St. Paul, Minnesota  
Rebild National Park Society, Southern California Chapter, Glendale, California  
Rebild National Park Society, Upper Midwest Chapter, Maple Plain, Minnesota  
Red River Danes, Fargo, North Dakota  
Ringsted Danish American Fellowship, Ringsted, Iowa  
Royal Danish Embassy, Washington, DC  
Shelby County State Bank, Elk Horn, Iowa  
Symra Literary Society, Decorah, Iowa  
The Viking Club of Orange County, Seal Beach, California  
Westergaard Farms and Scandinavian Bed & Breakfast (Dale & Ellen Westergaard Jackson), Whiting, Iowa

# New Additions to the Wall of Honor

## January 16, 2007 – May 31, 2007

The Danish Immigrant Museum's Wall of Honor provides families and friends with a means of preserving the memory of those who emigrated from Denmark to America. Over 4,500 immigrants are currently recognized on the Wall. Their stories and the stories of their families contribute importantly to the growing repository of family histories at the Museum's Family History and Genealogy Center.

If you would like to memorialize your forbearers by adding their names to the Wall of Honor, contact Debbie Larsen, development associate.

**Albert P. Albertsen**, *LeRoy & Sharlene Albertsen, Carroll, Iowa; Alvin Albertsen, Audubon, Iowa*

**Hakon Sigvard "Andy" Andersen & Elly Andersen**, *Hakon Andersen, Artesia, California*

**Jorgen K. Andersen**, *Jorgen & Donna Andersen, Arcadia, California*

**Kirsten Rafn Petersen Blaemire**, *Kirsten Blaemire, Los Angeles, California*

**Kristine Pedersen Christensen**, *LeRoy & Sharlene Albertsen, Carroll, Iowa; Mark & Thea Kyhnn, Atlantic, Iowa; Lenise Nissen, Audubon, Iowa*

**Carl Christoffersen**, *Danish Brotherhood Lodge #56, Lawrence, Kansas*

**Anker Christian Eastergard**, *R. Edith Eastergard, Waterloo, Iowa*

**George Edward Eastergard**, *R. Edith Eastergard, Waterloo, Iowa*

**Kirsten Eastergard Cundiff**, *R. Edith Eastergard, Waterloo, Iowa*

**R. Edith Eastergard**, *R. Edith Eastergard, Waterloo, Iowa*  
**Christian Rasmussen Enewold & Karen Marie Jensen Enewold**, *Jacqueline Johnson, Council Bluffs, Iowa*

**Robert Christian Enewold & Anna Mary Knagh Enewold**, *Jacqueline Johnson, Council Bluffs, Iowa*

**Carla Jorgine Rasmussen (Erikson)**, *Esther Larsen, Broomfield, Colorado*

**Peter Martin Eriksen**, *Esther Larsen, Broomfield, Colorado*

**Arne Goddik**, *Johannes and Roelie, Dayton, Oregon*

**Helle Goddik**, *Johannes and Roelie, Dayton, Oregon*

**Lisbeth Goddik**, *Johannes and Roelie, Dayton, Oregon*

**Henrik Hansen**, *Danish Brotherhood Lodge #56, Lawrence, Kansas*

**Mads Nielsen Hansen**, *Doris Miller, Alexandria, Minnesota*

**Niels Chr. Hansen**, *Danish Brotherhood Lodge #56, Lawrence, Kansas*

**Tor Jensen**, *Tor & Jeanette Jensen, Wilmette, Illinois*

**Andrew Jepsen**, *Kathryn Hap-pel, Hampton, Iowa; Mary Hewitt, Allison, Iowa; Alice Merfelt, Sun City, Arizona; Ruth Wirnsch, Greene, Iowa; Paul Jepsen, Greene, Iowa; Lee Jepsen, Waudon, Iowa; Helen Judas, Decorah, Iowa; Ruth Ann Bellmer, Cedar Falls, Iowa; Davis Jepsen, Iowa City, Iowa; Charles Jepsen, Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Fern Lindvall, Atlantic, Iowa; Larry Jepsen, Charles City, Iowa; Kay Callo-way, Wisconsin*

**Carl Ingward Jessen**, *Pauline Honan, Big Flate, New York*  
**John Johnson & Anna Marie Nielson Johnson**, *Annette Carlson, Blencoe, Iowa; Gene David Carlson, DeWitt, Iowa; Ronald Gray Carlson, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Jo Ellen Carlson Lage, Atlantic, Iowa; Christopher David Carlson, Ankeny, Iowa; Erica Kirsten Carlson, Ralston, Nebraska; Jennifer Ellen Carlson, DeWitt, Iowa; Sarah Rebecca Carlson, Waterloo, Nebraska and Faye Ellen Lage Dreyer, Atlantic, Iowa*

**Anders Peder Helbeck Knudsen**, *D. Smith & Nancy E. Zuber, Roseville, Minnesota*

**George Kyhnn**, *LeRoy & Sharlene Albertsen, Carroll, Iowa; Mark & Thea Kyhnn, Atlantic, Iowa*

**Royal Danish Consul John Larsen**, *John Larsen, Scottsdale, Arizona*

**Jens Rasmus Hansen Myrthu**, *Diane Aylesworth, Calgary, Canada*

**Niels Nielsen**, *Delmar D. Smith & Nancy E. Zuber, Roseville, Minnesota*

**Thomas Nissen**, *Danish Brotherhood Lodge #56, Lawrence, Kansas*

**Johannes Marius Sorensen & Jensine Elizabeth Sorensen**, *Jimmy & Esther Sorensen, Wood Dale, Illinois*

**Gerda Martine Vadsager (Wadsager) Starr**, *Betty L. Svendsen, Grayslake, Illinois*

**Thorkild Svendsen**, *Betty L. Svendsen, Grayslake, Illinois*

**Walter Westergaard**, *Norman Westergaard, Sloan, Iowa*

# Tribute to the Rescuers Essay Contest: 2007 Winners

Again this year, The Danish Immigrant Museum was pleased to sponsor The Tribute to the Rescuers Essay Contest. While the rescue of the Danish Jews during September and October of 1943 inspires the contest, many of the essays focused on individuals who have demonstrated moral courage in other situations.

Aaron Nissen, a tenth grader at Audubon High School, explored the courage of Emilie Schindler who, like her more famous husband Oskar, worked to save the lives of Jews in their employ. His essay "Saving Her Jews: the Emilie Schindler Story" took first place in the ninth-tenth grade category. Crystal Gardner, an eleventh grader at Elk Horn-Kimballton High School, submitted the winning essay in the eleventh-twelfth grade category entitled "The Hero That Lies Within." Her essay focused on Kurt Gerstein, a Waffen SS officer who, upon discovering the existence of Nazi death camps, informed diplomatic representatives of Sweden and the Allied countries in the hopes that actions could be taken to destroy the camps. Both first place winners received a prize of \$750 each.

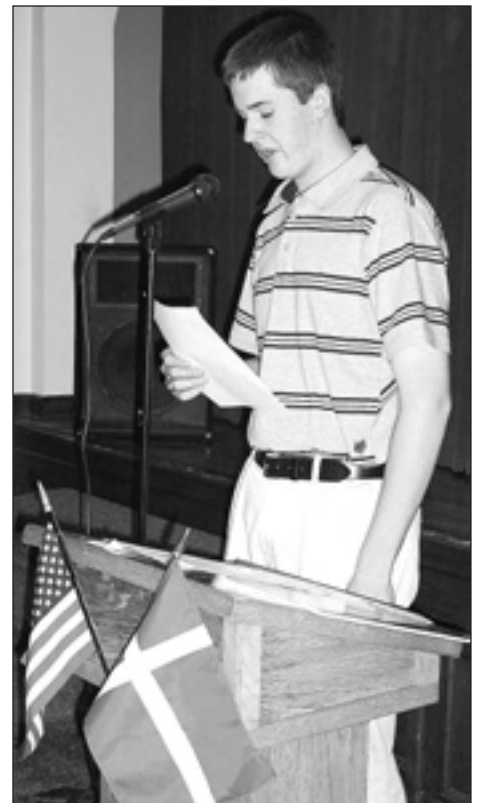
Nicole Bruch, a tenth grader, and Erica Frederiksen, a ninth grader, both of Audubon High School took second and third places with their essays, "To Be Captured or to Go Free" and "Taking a Stand." Two eleventh graders from Elk Horn High School received second and third place awards. Tyler Jensen's essay was entitled "Patrick Daniel Tillman: A True Hero" and Erin Greve wrote about Todd Beamer, who on September 11, 2001, as a passenger on United Airlines, Flight 93, sought to take over the cabin from the terrorist hijackers. Second place prize winners received \$500 prizes and third place winners, \$250. Joni Madsen and Randy Spies, both teachers at Audubon High School and Linda Peterson, a teacher at Elk Horn High School, each received gift certificates of \$50 for the purchase of resource materials for their classes.



*The winners of the 2007 Tribute to the Rescuers Essay Contest are recognized. Standing in the front (left to right) are Erica Frederiksen, Nicole Bruch, Erin Greve and Crystal Gardner (first place 11th/12th). In the back are Aaron Nissen (first place 9th/10th) and Dr. John Mark Nielsen, executive director of the Museum. Not pictured: Tyler Jensen.*

This year's contest was again made possible by a gift from the Eric and Joan Norgaard Charitable Trust of Northbrook, Illinois. In addition to making the awards possible, the trust also provided funds for "toolkits" containing books, videos and learning materials about Denmark during World War II and the rescue of the Danish Jews in 1943. These toolkits will be presented to the Red River Danes in Fargo, North Dakota, and the Cedar Valley Danes of Cedar Falls/Waterloo, Iowa for use in local schools.

*Aaron Nissen, a tenth grade student at Audubon High School, won first place for his essay about Emilie Schindler, the wife of Oskar Schindler who many know from the film Schindler's List.*





# Saving Her Jews: The Emilie Schindler Story

**Aaron Nissen, Audubon High School, 9th & 10th Grade First Place Winner**

**ner** Risking one's own health and well being to save the life of another human being shows courage above all other actions. Those who have the courage to do this are regarded as heroes; without these extremely courageous people during the Holocaust, many more innocent Jewish people would have perished in the Nazi concentration camps. One such heroine was Emilie Schindler, wife of Oskar Schindler; she helped her husband save over 1,200 Jews from the horrors of the Auschwitz death camp.

Born as Emilie Pelzl on October 27, 1907, she grew up on a farm near Alt Moletein, Bohemia. As a child, she developed a great love for animals and the outdoors. Emilie also learned many lessons from her grandmother, whom she looked up to and adored. Her grandmother taught her to be respectful, hard-working, as well as to stand up for what she believed was right. When Emilie was a child she saw and experienced the effects of World War I. Her father, who served in the war, developed a bad case of malaria which led to heart disease. He was never the same again, as he couldn't work and required a lot of rest. Emilie also witnessed the rise of the Nazi Party and Adolf Hitler in Germany.

At the age of 19, Emilie met the love of her life. Oskar Schindler had come to Alt Moletein with his father to sell electric motors; as soon as Oskar saw Emilie, he fell in love with her. On March 6, 1928, Oskar and Emilie were married and they soon moved in with Oskar's parents in Zwittau. Emilie was unhappy living there because she had to care for Oskar's whole family. Oskar's mother was sick and had to stay in bed and Oskar's father was an alcoholic. Oskar and Emilie soon moved to their own house in Zwittau.

Oskar then got a job working for the German Counterintelligence Service. He was stationed in Cracow, Poland and it was his job to help capture and persecute Polish spies. Emilie often feared for her husband's life as he was working with

members of the Nazi Party and SS. Oskar and Emilie did not share views about Jewish people with the Nazi Party, but Oskar and Emilie needed the money. They also knew that Oskar's job could provide them with adequate security. Oskar and Emilie soon moved to a new home in Cracow, Poland for Oskar's job.

In the spring of 1942, Oskar and Emilie were given an opportunity to buy an enamelware factory in Cracow. The Jewish owners were forced to sell the factory and Oskar thought it would be a good business opportunity. Emilie had to go and get a permit so that they could acquire workers from the Cracow ghetto. Any time that one of the Jewish workers had a problem, Emilie would try to help. When one of the Jewish men broke his glasses, Emilie made sure that he received a new pair so that he would be able to work. Emilie was always frightened that she may be caught helping the Jews, but she knew she was keeping them alive. Emilie would fiercely argue with any German soldier trying to harm one of her Jewish workers. She would also sneak extra food to the workers whenever she got the chance.

In the spring of 1944, the Schindlers faced a great problem. The Plaschow concentration camp near Cracow was shutting down and all of the Jews being held there were being shipped straight to Auschwitz. If Oskar and Emilie didn't act quickly, the 1,200 Jews working for them would also be taken. This triggered the formation of "Schindler's List," a list of all workers at the enamelware factory that would be transferred to a munitions factory in Brunnitz, Czechoslovakia.

When the transfer was made from Cracow to Brunnitz, there was a terrible mistake; the train hauling the female Jewish workers had been diverted to Auschwitz. Oskar sent messengers to Auschwitz and some time later the train was finally sent to Brunnitz with the

women onboard. The women were sick and extremely malnourished from their short stay at Auschwitz; they had to be carefully nursed back to health. The Jews were now safe as long as they were in the munitions factory, but now Oskar and Emilie were like prisoners also. If they ever tried to escape they would be executed.

Emilie had the task of securing extra food rations for the workers. She went to a rich lady who had a mill near their factory. Emilie asked for some grain to feed her starving workers and after some talking, the lady agreed to let Emilie have what she needed from her stores. Without this extra grain, the Jewish workers probably would have starved. Oskar and Emilie continued to take care of their Jews until the end of the war. When Germany surrendered, Oskar and Emilie had to flee, as Oskar was now a target for the Russian army.

After the war, Oskar and Emilie fled, with many others from Germany, to the neutral country of Switzerland. From there they crossed the Atlantic and arrived in Argentina. After some time, Oskar left Emilie to return to Germany. Their relationship had grown apart because of Oskar's drinking problem and his many relationships with other women, which had been ignored by Emilie up to this point. Emilie continued to live and work in Argentina until she was an old lady. In May of 1994, Emilie received "The Righteous Amongst the Nations" award along with Miep Gies. Emilie died on October 5, 2001 at the age of 93-years-old.

Emilie Schindler helped to save 1,200 Jews from death at Auschwitz. It took great courage to risk her life to help these people who were so unfairly persecuted because they practiced another religion. The good deeds of Emilie are forever imprinted in the memories of many, and I only wish that I could help others as much as she did.

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# The Hero That Lies Within

## Crystal Gardner, Elk Horn-Kimballton Community School, 11th & 12th Grade First Place Winner

During the reign of Hitler, everything changed. Innocent people were murdered and many lives were torn apart. But in the midst of it all, a few people stood out; people who wanted to help; people with moral courage. Kurt Gerstein was one of those people. He and many others like him, in the eyes of the world, were true heroes. Individuals with such moral courage don't come along very often. So when one does show up, we have to hold on to them and never forget the things that they've done for us.

Kurt Gerstein, born into a Prussian family on August 11, 1905, graduated as a mining engineer in 1931. In 1933, he joined the Nazi party, but was later expelled in 1936 because of his critical beliefs on Nazi blasphemies. In order to gather information about the Nazis and infiltrate the Third Reich, he applied to the SS after the Bishop of Stuttgart told him that mental patients were being killed at the institutions of Hadamar and Grafeneck. One year after he applied, Kurt Gerstein was admitted to the Waffen SS on March 10, 1941. But, toward the beginning of that year, his sister-in-law, Bertha Ebeling, died mysteriously in Hadamar. This encouraged him to pursue the mystery of Bertha's death and he was determined to find the truth about the many others who may have died at Hadamar and similar institutions.

Chosen as the head of the Technical Disinfection Department of the Waffen SS, Gerstein was responsible for procuring Zyklon B, a highly toxic prussic acid, to improve the effectiveness of the gas chambers. Then in 1942, Gerstein was sent to Poland on a mission to introduce Zyklon B gassing, in place of the Nazi's gas engines. Once Gerstein infiltrated the institution, his observation brought a desire to gain insight on the Nazi death machinery and then tell the world.

Kurt Gerstein later informed the Allies of the Nazis' atrocities, knowing that he was risking his life giving them the information he obtained. His exact words were, "I see everything! The mothers, their babies at the breast, the little

naked children, the men, and women, naked. They enter into the death chamber, pushed by the leather whips of the SS. 'Pack well,' that is what the captain ordered. Seven to eight hundred persons on twenty-five square meters. More than half are children . . . ."

On his way back to Germany on August 21-22, 1942, Gerstein came across the Secretary to the Swedish Legislation in Berlin, Baron Göran von Otter. He flooded the Secretary's mind with stories about the Nazis committing extreme atrocities against the Jews, including the request to inform the Allies and the outside world.

Von Otter believed Gerstein, and took measures to file a report to inform his government of unbelievable actions the Nazis were taking upon the Jews. But, they found it too peculiar to be credible, so measures of this matter weren't taken. But, Gerstein didn't give up hope. He maintained contact with the Swedish embassy and kept them informed on the termination procedures.

Gerstein continued to tell individuals, including members of the Dutch underground to broadcast the information by radio to Great Britain about the death camps and what went on there. Hoping that at least one of them would inform the world about the genocides the Nazis were committing; he was unfortunately ignored.

Gerstein didn't give up hope that some day someone would inform the Allies about the death camps. Because of this dedication, he became hysterical and pushed himself even harder to inform the world, risking his life every step of the way. His actions included destroying shipments of Zyklon B gas that were headed for the death camps during the war. The gas was buried after the decision was made that it had spoiled while being transported.

Towards the end of the war on April 22, 1945, Kurt Gerstein was arrested, by the French for being an alleged war criminal. While in prison, he gave detailed

reports on murderous acts in Belzec and Treblinka to a French intelligence team. The report provided the Allies with their most detailed records of the Nazi death camps and was later used in trials at Nuremberg. Kurt Gerstein's report was thought to be believed as the most horrific eyewitness story told of the Holocaust.

Three months later, the French took Gerstein to the Cherche-Midi Military Prison where he was, twenty days later, found dead in his prison cell. They don't know the exact reason for Gerstein's death. But some theories they came up with were that he might have committed suicide because he felt guilty about not being able to discontinue the Holocaust, or that he was murdered by one of the SS officers in the prison.

Gerstein was buried in the Thiais cemetery under the name of Gastein, which was later destroyed in 1956. Gerstein is just a memory now, a memory that we all should acknowledge and remember.

I think Kurt Gerstein shows moral courage because he knew deep down in his heart that what the Nazis were doing to the Jews was, on many levels, extremely wrong and demonic. He tried on numerous occasions to inform the Allies, churches, and other organizations about the atrocities the Nazis were performing on the Jews, but when he was turned away, that didn't slow him down or stop him from trying to save those innocent people. His bravery and devotion to make sure the whole world knew about the death camps resulted in his death. But it wasn't a death that ended with no meaning. It was a death he took in order to save men, women, and children he scarcely even knew. Not very many people have moral courage, but if it ever came to an individual's family, I guarantee that moral courage would increase dramatically. Those with moral courage don't come along very often. So when one does, we have to embrace them and never let the memory of their heroic actions die.



## News from the Family History & Genealogy Center

By Michele McNabb, librarian

### Danish Roots – American Branches “My Flowers are Fading and Dying:” The Gardener of Omaha

Looking for ancestral family members nowadays frequently starts with computer searching. If one does not go beyond the keyboard, however, much valuable information can be missed that can fill in details or add color to a person's life. And one never knows what will turn up!

Such was the case with the search for information about Peter “Maribo” Jensen, one of the passengers on board the S.S. Norge when it sailed for the United States in March, 1893. A 22-year-old gardener, Peter left Lisbjerg in Ribe County for Blair, Nebraska in March, 1893, and arrived in New York City on April 3, intending to stay permanently in the U.S. Why Blair was his destination is not known.

Peter was born on January 30, 1871, on a small farm-holding called “Mariboelhus,” in Hove parish, not far from Lemvig in Ringkøbing County; he was baptized in Hove Church on April 6 that same year as Peter Mariboel Jensen, after his place of birth. His mother, Christiane Jensen (1848-1921), was not married at the time. Following the custom of the day, his alleged father—one Peder Jensen Strande, who worked on a nearby farm—was named in the baptismal record, but nothing more is known of him.

Following the birth of a second illegitimate child (Ane Petrine in 1874), Christiane moved to adjacent Dybe parish, where she married a smallholder named Gregers Houdam Pedersen, settled down and had seven additional children.

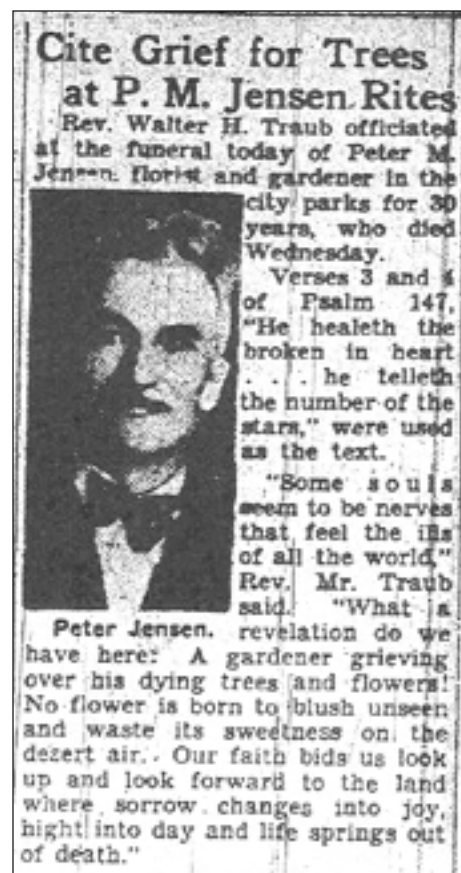
Peter, however, remained behind and was raised by his maternal grandparents, master mason Jens Christian Nielsen and

his wife Ane Kirstine Christensen, with whom he is found living in the 1880 and 1890 censuses. Following his confirmation he apprenticed as a gardener and apparently worked in that profession until his decision to immigrate.

When the Family History and Genealogy Center was initially contacted by Erik Høgsbro Østergaard, whose children descend from one of Peter's half-siblings, he had researched Peter's mother's family in great detail; but all he knew about her oldest son was his emigration in 1893. He wondered whether we might be able to discover anything about what happened to Peter in subsequent years.

At that time—just a few years ago—nothing in the FHGC was computerized and there were no online census indexes. It did not appear that we had any information on Peter, so we suggested that Erik contact the Washington County, Nebraska, Historical Association for possible assistance. This organization was able to find Peter in the 1900 census for that county and report that around 1898 he had married a fellow Dane named Pouline M., who had come to the U.S. in 1895, and that he was working as a day laborer in Blair. The couple had a 1-year-old daughter, Anne C., and Peter had applied to become a citizen. No marriage record was found in Washington County nor was the family found in later Washington County censuses.

Erik then turned to us, and asked if we might look for other sources. A call to First Lutheran Church in Blair confirmed that it was the former Danish Evangelical Lutheran congregation, so a trip was made to Blair to consult the



*Peter Mariboel Jensen's funeral notice.*

oldest church register, which—because it was written in Danish—no one on staff could read. We were able to confirm that “Mr. and Mrs. Maribo” were members of the congregation and found baptismal records between 1901 and 1905 for three additional children: Jens Christian, Hans Ingerholt, and Theodor Ingeholdt. From these records it was established that Pouline's full maiden name was Pouline Marie Hansen.

Shortly thereafter, the first online censuses became available, which made searching for the family much faster. It was discovered that some time between 1905 and 1910 Peter M. moved his family to Omaha, where he was found listed as “Peder Jensen” in the 1910 Douglas County census. Living on Gordon Street were Peter, wife “Poulina,” and four







## Activities and News from the Family History & Genealogy Center

- Until the end of October the FHGC is on summer hours, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and the first and third Saturdays each month at the same time.
- On a beautiful spring weekend in late April FHGC board committee members Mark Nussle and Ron Bro accompanied Michele McNabb to Madison to visit the Norwegian American Genealogical Center and Naeseth Library to get an idea of how this well-established research library is organized and run. Executive Director Blaine Hedberg gave a detailed tour and also a peek at the Danish collections at the University of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Historical Society. We came back with a number of useful ideas that will be implemented in the near future, particularly as staff and volunteers begin to catalog the FHGC collection.

Mark and Lori Nussle kindly hosted

Ron, his wife Mary, and Michele for the weekend at their lakeside retreat outside the city. Mange tak!

- At the June board meeting the green light was given to begin the process of cataloging the FHGC collection in PastPerfect™. In preparation, Gail Huetting, senior monographic cataloger at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign Library spent two days in Elk Horn, helping refamiliarize Michele with cataloging procedures and rules, looking at the library component of PP, assessing the various types of books in the collection, and making suggestions about cataloging entries. After some additional training Michele will begin the cataloging process, and we will be looking for a library cataloging intern or part-time assistant in the fall.
- The Museum webpage now links to the Danish American Heritage Society and to the Danish Immigrant

Archive(s) at Grand View and Dana colleges. The goal is to facilitate coordinating and sharing information about our institutions and their holdings. We hope to get started on several collaborative efforts in the near future.

- The 10th Anniversary Fundraising Campaign is coming along nicely and we very much appreciate those of you who have donated or made a pledge to date. Our ambitious goals for the campaign are to fund cataloging of the FHGC collection, add Danish Brotherhood lodge material to the Museum webpage and to purchase microfilms of selected Danish American newspapers and Danish church registers. You can help us realize our dreams through a gift of any amount ear-marked "FHGC 10th Anniversary Fund." A listing of all donors will appear in the next issue of the *America Letter*.



## Database Updates

Thanks to the staff at the Danish Immigrant Archives at Dana College and Lisa Petersen, genealogy columnist with *The Danish Pioneer*, who spent a day at the National Archives, we have now filled in the missing years from the 1930s of Danish Brotherhood member deaths published in the DB magazine. As soon as the new data is input we will have a complete listing from 1916-1995 available in the library. We hope to get this valuable material added to our webpage in the near future.

*In May Gail Huetting of the University of Illinois library worked with Michele McNabb to figure out an efficient way to catalog the FHGC collection.*





# Wish List

These are materials that we would like to add to the library collection. The following items are currently at the top of the FHGC Wish List. If you would like to make a donation of any of them or contribute toward their purchase as part of our 10th Anniversary Fund-raising Campaign, please contact Michele McNabb at [librarian@danishmuseum.org](mailto:librarian@danishmuseum.org) or 712-764-7008 or Thomas Hansen at 712-764-7001.

- *With a Brush and Muslin Bag: the Life of Niels Ebbesen Hansen* (2003), by Helen H. Loen.
- *A Global Citizen: Letter to my Descendants, part II* (2006), by Niels Aage Skov.
- *Ib Melchoir: Man of Imagination*, by Robert Skotak. (\$35).
- *Among the Danes*, by F. M. Butlin (available from [abebooks.com](http://abebooks.com) for \$50.)
- *Iowa, Kansas and Nebraska Civil War Veterans: Compilation of the Death Rolls of the Departments of Iowa, Kansas and Nebraska, Grand Army of the Republic, 1883-1948*, by Dennis Northcott (2007) (\$30 + shipping and handling)
- Microfilmed Danish Lutheran church records from various localities. One area of particular interest is the church in Tyler, Minnesota. Microfilm pricing varies, but the average cost is \$50 per roll.

Are you thinking of donating some books to the Museum? If so, please contact Michele McNabb before sending or bringing them. Although we appreciate the underlying thoughtfulness of donations, often we receive duplicate books or ones that do not fit our collection guidelines. An advance list of titles sent by mail or e-mail or a phone call can save both potential donors and FHGC staff time and money.



## Family History & Genealogy Center Exhibit Highlights Armed Forces

This year's Tivoli Fest photo exhibit, "In Service to Country: New and Old," features 50 photographs and vignettes of Danish immigrants who served in the armed forces in either Denmark or the U.S. (and sometimes both places!). Danish veterans range from several soldiers from the Dano-Prussian War era through Thorkild Svendsen, who served in the Danish underground. Examples from America include Revolutionary War participant Christian Febiger through legendary Iowa wrestling coach, Finn Bjorn Eriksen, who served in WWII, as well as Captain Erik Larsen, who saw action in Korea.

The exhibit concludes with several examples of the many individuals of Danish descent who have served in the military, including shadow boxes of souvenirs from two Elk Horn brothers who fought in WWII. The exhibit will be on display through the end of July at the FHGC.

*At left are two of the many photos included in the FHGC's exhibit. Sigrid Bro (top) joined the Army Nurse Corps during WWII, serving in England and France as well as stateside. S.D. Rodholm was teaching at Grand View College when the U.S. joined WWI. Initially turned down due to his age, he eventually joined the Army as a chaplain.*





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