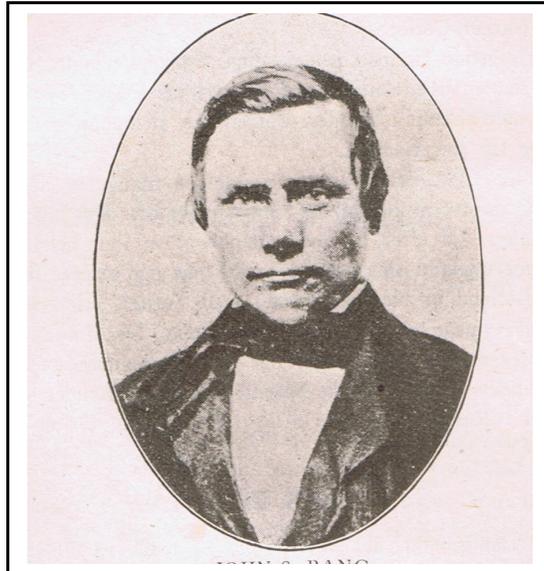


Across Oceans, Across Time® ...
Stories from the Family History & Genealogy Center



One hundred eighty years ago, the area that later became Racine, Wisconsin, and the 2nd largest Danish-speaking city in the world, was mostly uninhabited wilderness. One of the earliest persons to venture into the area was carpenter and joiner **John S. Bang(s)**, born Johann Schuehardt Bang in Dronninglund parish, Hjørring County, in 1812, who reportedly settled there as early as 1839/40. In the decades prior to the Civil War the demand for woodworking skills in the rapidly growing town along Lake Michigan drew other Danish-born carpenters, and by 1850 John had been joined by a younger brother, Lawrence J., and several other siblings. His future looked bright and prosperous. In 1851 John was elected to the city council and the following year he was named an elder in "The Scandinavian Evangelical Congregation." In 1852 he married an Englishwoman, Margaret Handley, and later became active in the English Methodist Church, where he taught Sunday School and perhaps also preached. The couple had four children: Lydia, William, Mary and John. The good fortune, however, was not to last. In 1857, during one of the frequent financial crises of the 19th century J. S. Bang lost most of his money and his property, and the family crossed the lake to Holland, Michigan, where Bang started over, becoming involved in the construction of the town harbor. But again, misfortune struck. He succumbed to an unspecified illness and died in Holland on September 9, 1861, at the age of 49. Ten years later Margaret Bang lost her house and home to a fire in Holland. She rescued only the clothes she was wearing - and her late husband's false teeth, which, fastened to a gold plate, she had kept in a bag at her waist!

The Danish Immigrant Museum

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