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When is a Dane a Dane? Sea captain and California pioneer **Cornelius Boy Jensen** illustrates the difficulty of clarifying the cultural identity of individuals who come from areas where various cultural groups exist alongside each other or intermingle. Born in 1812 on the island of Sylt off the Frisian coast of southern Slesvig, Jensen went early to sea. After taking his mate's examination in Denmark he sailed around Cape Horn and along the Pacific coast. In 1848, by this time fluent in English and Spanish, he left his ship and went to Sacramento, where he sold provisions to the gold miners. Here he made the acquaintance of Spanish-Californian Ignacio Alvarado, who convinced him to travel south to his home in the hamlet of Los Angeles. Shortly after his arrival the middle-aged Capt. Hansen fell in love with Alvarado's 18-year-old daughter, Mercedes. He impressed her by proposing in Spanish, was accepted, and the couple married at Mission San Gabriel in 1853. They settled on a large tract of land in Riverside County and had a family of 12 children. Cornelius died in 1886. His homestead now forms the Jensen-Alvarado Ranch Historic Park, where Cornelius built buildings that resembled those in his boyhood home. A biographical sketch of Cornelius Boy Jensen is found in *Danske i California*, where he is described as one of the earliest Danish pioneers in the state. However, the 1860-1880 censuses give his nationality as German or Prussian. Later census records for several of his children state that his native language was German rather than Danish. According to an article written by James Iversen of the Danish-American Heritage Society, Cornelius' passport papers have 'Denmark' printed on them. At the time the Duchy of Slesvig was a part of Denmark, so officially he was a Danish citizen. However, when a descendant visited Sylt, she was told in no uncertain terms by a local historian that her ancestor was Frisian, not Danish. Most residents of the island spoke Frisian, but there was a small Danish-speaking enclave on the eastern side of the island. And German was also spoken by many residents as well regardless of cultural identity, particularly after the Dano-Prussian War of 1864, when Slesvig was ceded to Germany. So what was Cornelius? His surname Jensen indicates at least some ethnic Danish heritage, while Boy(e) is a common Frisian name. At the time of his birth and departure into the world he was legally a Dane, but he may have considered himself differently. Further material on Cornelius may be found in files at the Family History & Genealogy Center.