

2015

Danish Cedar Falls : The immigrant experience

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DANISH CEDAR FALLS: THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

An Abstract of a Thesis
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Carrie L. Eilderts
University of Northern Iowa

July 2015

ABSTRACT

The Danish were the largest immigrant group in Cedar Falls. They immigrated to Cedar Falls and the nearby rural village of Fredsville in large numbers between 1870 and 1900. There they formed an immigrant community. They lived near each other, worshipped together, spoke the same language, and carried on Danish traditions. They farmed, found jobs in Cedar Falls businesses, and opened businesses of their own. By the 1930s, as the first generation of Danish immigrants grew old, the younger generations began to identify more as Americans than as Danes. The elements that characterized the Danish immigrant community began to disappear. The impact that the Danish immigrants had on Cedar Falls deserves to be remembered.

This thesis serves as a gallery guide for an exhibition at the Cedar Falls Historical Society. The exhibition, also titled *Danish Cedar Falls: The Immigrant Experience*, was on display at the Historical Society from February 5, 2015 to December 6, 2015. This gallery guide provides an in-depth look at the research behind the exhibition and utilizes the artifacts on display in the exhibition to illustrate the story of Danish Cedar Falls.

Most of the research was done in the Cedar Falls Historical Society archives, using local newspapers and family histories. Nazareth Lutheran Church, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, and Fredsville Lutheran Church also provided sources in the form of church histories and scrapbooks. Other sources were found at the Museum of Danish America in Elk Horn, Iowa. Finally, local Danish-Americans in Cedar Falls and Fredsville provided valuable assistance in finding sources and in defining the important elements of the Danish immigrant community.

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This Study by: Carrie L. Eilderts

Entitled: Danish Cedar Falls: The Immigrant Experience

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank the Cedar Falls Historical Society for giving me the opportunity to curate an exhibition. This has been an invaluable experience, and I could not have done it without the help of Karen Smith, Julie Huffman-klinkowitz, and Diane Shupbach, who guided me every step of the way.

Thank you to my thesis committee, Dr. Thomas Connors, Dr. Leisl Carr Childers, and Dr. Jay Lees. They, too, provided me with valuable guidance and assistance.

I would also like to thank all of the people who took time to meet with me and help me with my research. This includes Arlan and Carol Andersen, Ron and Mary Bro, Doug Dall, Phil and Alma Heath, Mardy Holst, Svend and Elin Koch, Freda Lovejoy, Joni McDonough, Liane Nichols, Deb Rhodes, Bert Schou, Gordon Sloth, Travis Wibben, and the members of the Cedar Valley Danes, who welcomed me to their final Christmas party with open arms. Angela Stanford and Michel McNabb at the Museum of Danish America were also very helpful.

A big “thank you” goes out to everyone who let the Historical Society borrow items for the exhibition, including Fredsville Lutheran Church, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Fredsville Lutheran Church, and several generous citizens of Cedar Falls and Fredsville.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Jerald and Carol Eilderts, for all the support they have given me.

To anyone else I interacted with throughout the process of this thesis project who is not listed here, thank you.

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INTRODUCTION

From the 1870s to 1900, Danish immigrants settled in Cedar Falls, Iowa and the nearby farming community of Fredsville in large numbers. There, they formed an immigrant community whose members were connected by their religion, their organizations, their language, and their traditions. They found ways to balance their Danish identities with their new American identities.

Benedict Anderson discusses the concept of national identity in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. According to Anderson, national identity includes feeling a deep sense of comradeship and fraternity with others of the same nationality, which creates a sense of community. They feel connected to each other through a shared culture and language, even if they do not personally know everyone in the community.¹ This sense of comradeship is among Danish immigrants in Cedar Falls, as they lived near each other, spoke the same language, attended the same churches, and formed organizations to socialize together and help each other.

Yi-Fu Tuan discusses the physical homes that people create in his article “A View of Geography.” He says that “Basic humanity is nurtured in the confined spaces of home and neighborhood, family and community. Even when people feel threatened at home and escape boldly across an ocean or a continent to freedom, their purpose is still to reestablish a bounded world in which they can pursue a familiar way of life.”² This is

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983), 16.

what the Danish immigrants in Cedar Falls did. They felt the need to leave Denmark, but they formed a community and a home together in Cedar Falls.

The first chapter, “From Denmark to Cedar Falls,” explores the reasons why Danish immigrants chose to leave Denmark and come to Cedar Falls. This includes “push factors,” or the reasons why Danish citizens wanted to leave Denmark. Economic factors and political relations with Germany were two major push factors for Danish immigrants. “Pull factors” drew immigrants to Cedar Falls. Availability of farmland and jobs were major pull factors that led Danish immigrants to choose Cedar Falls as their new home. Chain migration was another factor in Danish immigration to Cedar Falls.

The second chapter, “Danes at Work,” provides a closer examination of the jobs that drew immigrants to Cedar Falls. Danish immigrants in Cedar Falls found work in businesses along Main Street. Some opened businesses of their own. Some of these businesses catered specifically to Danes, while others served the city as a whole. Farmland also drew immigrants to Cedar Falls and Fredsville. Danish immigrants gained a reputation as hard workers, and their occupations are one way in which they impacted the city.

The third chapter, “Danish Churches and Organizations,” tells the story of the institutions that drew the Danish immigrant community together. Many Danish immigrants in Cedar Falls and Fredsville were Lutheran, and they formed the congregations of Fredsville Lutheran Church and Nazareth Lutheran Church in the 1870s. In the 1890s, Nazareth Lutheran split, and Bethlehem Lutheran Church was formed.

² Yi-Fu Tuan, “A View of Geography,” *Geographical Review* 81 (Jan.1991): 104.

Besides Lutherans, there were also Danish Baptists and Seventh Day Adventists. The churches utilized the Danish language and displayed elements of Danish culture. The churches also formed aid societies. There were other Danish societies in Cedar Falls, as well, including the Danish Lyren Society and the Danish Brotherhood. Meetings of these organizations allowed Danish immigrants to socialize together and also provided a way to offer aid to immigrants, often in the form of insurance.

The fourth chapter, “The Danish Language,” takes a closer look at the use of Danish in Cedar Falls and Fredsville. Besides being used in the churches, the Danish language was used in Cedar Falls businesses and on tombstones through the 1930s. Danish publications were also published in Cedar Falls, especially the *Dannevirke*, a Danish language newspaper with a wide circulation in Cedar Falls and beyond. The Danish language was an important characteristic of the Danish population in Cedar Falls and Fredsville.

The final chapter, “Assimilation and the Continuance of Tradition,” discusses the decline of Danish identity in Cedar Falls and Fredsville and the Danish traditions that have remained. As the first immigrants who had arrived in the area between 1870 and 1900 began growing older, the younger generations who had grown up in the United States identified more as Americans than as Danes. The use of the Danish language declined during the 1930s, although the shift to English occurred slightly later in Fredsville. Still, many Danish traditions remained, especially in the form of Danish foods and holiday traditions at home and at church. Danish Days in the 1950s celebrated the influence of Danish immigrants on Cedar Falls. From 1989 to 2015, the Cedar Valley

Danes, provided a place for local Danish-Americans to meet together and remember their heritage.

In his article, “The Voice of the Past: Oral History,” Paul Anderson discusses the importance of remembering local heritage and history. He says, “Through local history a village or town seeks meaning for its own changing character and newcomers can gain a sense of roots in personal historical knowledge.”³ All groups are important for a complete understanding of local history, including immigrants.

Danish immigrants are an important part of the local history of Cedar Falls. While a sense of Danish identity is no longer present in Cedar Falls, the impact that Cedar Falls’s largest immigrant group had on the community deserves to be remembered. *Danish Cedar Falls: The Immigrant Experience*, an exhibition at the Cedar Falls Historical Society from February to December 2015, is one way in which the story of the Danish immigrant community can be told through the community’s material culture. This narrative, illustrated by the material culture of the exhibit, provides an in-depth look at the Danish immigrant community in Cedar Falls and the nearby rural community of Fredsville.

³ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 26.

CHAPTER 1

FROM DENMARK TO CEDAR FALLS

In 1855, Frederick Petersen's family became the first recorded Danish immigrants to settle in Cedar Falls. The Petersens came from the Schleswig region and settled in the area that is now Washington Park, at the end of East 9th Street. In 1860, Christian Petersen came to Cedar Falls, also from Schleswig.⁴ More families moved here from Pine River, Wisconsin in 1866, and the next year Danes began arriving directly from their homeland after enduring a long journey by ship and train.⁵ Immigration increased in the 1870s and continued through the end of the century.

The trip from Denmark to Cedar Falls could be dangerous at times, as Peder Pedersen discovered. He left Denmark on the ship called *Oscar II* in February of 1903 (Figure 1). The ship ran into a hurricane. Pedersen's wife Sofia described the hurricane, saying "It developed into a terrifying hurricane. No one can understand or imagine the feeling in a time like this. This large ship was tossed around like a small ball on the wild roaring ocean....It really felt like falling from a large or high mountain into a deep valley – every wave completely burying the boat. This continued for several days and nights."⁶ The ship sprang a leak, and everyone on board had to stay in Portugal for a while before being picked up by a German boat to continue the journey on March 12. Passengers and

⁴ "Danes Come to Cedar Falls," Cedar Falls Historical Society Series II, Cedar Falls History, Box 4, Danish History, "Danes in Cedar Falls," 19.

⁵ "The Why of Cedar Falls," *Daily Record*, October 23, 1948, Cedar Falls Historical Society Series II, Cedar Falls History, Box 4, Danish History, "Danes in Cedar Falls."

⁶ Sofia Rassberg, Alex Dahl, trans. "An Adventurous Journey," 1903, Museum of Danish America, Elk Horn, Iowa.

crew alike were very relieved to finally see the Statue of Liberty. The collection of Jens Nielsen, another immigrant to Cedar Falls, includes a photo of the Statue of Liberty, as well as a picture of a ship, which would have been a very familiar sight to those leaving Denmark, a seafaring nation (Figure 2). One high point of the trip for Pedersen was meeting Sofia Rassberg on board the ship, who he would later marry at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Cedar Falls. They lived on a farm along South Main Street, and eventually retired and moved to Tremont Street.⁷



Figure 1: *Oscar II* Handkerchief (Cedar Falls Historical Society)

⁷ Rassberg.

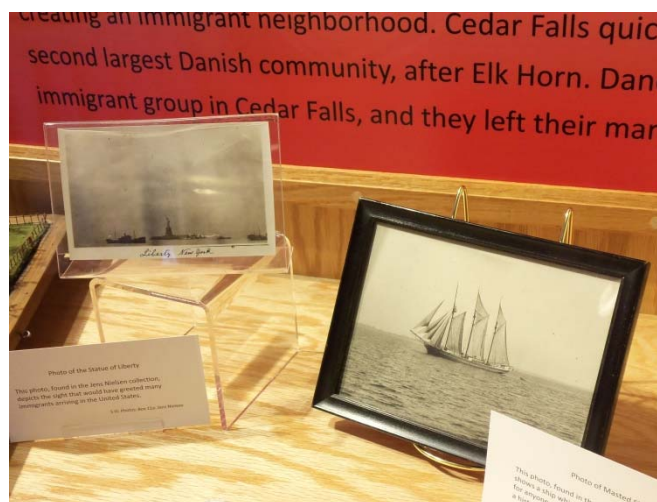


Figure 2: Jens Nielsen’s Statue of Liberty and Ship Photos (Cedar Falls Historical Society)

Another family that experienced a dangerous journey from Denmark to the United States was the Mortensen family. Peter and Thora Mortensen traveled with their children, Esther, Enok, Lydia, Marie, Martha, and David, from Svinninge, Sjaelland, Denmark, to join their son John, who was already in Cedar Falls. They sailed on the *Frederick VIII* in May of 1919. The ocean journey was hazardous due to mines that were in the ocean from World War I. They traveled by daylight, when it was safer, and made it to New York. From New York, they took a train to Cedar Falls. In Cedar Falls Peter operated a shoe repair business for many years.⁸

Many of the immigrants came from the Schleswig-Holstein region, which borders Germany, in the southernmost part of the area of Denmark known as Jutland (Figure 3). In the late nineteenth century, Denmark lost two wars against Prussia, which resulted in

⁸ Peter Mortensen, Lydia Mortensen Godfredsen, trans., “Journey to America,” May 1919, Museum of Danish America, Elk Horn, Iowa.

Denmark losing some of its territory, namely the area of Schleswig-Holstein. After the second defeat in 1864, some citizens of Denmark began to lose hope in the future of their country.⁹ Many Danes began leaving the region because they did not want to join the German army or undergo the process of “Germanization” which resulted from the fact that they were now German citizens and German became the region’s official language.¹⁰ Some of these Danes sought political freedom in the United States. One such person was Maria Bodholdt, the mother of Thorvald Holst, who had been required to attend a German school in Schleswig-Holstein.¹¹ Another was Jørgen Boysen, who immigrated to the United States at the age of 19, just one year before he could be conscripted into the Prussian Army.¹²



Figure 3: Map of Schleswig-Holstein (Wikimedia Commons)

⁹ Kristian Hvidt, *Flight to America: The Social Background of 300,000 Danish Emigrants* (New York: Academic Press, 1975), 37.

¹⁰ George R. Nielsen, *The Danish Americans* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1981), 38.

¹¹ Thorvald Holst, “Early Danes in and Near Cedar Falls, Iowa,” 1967. Cedar Falls Historical Society Series II, Cedar Falls History, Box 4, Danish History, Folder 2.

¹² George Glenn Boysen, “Harvesting our Boysen Heritage: From Fjelstrup to Fredsville.” 4-6. Cedar Falls Historical Society Archive, Shelf H2.

The earliest Danish immigrants in the United States settled in eastern cities, but by the mid-1800s, Danes migrated to the Midwest, Utah, and California. Settlements were formed in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Iowa, to name a few.¹³ By the early 1870s, Danes were settling in Cedar Falls in large numbers. By 1871, three hundred Danes called the city home, making up about 10 percent of the city's population.¹⁴ One such person who was born in Denmark and settled in Cedar Falls was Kristoffer Kristoffersen (Figure 4). Danish immigration to Cedar Falls did not taper off again until the late 1890s.¹⁵

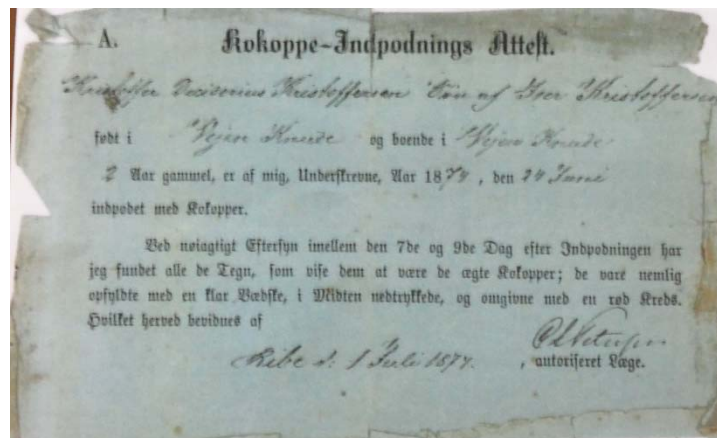


Figure 4: Kristoffer Kristoffersen's Danish Birth Certificate (Private Collection)

¹³ Museum of Danish America, "Danish Immigration- An Overview," Accessed April 13, 2015, <http://www.danishmuseum.org/danishimmigration-an-overview.cfm>.

¹⁴ "The Why of Cedar Falls."

¹⁵ "Danes Come to Cedar Falls."

Cedar Falls is located in Black Hawk County, which is in the northeastern part of Iowa. The city sits along the Cedar River in an area of rich and fertile ground.¹⁶ Early pioneers were drawn to Black Hawk County by the land on which they grew wheat and corn and also grazed livestock. They were also drawn by the river, which held the potential to power mills.¹⁷ After the arrival of the railroad in 1861, Cedar Falls entered a period of prosperity and growth, and by the 1890s, the city could be considered a center of industry with a population of 5,553.¹⁸ Mills were the first industries to draw people to Cedar Falls. People would come to Cedar Falls to have their grain ground into flour, and they stayed to buy and sell goods and exchange news and ideas while in the city. This activity drew more people to Cedar Falls to build their homes and businesses.¹⁹ The earliest Cedar Falls businesses included flour-, grist-, wool- and sawmills, paper, brass, and iron manufacturers, and several factories.²⁰ By the 1870s, farming was also more of a business and provided a base of economic development throughout the county.²¹ Cedar Falls came to be known as the “Garden City” due to its tree-lined streets, well-kept homes, good schools, and good churches.²²

¹⁶ Brian C. Collins, Introduction to *Images of America: Cedar Falls, Iowa* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 1998).

¹⁷ Glenda Riley, *Cities on the Cedar: A Portrait of Cedar Falls, Waterloo and Black Hawk County* (Parkersburg, IA: Mid-Prairie Books, 1988), 11.

¹⁸ Collins, Introduction to *Images of America*.

¹⁹ Riley, 12.

²⁰ Riley, 36-37.

²¹ Riley, 27.

²² Collins, Introduction to *Images of America*.



Figure 5: Map of Cedar Falls (University of Iowa Digital Library)

Immigrants found that the landscape of the Cedar Valley reminded them of Denmark (Figure 6), which helped draw some to Cedar Falls and others to the nearby rural village of Fredsville, about eight miles to the southwest. Carlo Christensen, a cultural attaché at the Danish embassy, visited Cedar Falls in 1959 for a Danish Days celebration and commented on the landscape, saying “I can understand why the Danes settled here because around Cedar Falls the country is very much like we have it in Denmark.”²³

²³ A. B. Turnbull, “Danish Days Fade Into Past With the Celebrities Who Came, Went,” *Daily Record*, Cedar Falls, July 6, 1959.



Figure 6: “Anton’s View Toward Lem (Denmark)” by David Delafield
(NewAldaya Lifescapes)

Fredsville, which means “peaceful village” in Danish, was located on the highest ground in Grundy County (Figure 7). Despite hopes that the railroad would go through Fredsville, early in the twentieth century the railroad chose to go through Dike instead. The businesses in Fredsville began to decline, but the farming community and church remained.²⁴ Cedar Falls and Fredsville had their Danish heritage in common, and the two cities shared a Danish minister for a while.



Figure 7: Fredsville Village Model (Fredsville Lutheran Church)

²⁴ Veryl Sanderson, “Place of Peace: Fredsville’s Gone but Church Lives,” *Waterloo Courier*, 1967.

Jens Andersen, one of the first to settle in Fredsville in 1866, returned to Denmark the following year to bring more settlers back to both Fredsville and Cedar Falls, an example of chain migration.²⁵ As the number of immigrants in the area grew, more Danes heard about the area from family and friends and made Cedar Falls their new home, too. Correspondence with relatives often aided in drawing immigrants to the United States (Figure 8).²⁶



Figure 8: Danish Postcard (Cedar Falls Historical Society)

One such Dane who heard about Cedar Falls from other Danes who had moved there was John (Johan) Petersen. He feared he would never be independent in Denmark, so when people he knew left Denmark for Cedar Falls following the war with Prussia, he decided he would go to Cedar Falls, too. Petersen traveled by boat to New York, and from there took a train to Chicago and another train to Cedar Falls. Once in Cedar Falls,

²⁵ Fredsville Lutheran Church, "Our History, 1871-1900," <http://www.fredsவில்லுதரன.ഔ/who-we-are/ourhistory/1871-1900>.

²⁶ Riley, 23-51.

he found work on the railroad before becoming a farm hand. Interestingly, he changed his name from the Danish “Johan” to the more American “John.”²⁷

Immigrants were drawn to Black Hawk County by its rich soil and the availability of jobs. According to Riley, immigrants making their home in Black Hawk County experienced little harassment, even during World War I when the governor of Iowa declared that only English could be spoken in schools and public meetings, including church services. By the 1920s, many citizens of Black Hawk County realized that their immigrant neighbors had been just as willing to fight for the United States as those who were born in America, and the immigrants were valued as farmers, workers and citizens.²⁸ Still, there was occasional harassment in Cedar Falls, such as the instances Hans and Axel Holst recalled of occasionally being told “Go home you damn Danes” when they would get into scraps around town.²⁹ This is the physical and cultural environment in which Danish immigrants in Iowa found themselves.

According to Thomas J. Archdeacon’s *Becoming American*, Scandinavians had the choice to remain among themselves as a group or to mingle among other Americans, with little discrimination either way. Scandinavians were generally light-skinned and Protestant, so they did not pose a threat to the American value system. They were under less pressure to dissolve their connections to each other as an ethnic group. As a result, many Scandinavians were able to peacefully maintain a separate identity and live in

²⁷ P. John Petersen, “Another Danish Immigrant Arrives.” Cedar Falls Historical Society Series II, “Danish Memories.”

²⁸ Riley, 23-51.

²⁹ Interview with Hans and Axel Holst by Lisa Garrison and Jane Schmidt, Cedar Falls Historical Society Series III, Cedar Falls Citizens, Box 8.2, “Holst.”

separate ethnic enclaves. Many distinctly Danish communities developed in the United States around the turn of the 20th century throughout the Midwest as well as in California and Utah.³⁰ Some Danes held on to Danish language, religion, literature and songs, evidence of which can be found in Cedar Falls.

A majority of Danish immigrants in Cedar Falls settled east of Main Street, between 7th and 12th Streets, creating an immigrant neighborhood.³¹ According to Mark Abrahamson's book *Urban Enclaves*, new immigrants tend to form these distinct ethnic communities, or enclaves, which are "concentrations of residents who share a distinctive status that is important to their identity."³² Identities, according to Abrahamson, are "people's definitions of their (social) selves and tends to be linked to roles and statuses."³³ He says that enclaves can form around life-style, income, race, religion and/or ethnicity, and often include specialized stores and institutions that support those distinctive statuses. Newcomers are drawn to these enclaves both for the support they provide and because they feel that the enclave is the only place where they can be themselves.³⁴ Jacob L. Vigdor has also studied the immigrant enclave in his book, *From Immigrants to Americans*. He says that immigrants tend to settle near members of their own ethnic or linguistic group. Enclaves can help immigrants overcome employment and

³⁰ Thomas J. Archdeacon, *Becoming American: An Ethnic History* (New York: The Free Press, 1983), 323-326.

³¹ The area of the Danish immigrant neighborhood in Cedar Falls is based on information in the 1900 Census and Cedar Falls Directory.

³² Mark Abrahamson, *Urban Enclaves: Identity and Place in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 13.

³³ Abrahamson, 5.

³⁴ Abrahamson, 13.

linguistic barriers. As immigrants assimilated in their jobs and learned English, the enclaves were no longer beneficial.³⁵

The Danish immigrant population in Cedar Falls reflected the immigration trends in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The community Danish immigrants built was characterized by its businesses, institutions, language and traditions. Cedar Falls quickly became the state's second largest Danish community, after Elk Horn. Danes comprised the largest immigrant group in Cedar Falls, and they left their mark on the city.

³⁵ Jacob L. Vigdor, *From Immigrants to Americans: The Rise and Fall of Fitting In* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 121-122.

CHAPTER 2

DANES AT WORK

Rich soil and the availability of jobs were major factors drawing immigrants to Cedar Falls. Whether they were working on the farm, on the railroad or in one of the many businesses in town, there were plenty of opportunities for Danes who were willing to work hard. In fact, the Danes in Cedar Falls soon gained a reputation as good, reliable and honest workers, which allowed them to find jobs despite their language barriers.

According to an article in *The Daily Record* in 1948:

Many of these immigrants are young men and women who very soon became known as honest and progressive workers who found it comparatively easy to find work. Many of them, thru honest but hard work, in time became prosperous farmers, or business men and have had an important part in building up the community, honored and respected and enjoying the confidence of their fellow citizens.³⁶

According to author Elaine Joy Anderson, one of the reasons for this reputation was the fact that Denmark is a small country. She says, “You always have to do things a little better in small countries to be heard,” which means that Danes in Iowa might have been successful in farming and in business in an effort to help the reputations of Danes all over the world.³⁷ Thus, Danes who were drawn to Cedar Falls left their mark on the city.

Danes were involved in all manner of work in Cedar Falls and Fredsville. Many found jobs in Cedar Falls businesses. At one time, every store along Main Street needed to employ at least one person who spoke Danish in order to communicate with the many

³⁶ “The Why of Cedar Falls.”

³⁷ Elaine Joy Anderson, “Danes at Cedar Falls,” In *Old World Iowans: Transplanted Europeans, Loyal Americans in Iowa* (Mason City, IA: Klipto Loose Leaf Company, 1949), 60.

immigrants in the city.³⁸ Manufacturing was another popular pursuit for Danish immigrants who had been involved in manufacturing in Copenhagen, Denmark.³⁹

Some Danes were able to open their own businesses. Some of these businesses were designed specifically for the Danish population. One Dane began making wooden shoes.⁴⁰ Others opened bakeries that specialized in Danish pastries.⁴¹

Other businesses served the city as a whole, such as Bruhn's Meat Market, which sold fresh and cured meats, fish, and poultry (Figures 9 and 10). In 1919, Christian N. Bruhn purchased a meat market that was established in 1908 by Hans Martin and then sold to Charles Johnson and Edward Thompson. In 1926, he built a building at 407 Main Street to house the market.⁴² Bruhn was an active community member. His grave names him as a founder of Bruhnsville, which was a neighborhood north of Cedar Falls that would become part of North Cedar.⁴³

³⁸ Thorvald Holst.

³⁹ Anderson, 63.

⁴⁰ Thorvald Holst.

⁴¹ Anderson, 61.

⁴² "Eiler Buys Bruhn Market at Cedar Falls," *Waterloo Daily Courier*, September 25, 1946, 3.

⁴³ "Outlying Cedar Falls District is Now 'North Cedar'," *Waterloo Daily Courier*, June 11, 1947, 5.



Figure 9: Bruhn's Meat Market (Cedar Falls Historical Society)

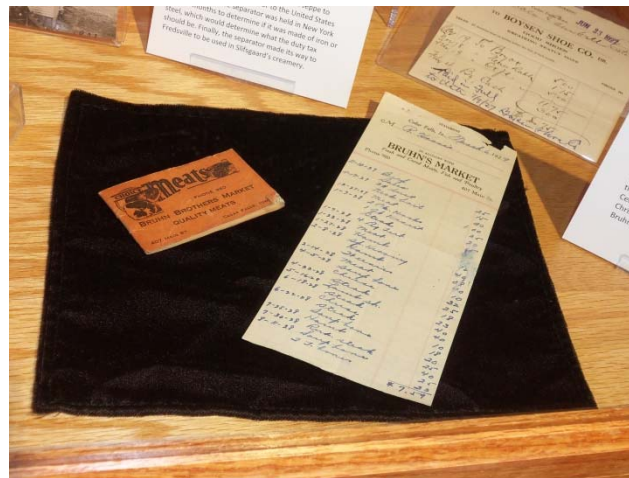


Figure 10: Bruhn's Market Tablet and Receipt (Cedar Falls Historical Society)

George Boysen was a Danish immigrant who owned the Boysen Shoe Company, where he sold and repaired many different types of shoes in Cedar Falls for 46 years (Figures 11, 12 and 13). He opened the business at 218 Main Street in 1900 along with his brothers Alfred and T. H. Boysen. In 1920, the business moved to 305 Main Street.

Boysen became very involved in the community as a member of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, the Rotary Club, the Danish Lyren Society, and the Chamber of Commerce. His son Robert took over the store after his death in 1946.⁴⁴



Figure 11: Boysen Shoe Company Button Hook (Cedar Falls Historical Society)



Figure 12: Boysen Shoe Company Shoe Horn (Cedar Falls Historical Society)

⁴⁴ "George Boysen Dies Suddenly Tuesday 5 p.m." *Harvesting Our Boysen Heritage*, 28.

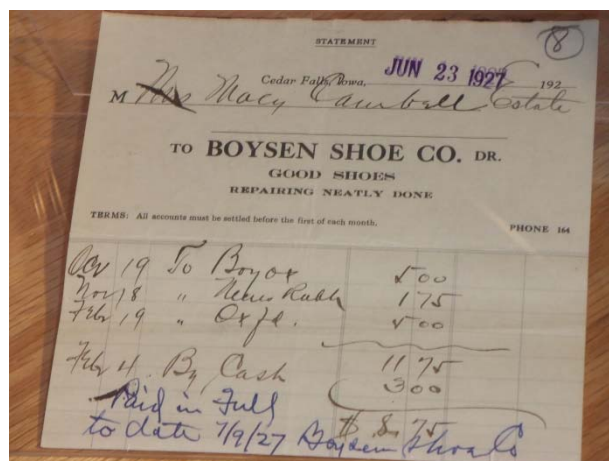


Figure 13: Boysen Shoe Company Receipt (Cedar Falls Historical Society)

Other Danish businessmen were also very involved in the community. Jens P. Jepsen was a carpenter and builder when he came to the United States from Schleswig in 1885. He began working for the Townsend and Merrill Company in 1894 and was elected secretary and general manager of the business on January 7, 1905. He also served at the Citizens Savings Bank and the Cedar Falls Building and Loan Association. He was a director of the Black Hawk Hotel for a while, was vice president of the Danish Mutual Insurance Association, and was elected as a school board member. He was also involved in the organization of Viking Pump.⁴⁵

Jes Clausen was another Danish businessman in Cedar Falls in the early 20th century. He was a partner in the Severin and Clausen Mercantile, and later in Hartbecker

⁴⁵ "Nazareth Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, Cedar Falls, Iowa: Fragments from the First Sixty Years of Its History," Nazareth Lutheran Church, 62.

and Clausen. He also organized a group called the Danish Sick Benefit Society to help people in times of sickness.⁴⁶

J. P. Larsen owned a harness shop which played a significant role in the Danish community in Cedar Falls (Figure 14). On July 1, 1897, a group of 50 men and women, most of Danish descent, met above Larsen's Harness Shop at 222 Main Street to organize Bethlehem Lutheran Church.⁴⁷ The Danish Book Concern, which was a business that imported and sold Danish books, also began above Larsen's Harness Shop.⁴⁸



Figure 14: J. P. Larsen and Family (Cedar Falls Historical Society)

Danish Mutual Insurance was organized on March 7, 1884, and started out serving only Danes in Black Hawk, Grundy, and Butler County. The insurance company was located at 318 Main Street, and was also known by the Danish name of *Det Danske*

⁴⁶ "Nazareth Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, Cedar Falls, Iowa," 61-62.

⁴⁷ "Nazareth Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, Cedar Falls, Iowa, 1871-1931," 15-17.

⁴⁸ Thorvald Holst.

Gensidige Assurance Selskab. The company continued to serve only Danes until 1935, when membership was opened to all nationalities based on the recommendations of its officers and directors. Membership also expanded to serve people in Bremer, Fayette, Buchanan, Benton, and Tama County. Between 1935 and 1958, membership grew from 686 to well over 2,000 members. In 1959, the company celebrated its 75th anniversary (Figures 15 and 16).⁴⁹

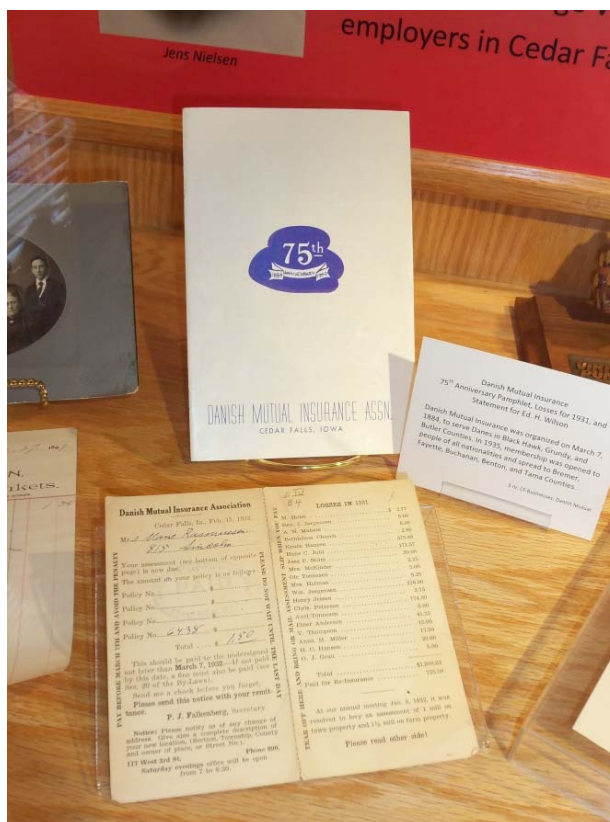


Figure 15: Danish Mutual Insurance 75th Anniversary Book and 1931 Losses (Cedar Falls Historical Society)

⁴⁹ “Danish Mutual Insurance, Assn., Cedar Falls, Iowa, 75th Anniversary, 1959,” CFHS Series IV, Cedar Falls Businesses, Box 5.

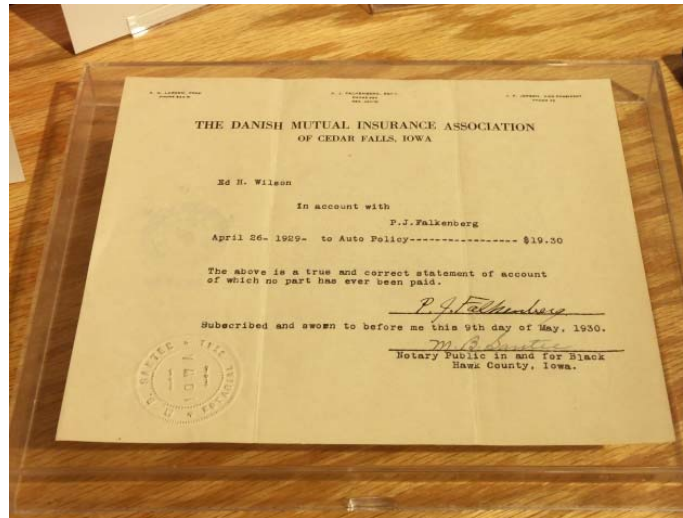


Figure 16: Danish Mutual Insurance Statement (Cedar Falls Historical Society)

Jens Nielsen (Figure 17), who was involved in the organization of the Danish Mutual Insurance Company, was one of the most successful Danish businessmen in Cedar Falls. Jens Nielsen made a large impact on commerce in the community. He owned a stone quarry which supplied the stone used to build many early Cedar Falls homes.⁵⁰ He experienced many problems with flooding in his quarry, however. It was because of this flooding that in 1904, Nielsen developed a pump to remove seepage water from the quarry. He had the pump patented, and in 1911, he founded the Viking Pump Company, along with George Wyth and Christian Petersen. Petersen brought with him the skills he had learned as a machinist in Denmark.⁵¹ Viking Pump is still one of the largest employers in Cedar Falls (Figure 18).

⁵⁰ Brian C. Collins, Introduction to *Images of America: Cedar Falls, Iowa* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 1998), 76.

⁵¹ Thorvald Holst.



Figure 17: Jens Nielsen (Cedar Falls Historical Society)



Figure 18: Modern Viking Pump Model (Cedar Falls Historical Society)

George R. Nielsen's *The Danish Americans* states that economic factors were a major part of the decision to immigrate, especially for farmers. Many immigrants

suffered due to unemployment and poverty. Between 1850 and 1891, the largest group of Danish immigrants was farmers and laborers. Many of them wanted to own their own land, and the opportunity for land ownership in Denmark was limited. Farmers and laborers there often ended up doing seasonal work for low wages when they could not find land to purchase for themselves.⁵² According to Kristian Hvidt's *Flight to America*, farmers in Denmark were also hurting due to a drop in grain prices, partially caused by an increased exportation of crops from the United States in the years following the American Civil War.⁵³ These farmers sought better opportunities in the United States.

Many Danes became farmers in the area surrounding Cedar Falls, especially at the rural community of Fredsville. Some of these farmers found greater opportunities for land ownership in the United States than they would have had in Denmark. It is possible that Danish immigrants Adam, Hans, and Jørgen Boysen were drawn to the United States for that very reason. They could not all stay on their father's farmland in Denmark, and land sales in the United States in the 1860s drew them to America. Hvidt has also looked at immigration in Iowa specifically. Iowa was considered "open space" as late as 1880, and cheap homesteads drew many people to the state.⁵⁴ The Boysen brothers all settled near Fredsville and farmed.⁵⁵

Dairy farming was especially popular, and Truels Slifsgaard ran a creamery in Fredsville. He often wrote to his father Jeppe (Figure 19), who was still in Denmark, and

⁵² Nielsen, 37-38.

⁵³ Hvidt, 158-159.

⁵⁴ Hvidt, 175.

⁵⁵ Boysen, 81.

complained about the cream separation methods that were available to him. Jeppe decided to come to the United States and bring a cream separator with him. This sped up the process of cream separation considerably.⁵⁶ The cream separator was invented by Gustaff De Lavalla, a Swede, and L. C. Nielsen, a Dane. It used centrifugal force for separation.⁵⁷ The cream separator was an essential part of Fredsville, as many considered dairying to be the lifeblood of the community.⁵⁸



Figure 19: Jeppe Slifsgaard (findagrave.com)

Besides the creamery, several other businesses made up the village of Fredsville. The Slifsgaards also ran a general store, which sold dry goods, notions, fancy goods,

⁵⁶ “First Cream Separator in U.S. Brought to Fredsville in '82 by Jeppe Slifsgaard,” *Waterloo Sunday Courier*, May 26, 1940.

⁵⁷ Sanderson.

⁵⁸ “First Cream Separator in U.S.”

boots and shoes, groceries, hardware and tinware, patent medicines, wallpaper, paints, oils, varnishes, and machine oil (Figure 20). Unfortunately, the store burned down in 1908 or 1909 and was never replaced. A post office was part of the general store. Fredsville was also home to Theo Juhl's blacksmith shop, a cooperage, a harness shop, and a country school.⁵⁹



Figure 20: T. Slifsgard General Store (findagrave.com)

The many businesses and opportunities in Cedar Falls and Fredsville helped draw Danes to the city. They also helped Danes establish their place within the Danish immigrant community and the city as a whole.

⁵⁹ Boysen, 297-303.

CHAPTER 3

DANISH CHURCHES AND ORGANIZATIONS

The group of immigrants who came to Cedar Falls from Pine River, Wisconsin worked to bring Reverend C. L. Clausen from St. Ansgar, Iowa to conduct Danish church services in Cedar Falls and Fredsville whenever he had the chance. Family Bibles (Figure 21) allowed immigrants to worship and pray in Danish, but they were eager to hear the Word of God preached in their native language. Clausen primarily served a Norwegian Lutheran congregation in St. Ansgar, but he may have made the acquaintance of the men from Pine River when they served in the 15th Wisconsin regiment during the Civil War when he served as their chaplain, leading the men to ask him to come preach in Cedar Falls. Clausen first led services in Cedar Falls in 1867 or 1868. The Danes in Cedar Falls soon organized a congregation called the Scandinavian Church Society, and the later changed the name to the Danish Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church.⁶⁰



Figure 21: Danish Bible (Cedar Falls Historical Society)

⁶⁰ “Nazareth Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, Cedar Falls, Iowa, 1871-1931,” Cedar Falls Historical Society Series II, Cedar Falls History, Box 4, Danish History, “Nazareth Lutheran 1871-1931,” 8.

Eventually, the Danes in Cedar Falls desired their own pastor, and they wrote a letter to a committee called Udvalget in Denmark to ask for one. The committee sent A. S. Nielsen. Nielsen had joined the Inner Mission faction for the Lutheran Church in Denmark and felt called to serve as a missionary to the Danish people in the United States. He visited Cedar Falls and preached a sermon in July of 1871. The Danes in Cedar Falls decided to call Nielsen to be their pastor, and they organized the Nazareth Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church. They met in the German Lutheran Church until constructing their own building in 1873. Nazareth Lutheran Church quickly became a very important part of the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The Church held its national conventions in Cedar Falls in 1880 and 1886.⁶¹

The church continued to be a place for Danes to worship in their own language for many years, although the question of whether or not to switch to English did come up in the early twentieth century. A Danish choir book, *Israel's Sange*, was used until at least 1919 (Figure 22). In 1922, the issue of language was officially addressed at the annual church meeting, but it was put off for further discussion the next year. In 1923, the congregation decided that one High Mass service each month would be done in English. In 1925, Reverend Otto Nielsen began holding half of the services in English, and use of the Danish language continued to be phased out.⁶² The Danish services remained fairly popular though. The average attendance at the 12 Danish services held in 1936 was 134, while English services had an average attendance of 200.⁶³ By 1934, there was only one

⁶¹ "Nazareth Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, Cedar Falls, Iowa, 1871-1931," 9-14.

⁶² "Nazareth Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, Cedar Falls, Iowa, 1871-1931," 21-22.

Danish service held each month, and by 1938, all regular services were in English, although Danish services were still occasionally provided. By June of 1943, the word “Danish” was dropped from the church’s name.⁶⁴

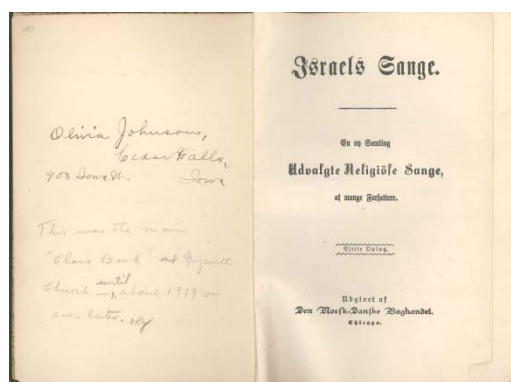


Figure 22: *Israel's Sange* (Cedar Falls Historical Society)

The switch to English occurred more quickly in Nazareth’s Sunday school. Sunday school was used as a time not only for religious study, but also to learn Danish patriotic and folk songs. All Sunday school was conducted in Danish until 1917, when the nationalism inspired by World War I encouraged the switch to English. This seemed to be a good time to switch Sunday school classes to English since English had become the language of the children. Attendance at Sunday school actually increased due to the use of the English language.⁶⁵

⁶³ “Annual Report, 1936, Nazareth Church, Cedar Falls, Iowa,” Nazareth Lutheran Church, 3-4.

⁶⁴ “Nazareth Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, Cedar Falls, Iowa: Fragments from the First Sixty Years of Its History,” 15-17.

⁶⁵ “Nazareth Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, Cedar Falls, Iowa, 1871-1931,” 26-28.

On July 1, 1897, around 50 members of Nazareth Lutheran left the church to found their own congregation, Bethlehem Lutheran Church. This was due to a split in the Danish Lutheran Church between the Grundtvigian and Inner Mission factions. Until 1892, all of the pastors of Nazareth Lutheran had been Grundtvigian. In 1892, Pastor P. L. C. Hansen of the Inner Mission movement became the pastor of Nazareth. In 1893, the national synod met in Wisconsin and adopted a new constitution. Nazareth Lutheran wished to remain a part of the synod, but rejected the new constitution. They did not like that the new constitution made the church property liable to the synod and liable to be taxed. Nazareth and other churches that refused to sign the constitution joined together as the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church of North America, which held its convention in Cedar Falls in 1895. This convention brought more attention to the split, and ended up splitting Nazareth's congregation. In June 1897, the members of Nazareth who identified as Grundtvigian met together and decided to resign from the congregation on July 1, 1897. That declaration was signed by 53 members.⁶⁶ The meeting took place above Larsen's Harness Shop at 222 Main Street. The group decided to ask Reverend Adam Dan, who was the pastor at Fredsville Lutheran Church, to preach for them as well.⁶⁷ A velvet bag on a pole that was used to collect the offering is a remnant of the early days of Bethlehem Lutheran Church (Figure 23). Although that was a tumultuous time for Nazareth and the new congregation of Bethlehem, the two churches are now on good terms.

⁶⁶ "Nazareth Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, Cedar Falls, Iowa, 1871-1931," 15-17.

⁶⁷ "Bethlehem Lutheran Church – 14th and Main Streets, Cedar Falls, Iowa," 1971, Cedar Falls Historical Society Series Via, Cedar Falls Churches, Box 4, Lutheran Churches.



Figure 23: Bethlehem Lutheran Church's Offering Bag (Bethlehem Lutheran Church)

Like Nazareth, Bethlehem also started out conducting all services in Danish, but eventually made the gradual transition to using English. At a congregational meeting in July 1922, there was a request for a meeting to discuss the possibility of using English in some church services and Sunday school classes. They decided at that meeting that they would hold two evening services each month in English. The use of English at Bethlehem gradually increased since then. According to Julia Madsen, a boys' Sunday school class taught in 1932 was the last class to be taught in Danish. When the church had first started, Sunday school classes had been exclusively in Danish.⁶⁸ According to a church pamphlet printed in 1971, the switch to English was greatly supported by the younger generation. It says:

The American born and educated children of the early Danish immigrants did not question that they were American born and soon demanded that English be heard,

⁶⁸ "Bethlehem Lutheran – Dedication of New Church, 1979," Cedar Falls Historical Society Series Via, Cedar Falls Churches, Box 4, Lutheran Churches, 24-32.

first from the families whose children had married outside of Danish circles. A gradual transition from Danish to English began shortly following the twenty-fifth anniversary of Bethlehem Congregation in 1922. Since then, the use of the English language increased rapidly, hymns were translated and the Danish diminished.⁶⁹

This shows that generational differences were the driving force behind changes in the church.

According to a church history written by Holgar O. Nielsen on August 29, 1947, the church went through three stages in its growth. During the first stage, the church almost exclusively served Danish immigrants and was essentially an extension of the church in Denmark. In the second stage of the church, immigrants in the congregation still spoke Danish, but many had become American citizens and their children were natural born citizens of the United States. This complicated the issues of nationality and language. Children were attending public schools where they spoke English, but still spoke Danish at home. They had Danish roots, but they lived, worked, and went to school in America. Finally, in the third stage of the church, there was a shift towards American language and culture. Children did not have a question of identity. They saw themselves as American and wanted to be a part of the larger community and not isolate themselves.⁷⁰ These stages experienced at Bethlehem Lutheran are similar to the stages experienced by the Danish immigrant community in Cedar Falls as a whole.

Despite the switch to English, Danish heritage remained an integral part of Bethlehem's identity. In 1970, Pastor Arnold Stilwell was the first non-Danish minister to

⁶⁹ "Bethlehem Lutheran Church – 14th and Main."

⁷⁰ "Bethlehem Lutheran – Dedication," 47-48.

serve the church. He served from 1970 to 1973, and it was during this time that Bethlehem transitioned from being perceived as for Danes only to being perceived as a church open to all people. The changes in the church met with a lot of resistance. The secretary of the church found a quote, which Stilwell requested be made into a banner. It read, “The seven last words of the church: we never did it that way before.” The banner hung in the church for the remainder of Stilwell’s time there.⁷¹

Besides Bethlehem Lutheran, Nazareth Lutheran also had close ties to Fredsville Lutheran. Reverend A. S. Nielsen, who was the first pastor of Nazareth, also served at Fredsville. Nielsen lived in Cedar Falls, and children from Fredsville travelled to Cedar Falls for catechism. The congregation in Fredsville was formed in 1871, the same year as Nazareth. By 1873, the church minutes recorded that “A general need for the erection of a little Danish church for the Danish people living outside of Cedar Falls has for a longer time been considered,” and a church was built for the congregation.⁷² Another pastor, Reverend Jens Jensen, also served both the congregation in Cedar Falls and the congregation in Fredsville. Furthering the connection between the two communities was the name the Fredsville church was sometimes referred to as, which was “The Congregation outside Cedar Falls.” The church officially became known as Fredsville in 1888. Fredsville’s first minister of its own was Reverend R. Thomsen, who came from Denmark.⁷³

⁷¹ Arnold Stilwell, “Second Sunday in Advent Sermon,” Bethlehem Lutheran Church, December 8, 1996.

⁷² Fredsville Lutheran Church.

⁷³ Fredsville Lutheran Church.

Like Nazareth and Bethlehem, Fredsville gradually made the switch to English during the first half of the twentieth century, although the switch took a little longer than it had in Cedar Falls. During World War I, Governor William L. Harding banned the use of foreign languages in public services, but the proclamation was not effective. The congregation at Fredsville sent a letter of protest to the governor, and this letter, along with other protests across the state, caused the governor to withdraw his proclamation. It was not until 1936 that Fredsville's minutes for their annual meeting were written in English, and in 1941 English became the official language of their meetings. In 1944, they decided to hold one Danish service and three English services each month. In 1950, Pastor C. A. Stub sent out a newsletter, in which he noted that one Danish service was held at 9:30 one Sunday each month, with English services being held at 10:30 every week. In 1951, only nine Danish services were held during the entire year. There was no record of any Danish services held in 1953, and the word "Danish" was dropped from the name of the church that same year.⁷⁴

While most of the Danish immigrants in Cedar Falls were Lutheran, some of them were Seventh Day Adventists, and some were Baptist. The Seventh Day Adventists never established a church in Cedar Falls, but the First Danish Baptist Church in Cedar Falls was established in 1878. During the early 1870s, Reverend Jens Henriksen, the pastor of a Baptist church in Clarks Grove, Minnesota, came to Cedar Falls to visit friends he had attended church with in Denmark, and he was the one to organize the First Danish Baptist

⁷⁴ Fredsville Lutheran Church.

Church. The congregation built a church building in 1882, and Henriksen came to serve as the church's minister soon after.⁷⁵

The switch to English happened more quickly in the Baptist church than it had in the Lutheran ones. During World War I, the language at Sunday evening services was changed to English. The name of the church was changed to Calvary Baptist Church in 1923. In 1927, 67 members of the congregation signed a petition which said:

Believing the time has arrived in the history of our Church when we can be of more service to a larger number of people if the language is changed to English, we the following members of Calvary Baptist Church, respectfully request the Deacons to give this their careful as well as prayerful consideration, that the matter may be brought before the church at our next quarterly meeting.⁷⁶

The petition passed, although meeting minutes continued to be written in Danish until December 1930. Their Danish constitution was translated to English in 1934, and eventually the church severed all ties with the Danish Baptist conference.⁷⁷

The Lutheran churches, however, continued to remember their Danish heritage long past the switch to the English language. A model ship hangs from the ceiling of Bethlehem Lutheran, which is a Danish tradition and represents the Christian's journey, sailing on rough seas toward salvation. The ship also has ties to Denmark's history as a seafaring nation. Ships hang in the homes and churches of many Danes.⁷⁸ Fredsville also

⁷⁵ "100th Anniversary Jubilee, 1878-1978, Calvary Baptist Church," Danish Genealogy Center, Elk Horn, 1-6.

⁷⁶ "100th Anniversary Jubilee," 9.

⁷⁷ "100th Anniversary Jubilee, 10-11.

⁷⁸ "Bethlehem Lutheran Church – 14th and Main."

has a ship hanging from its ceiling, and Nazareth has a ship which used to hang from the ceiling and is now displayed in a case of items from the church's history (Figure 24).



Figure 24: Nazareth Lutheran Church's Model Ship (Nazareth Lutheran Church)

A copy of the statue “Christus” by Danish sculptor Thorvaldsen is also seen in many Danish churches in the United States. A copy of that statue stood over the altar at Bethlehem Lutheran for over 75 years, and it now sits just outside the sanctuary (Figure 25).⁷⁹ Fredsville interestingly added a copy of the statue to the church in the 1950s, after the use of the Danish language had already declined. Perhaps this was their way of keeping Danish heritage alive.⁸⁰ Thorvaldsen is a very famous Dane and is a source of pride for people from Denmark.

⁷⁹ “Bethlehem Lutheran Church – 14th and Main.”



Figure 25: Thorvaldsen's "Christus" (Bethlehem Lutheran Church)

In 1997, the pastor at Bethlehem expressed his belief in the importance of remembering the church's Danish roots. He said that having such deep roots allows the congregation to draw inspiration from the courage and faith of the people who started the church. He said "Bethlehem was founded by immigrants from Denmark, and has always maintained its strong Danish heritage despite becoming a diverse congregation.... We've all sort of become honorary Danes."⁸¹

The churches also started charitable groups to help those in need. Members of Nazareth Lutheran's Danish Ladies Aid helped support orphanages and hospitals, and visited the sick.⁸² The Danish Ladies Aid at Bethlehem Lutheran planned various social gatherings and activities. Canned fruit was donated to Sartori Hospital, Grand View

⁸⁰ Fredsville Lutheran Church.

⁸¹ Staci Schmit, "Centennial Celebration: Bethlehem Lutheran Church's 100-Year Anniversary," *Waterloo Courier*, June 20, 1997.

⁸² "Nazareth Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church."

College, and Valborg's Old People's Home in Des Moines, and money was raised for other causes.⁸³

Several other organizations gave Danish immigrants in Cedar Falls a place to socialize in their own language and provided assistance when needed. The Danish Brotherhood, founded in 1882, was an organization with lodges across the country and was formed to unify Danes in the United States, perpetuate memories of Denmark, and provide insurance for death, sickness, and disability.⁸⁴ The Danish Lyren Association, formed in 1890, was a benevolent and fraternal organization that offered insurance as well as a place to socialize. The national convention of the Danish Lyren Association was held in Cedar Falls in June of 1902, with H. Rasmussen serving as the delegate for the city (Figure 26).⁸⁵ These organizations, as well as the churches, brought together the Danish community in Cedar Falls throughout much of the first half of the 20th century.

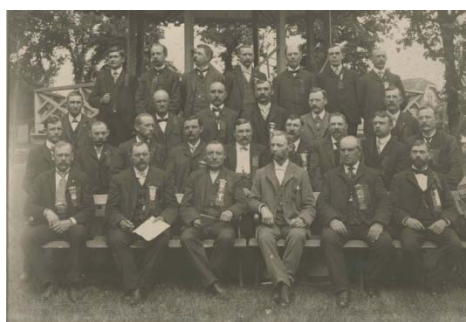


Figure 26: Danish Lyren Association Convention, 1902 (Cedar Falls Historical Society)

⁸³ Elin Koch, "The Danish Ladies Aid of Bethlehem Lutheran Church," Bethlehem Lutheran Church, December 1996.

⁸⁴ Nielsen, 174.

⁸⁵ "Danes in Convention," *Waterloo Daily Courier*, June 3, 1902, 1.

CHAPTER 4

THE DANISH LANGUAGE

As seen by the importance of Danish being spoken in Cedar Falls businesses and churches, the use of the Danish language was an essential characteristic of the immigrant community in Cedar Falls. While many immigrants learned English fairly quickly, they continued to speak Danish well into the twentieth century. This is seen through the presence of a library of Danish books that was at Bethlehem Lutheran Church, the continued popularity of publications in the Danish language, and Danish inscriptions on tombstones in both Cedar Falls and Fredsville.

The most popular Danish newspaper published in Cedar Falls was the *Dannevirke*. The name of the *Dannevirke* means “Dane’s work” in Danish. It was also the name of a wall that was built between Denmark and Germany, which demonstrates the significance of the conflict between Denmark and Germany to the Danes who immigrated to the United States.⁸⁶ The *Dannevirke* provided a “spirit of unity” to the Danes.⁸⁷

The *Dannevirke* was first established in Elk Horn, Iowa in 1880 to support the interests of a local Danish folk school there. In 1882, the publication of the newspaper was moved to Cedar Falls. N. U. Christiansen partnered with Martin Holst (Figure 27) to publish the paper. Following Christiansen’s death, Holst was assisted by his sons Hans,

⁸⁶ “Danish Paper 50 Years Old,” 1932, CFHS Series III: Cedar Falls Citizens, Box 8.2, “Holst.”

⁸⁷ “Martin Holst,” *Great Grandflatken*, part one, Cedar Falls Historical Society Series III: Cedar Falls Citizens, Box 8.2, “Holst,” 7.

Axel and Thorvald.⁸⁸ According to Holst, the purpose of the *Dannevirke* was “to serve as a messenger from the big world, but in particular from our old as well as our new fatherland. Not least we wish to be a linkage between country men here, that have gathered in associations or new settlements and have created congregations.”⁸⁹ The paper was also closely related to the Grundtvigian movement in the Lutheran Church which sought to preserve Danish language and Danish culture.⁹⁰ At its peak, the *Dannevirke* had a circulation of around 2,400.⁹¹ The paper reached subscribers in 37 states, Canada, South America, and Denmark.⁹²



Figure 27: Martin Holst (Cedar Falls Historical Society)

⁸⁸ “Dannevirke, Danish Newspaper Here is Fifty Years Old – M. Holst, Editor is 74 Years Young and Still Going Strong,” *Cedar Falls Daily Record*, Cedar Falls Historical Society Series IV, Cedar Falls Businesses, Box 5, “Dannevirke/Danes.”

⁸⁹ Martin Holst, *Dannevirke*, May 4, 1932, Cedar Falls Historical Society Series III: Cedar Falls Citizens, Box 8.2, “Holst.”

⁹⁰ “Martin Holst,” 6.

⁹¹ Thorvald Holst.

⁹² David Whitsett, “Editor Keeps Foreign Newspaper Afloat, Becomes C.F. Icon,” November 28, 2009.

Holst was also the publisher of many other Danish publications in Cedar Falls. These publications included the *Børnevenden* (a children's Sunday school paper), *Ungdom* (a monthly young people's magazine), *Julegranen* (a Christmas annual), and various other books of sermons, poetry, and songs (Figure 28). The Holst Printing Company also published the annual reports of the church.⁹³ Holst also formed *Danske Boghandel* (The Danish Book Concern) with Peter Falkenberg. The business began operating above Larsen's Harness Shop. Through the Danish Book Concern, Holst and Falkenberg imported and sold Danish books.⁹⁴



Figure 28: *Dannevirke* and *Julegranen* (Cedar Falls Historical Society)

Holst was born in Southern Jutland in Denmark, where he wished to become a teacher. The German authorities in the area would not allow him to teach, though. He wrote a letter to Hans Jorgen Pederson, the headmaster of the folk school in Elk Horn,

⁹³ "Martin Holst," 7.

⁹⁴ Thorvald Holst.

Iowa, who suggested that Holst come to Elk Horn, where he could work with students on the *Dannevirke*. After Pederson left Elk Horn, Holst moved the paper to Cedar Falls with the help of Pastor Mylund there to keep publication of the paper going.⁹⁵

Martin Holst became a very well respected member of the Cedar Falls community and the Danish immigrant community through his work on the *Dannevirke*. His work on the *Dannevirke* provided help and inspiration to newcomers to the United States, and helped Danish immigrants become proud American citizens.⁹⁶ When he died, three ministers spoke at his funeral at Bethlehem Lutheran Church, which he was instrumental in founding as a strong supporter of the Grundtvigian movement.⁹⁷ He was praised for his contributions to Cedar Falls as well as for his influence on other Danish communities throughout the United States through the *Dannevirke*. Reverend Ottar Jorgensen, one of the speakers at the funeral, said that Holst transferred the values of the American press to the Danish language, and also brought Danish values to Danish-Americans. Jorgensen went on to talk about how Holst loved Denmark but also loved America, saying “He first sought comfort, rest and recreation in his home. The circle then widened out to embrace the Danish-Americans and to embrace the country where he could work in freedom in the language which he loved.”⁹⁸ Despite his commitment to the Danish language, even during World War I, when foreign languages were viewed with suspicion, Holst was

⁹⁵ “Martin Holst,” 4-6.

⁹⁶ “Martin Holst of Dannevirke Was Leader of Danes,” *Waterloo Courier*, 1932, Cedar Falls Historical Society Series III, Cedar Falls Citizens, Box 8.2, “Holst.”

⁹⁷ “Martin Holst,” 7.

⁹⁸ “Martin Holst’s Memory Will Be Cherished Here,” Cedar Falls Historical Society Series III, Cedar Falls Citizens, Box 8.2, “Holst.”

always viewed as a model American citizen. Fittingly, Jorgensen's speech at the funeral was delivered in both Danish and English.⁹⁹ At the convention of the Danish Lutheran Church following Holst's death, Synodical President Hakon Jorgensen expressed the esteem with which Holst was held throughout the United States, saying, "It is difficult to value too highly what Holst has meant to the Danish People in America through *Dannevirke*, but of all people we in the Danish Church should remember him with heartfelt thanks."¹⁰⁰

While the Holst Printing Company, and later office supply store, continued to exist into the 1980s, the Holsts transferred the *Dannevirke* to August Bang (Figure 29) in 1947. At the time when Bang took over the paper, he said:

It is not easy to keep a foreign language weekly afloat nowadays. Nevertheless, it is a mission and a cultural problem, and even if immigration has practically stopped, *Dannevirke* has today more subscribers than eight years ago. The Holsts may be assured that *Dannevirke* will be continued in the same spirit as it was founded and edited by their father.¹⁰¹

Bang kept his word and continued publication of the paper until 1951, when he sold it to the Decorah Posten. Publication of the paper ceased in 1952. By that time, Bang found it too difficult to keep funding the printing of the *Dannevirke*.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ "Martin Holst's Memory."

¹⁰⁰ "Martin Holst," 7.

¹⁰¹ "Holsts Transfer Danish Newspaper: August Bang is Now Owner," *Cedar Falls Daily Record*, August 26, 1941, 1.

¹⁰² "Bang Sells Dannevirke," *Cedar Falls Daily Record*, December 6, 1951.



Figure 29: August Bang (Cedar Falls Historical Society)

Bang, who served as editor of the *Dannevirke* from 1939 to 1949, also highly valued the Danish language, as well as relations between Denmark and the United States. He was born in Aarhus, Denmark in 1887 and came to the United States in 1913 in search of opportunities to be a writer. He married his wife Johanna Lavridsen in North Dakota. They moved to Minnesota in 1932, and then finally settled in Cedar Falls, Iowa, in 1939, where they lived at 1001 ½ Iowa Street. He loved his new home in the United States, but he never forgot Denmark. He brought Danish traditions and customs with him to America and made them “peculiarly American.”¹⁰³

¹⁰³ “August L. Bang Dies; Danish Editor, Poet,” *The Daily Record*, Cedar Falls Historical Society Series II, Cedar Falls History, Box 4.1, “Danish Day 1952 Centennial.”

Besides editing and publishing the *Dannevirke*, Bang had many other accomplishments. He wrote poetry. Many of his poems were published in the United States and in Denmark, and some of them were set to music. One such book of poems was called *Livet I Vold Digte og Sange (Life in Violence Poems and Songs)* (Figure 30). He also ran Bang's Travel Bureau on West 1st Street in Cedar Falls, where he specialized in helping fellow Danes plan trips back to Denmark. Bang was knighted by the king of Denmark for his efforts in positive Danish-American relations, and was the only citizen of Cedar Falls to be knighted.¹⁰⁴

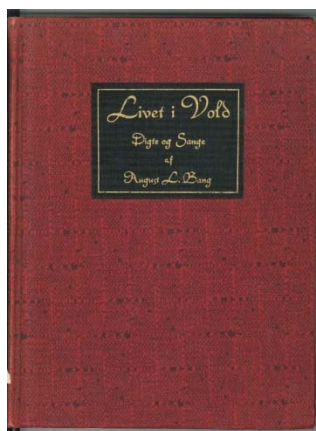


Figure 30: *Livet I Vold: Digte og Sange*, by August Bang, (Cedar Falls Historical Society)

Besides the abundance of Danish publications in Cedar Falls, continued use of the language can also be seen in the inscriptions on tombstones in both Greenwood Cemetery in Cedar Falls and the Fredsville Cemetery. Some tombstones in Greenwood and Fredsville Cemeteries were inscribed in Danish through the 1930s. The phrase *hvid*

¹⁰⁴ "August L. Bang Dies."

i fred, meaning “rest in peace,” can still be read on some monuments, as can as the words *født* and *død*, meaning “born” and “died.” Family relationships are also noted with words such as *moder* and *fader*, meaning “mother” and “father.” A few monuments have longer Danish inscriptions, while others record the immigrant’s birthplace in Denmark. Many of those who spoke Danish in life wished to be remembered in Danish after their death (Figure 31).



Figure 31: Tombstones at Fredsville and Greenwood Cemeteries

CHAPTER 5

ASSIMILATION AND THE CONTINUANCE OF TRADITIONS

The assimilation of Danish immigrants into American culture in Cedar Falls happened gradually. By the middle of the twentieth century, the churches, businesses, and organizations that had characterized the Danish community in Cedar Falls, as elsewhere in America, were no longer distinctly Danish. The immigrants' children had grown up here, spoke English, and identified as American. As the use of the Danish language declined, it became necessary to translate Danish words and songs into English (Figures 32 and 33). The desire to maintain a separate Danish identity and community had faded. Even so, local Danish-Americans continued to remember their heritage through Danish traditions.



Figure 32: *Translations of Danish Songs* (Cedar Falls Historical Society)

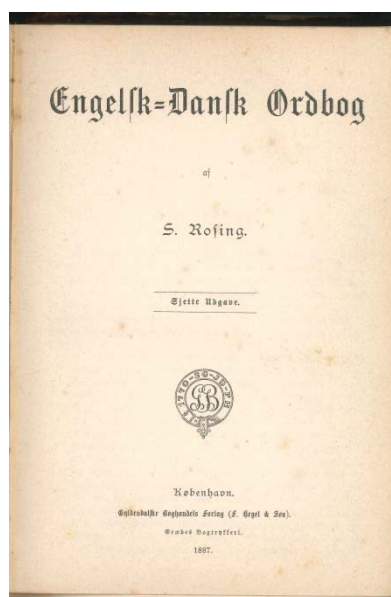


Figure 33: English-Danish Dictionary (Cedar Falls Historical Society)

Food was one traditional way of keeping Danish heritage alive in Cedar Falls and Fredsville (Figure 34). Many different Danish foods were enjoyed by families in the area. These foods included fish, fish salads, *Fiskerouletter*, *Festsuppe*, *Oksenhalesuppe*, fruit soups, *Jule-Risengrod*, *Rombudding*, *Bagte Boller*, and *Marcipan*.¹⁰⁵ Other foods which are still commonly enjoyed in Cedar Falls and Fredsville, especially at church functions, include open-faced sandwiches (Figure 35), *pebernodder* cookies, and pastries.

Æbelskiver. The popular Danish dish *Æbelskiver* is a type of pancake cooked to form a small ball. A bit of apple may be added to the batter, hence the name, which means “apple circle.” It is cooked in a special pan with rounded indentations (Figure 36). A *Rollpølse* press is used to make Danish sausages (Figure 37). A mixture of meat and

¹⁰⁵ Anderson, 62.

spices is rolled, tied together, and boiled. The rolls are then placed in a press to cool and harden.

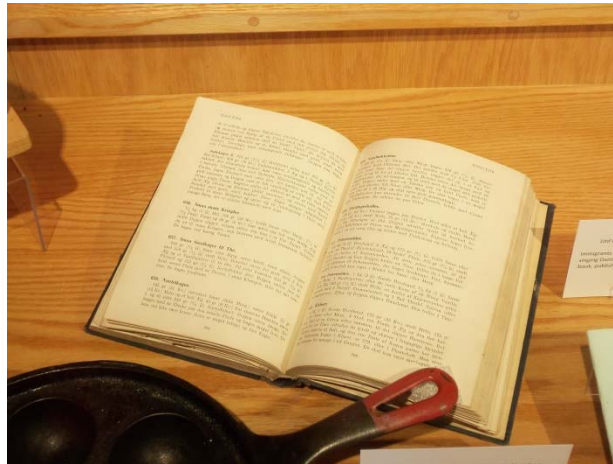


Figure 34: *Fru Constantin's Husholdnings og Kogebog (Mrs. Constantin's Household and Cookbook)* (Cedar Falls Historical Society)



Figure 35: Danish Open-Faced Sandwiches



Figure 36: *Æbelskiver* Pan (Private Collection)



Figure 37: *Rollpølse* Press (Private Collection)

Holidays revolved around customs from the old country. One such custom is the tradition of dancing around the Christmas tree while singing carols such as “*Nu Har Vi*

Jul Igen” (“Now We Have Christmas Again”). This tradition is still popular with church groups and families of Danish heritage (Figure 38).



Figure 38: Dancing Around the Christmas Tree at Bethlehem Lutheran (Bethlehem Lutheran Church)

Danish traditions also survived in popular hobbies and activities. A Danish gymnastics club met twice a week in 1896, and traveling Danish gymnasts regularly performed locally. A team of 17 men and 18 women led by Erick Flensted-Jensen performed at the Iowa State Teachers College Fieldhouse during the 1930s, drawing a crowd of 2,500 people. The team was made up of star gymnasts from Denmark who were touring the United States and Canada.¹⁰⁶ Folk-dancing was another popular activity, and women continued to produce traditional needlework, including red- or blue-on-white

¹⁰⁶ “Gym Team at East at 8 O’Clock,” 1930s, Cedar Falls Historical Society Series II, Cedar Falls History, Box 4.1, “Danish Gymnastics.”

cross stitching as well as *hedebo* and *hardanger*, which is white-on-white embroidery (Figure 39).



Figure 39: *Hedebo* and *Hardanger* (Private Collection)

Danish folk dancing was important to Olivia Johnson. She grew up in Cedar Falls and graduated from Cedar Falls High School before moving to Solvang, California. There, she joined a folk dancing group and was selected as one of the dancers to represent Denmark at a Rose Bowl presentation on the eve of the 1932 Olympic games in Los Angeles. She wore a traditional Danish costume (Figures 40 and 41). Johnson returned to Cedar Falls in 1938, and in 1967, she became Secretary and Hostess of the Cedar Falls Historical Society. Costumes such as the ones worn for traditional Danish

folk dancing were a way of keeping Danish heritage alive in Cedar Falls and throughout the United States.¹⁰⁷



Figure 40: Olivia Johnson's Olympic Costume (Cedar Falls Historical Society)



Figure 41: Olivia Johnson with Her Folk Dancing Group (Cedar Falls Historical Society)

¹⁰⁷ Herb Hake, "Newsmakers," *Cedar Falls Record*, October 18, 1977.

While many Danish traditions continue to thrive in Cedar Falls, this does not change the fact that the Danish immigrants did eventually assimilate into American culture. Maren Hansen is an example of a Danish immigrant who adopted American ways while living in Cedar Falls. In 1949, she visited her sister who still lived in Denmark. The newspaper reported that:

No one can be in doubt as to which is the American of the two sisters, even if they both sparkle with the same humorous Jutland disposition. Mrs. Hansen has a gay colored fancy apron with big ruffles over her silk dress, her strong eyes are covered with American glasses with fine frames, and her feet are in a pair of tiny green silk slippers. Even if she does come so far away as Cedar Falls, which is two to 3,000 kilometers west of New York, her hair sits in fine waves like a real city wife.¹⁰⁸

By those who lived in Denmark, Hansen was viewed as outwardly American.

It was around this same time, when many Danes had been assimilated into American culture, that some people in Cedar Falls began looking for ways to celebrate the city's Danish heritage. The first such celebration was planned for a day during the city's centennial celebration in 1952. The day featured Henrik Kauffman, the Danish ambassador to the United States, who gave a speech. He spoke at Overman Park and was welcomed by locals August Bang, Edward Refshauge, Mrs. Hans Holst, and Mrs. Esther Thompson. In his speech, he declared that he was impressed with the "stronghold of Danish Americans" in Cedar Falls.¹⁰⁹ The day's activities also included Danish folk dancing, a concert by Leo Olson's chorus, a skit, community singing, a Danish display at the Odd Fellows Hall, and costumed folk dancers (Figure 42), and *Æbelskiver* and coffee

¹⁰⁸ Mildred Nielsen, trans. "70-Year Old 'Farmerwife' Creates Near Sensation in Car in Denmark," *Aarhus Stiftstidende*, May 10, 1949.

¹⁰⁹ "Danish Ambassador Highlight of Centennial Danish Day," *Cedar Falls Daily Record*, July 3, 1952.

were served.¹¹⁰ Danes in Cedar Falls felt strongly enough about their role in the city that they became a major part of the city's centennial.



Figure 42: Hat from Child's Danish Costume (Cedar Falls Historical Society)

The Danish Day in 1952 went over well enough that a Danish Days celebration was planned for July 2, 3, and 4, 1959 (Figure 43). The celebration featured many events, including the Decorah Kilties Drum and Bugle exhibition, the Fort Dodge Lancers Drum and Bugle Corps, a band concert, the Waterloo Colored Elks Drum and Bugle Corps, an *Æbelskiver* meal served by the Cedar Falls Woman's Club, a parade, a show by the Waterloo Waterhawks, a community songfest, and a street dance.¹¹¹ Governor Herschel Loveless spoke, and television star Carmel Quinn was featured in the variety show at the

¹¹⁰ "Thousands View Cedar Falls Parade," *Waterloo Daily Courier*, July 4, 1952.

¹¹¹ "Varied Program Sparks Cedar Falls Celebration," *Waterloo Daily Courier*, July 4, 1959.

college gymnasium.¹¹² The crowd for Danish Days was estimated to be between 20,000 and 25,000 attendees for Saturday morning alone.¹¹³



Figure 43: Danish Days 1959 (Cedar Falls Historical Society)

A replica of Copenhagen’s Tivoli amusement park was set up in Overman Park (Figure 44). The Tivoli featured Don Rosele Marionettes, Danish folk dancers, tumblers, and a children’s signing group called “Lille Ole’s Nattergale.”¹¹⁴ Bethlehem Lutheran Church set up a café at Tivoli, which displayed a lot of flowers and ferns, which are very popular in Denmark. The cafe served open-faced sandwiches, pastries, and coffee.¹¹⁵ For those who wanted to make their own Danish foods, a recipe book called “Greetings From Cedar Falls” was published, and it included recipes for Danish dishes submitted by local women, as well as a few Swedish, English and American recipes (Figure 45).

¹¹² “Arriving for Danish Days,” *Cedar Falls Daily Record*, July 6, 1959.

¹¹³ Turnbull.

¹¹⁴ “Varied Program.”

¹¹⁵ “Bethlehem Church to Have Outdoor Café at Tivoli,” *Cedar Falls Daily Record*, June 30, 1959.

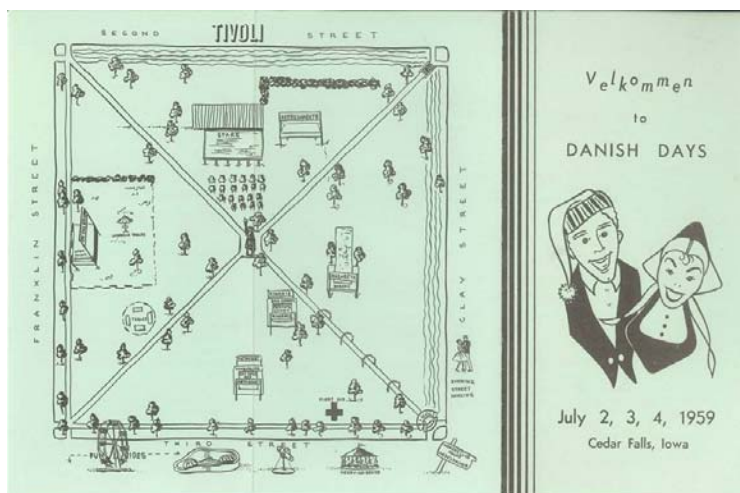


Figure 44: Danish Days Tivoli Program (Cedar Falls Historical Society)



Figure 45: “Greetings From Cedar Falls” Recipe Book (Cedar Falls Historical Society)

One of the most significant events of the Danish Days was the historical pageant (Figure 46). The pageant was opened by cultural attache Carlo Christensen of the Danish Embassy in Washington, D. C. He spoke about the role Iowa has played in becoming home to more Danish immigrants than any other state, and he also paid tribute to the late August Bang. A local troupe performed the pageant, which used a combination of drama, humor, music, dancing, narratives, costumes, sound effects, lighting effects, children's voices, motion pictures and still picture slides to portray a picture of Danish and Danish-American history and culture. The pageant ended with the audience joining together in singing the "Star Spangled Banner," which tied together the Danish and American identities of those participating. The pageant was narrated by Harold Holst, who, along with Reverend Homer Larsen, co-chaired the program committee. The overall purpose of the historical pageant was to "import the flavor of the Danish cultural heritage" and "give meaning to the Danish Days celebration over and above its face value of being an occasion for festivity or as a city promotional event."¹¹⁶ It was the historical pageant that gave the Danish Days celebration its meaning. It was important to those of Danish decent that people attending the celebration understood the role of the Danes in Cedar Falls and the United States. As quoted from the pageant itself, "Here are the Danish-Americans. They are one ingredient in the vast melting pot of nationalities that is America. This is their story and these are their contributions."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Bill McDonald, "Pageant Sets Mood for 'Danish Days'," *Waterloo Daily Courier*, July 4, 1959.

¹¹⁷ McDonald.

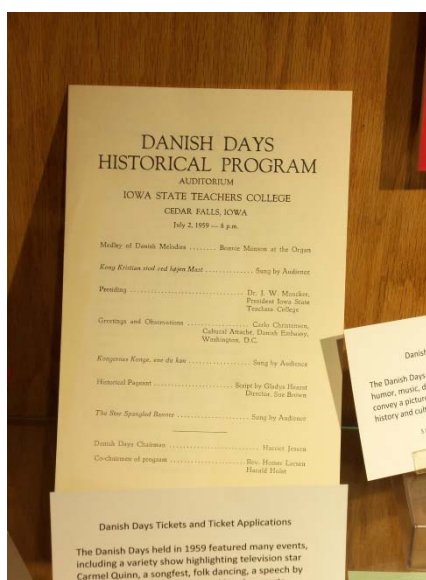


Figure 46: Danish Days Historical Program (Cedar Falls Historical Society)

While the importance of the Danish story and contributions has not diminished, memories of the Danish immigrant community seemed to fade in the years following the Danish Days celebration. Then, in 1989, a group of children and grandchildren of Danish immigrants got together to form the Cedar Valley Danes (Figure 47). They formed in part to offer support to the Danish Immigrant Museum in Elk Horn, but also to preserve their heritage. Until 2015, they still met a few times a year to enjoy fun, laughter, music and Danish foods (Figures 48 and 49). They also held an annual Christmas party called Julefest, where they practiced the tradition of dancing and singing around the tree. On the tables, they displayed both an American flag and a Danish flag, signifying the importance of both places in their lives (Figure 50). Danish immigrants played a large role in the

development of the United States and the Cedar Falls area, and that role should be remembered.¹¹⁸

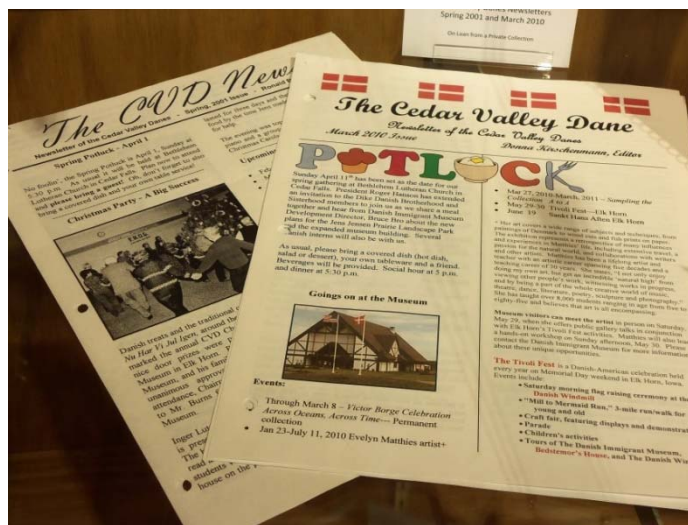


Figure 47: Cedar Valley Danes Newsletters (Private Collection)

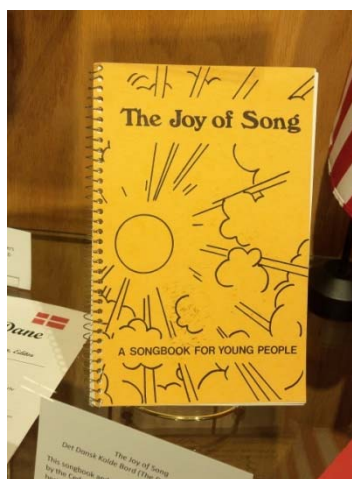


Figure 48: Cedar Valley Danes Song Book (Private Collection)

¹¹⁸ Cedar Valley Danes Newsletter, 1989, CFHS Series II, Cedar Falls History, Box 4.1, “Cedar Valley Danes.”

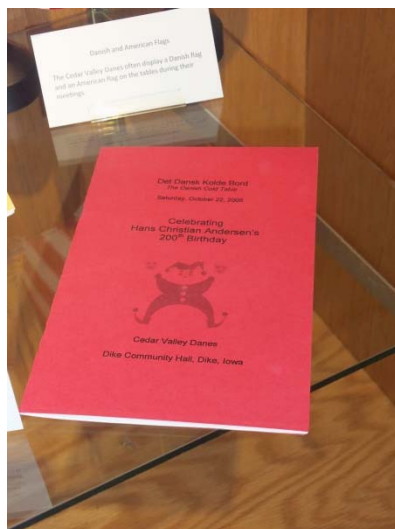


Figure 49: Cedar Valley Danes Recipe Book (Private Collection)



Figure 50: American and Danish Flags

CONCLUSION

In April 2015, the Cedar Valley Danes made the decision to cease meeting. Members of the group are growing older, and the younger generations do not have an interest in attending. It seems that in Cedar Falls, assimilation has finally been completed. Those of Danish descent see themselves as fully American, and they do not have a desire to meet together with others who share their heritage. The impact that Danish immigrants made on Cedar Falls is still evident in the churches, in the continued success of businesses such as Viking Pump, and in individual family traditions. However, people in Cedar Falls no longer identify themselves as part of a Danish community.

Citizens in Fredsville, on the other hand, still see their Danish identity as something that draws them together. As noted, the Danish language was used in Fredsville Lutheran Church until the 1950s, significantly later than in Cedar Falls. Danish can be seen on more recent stones in Fredsville Cemetery as well. Danish foods still play a prominent role at events at Fredsville Lutheran Church, and church renovations completed in 2014 include a place for the Christmas tree so that people can circle around it. Members of Fredsville Lutheran have shown a great enthusiasm for the exhibition at the Cedar Falls Historical Society and its associated programs. Danish heritage is still very much a part of the identity of the Fredsville community.

Through their churches, businesses, organizations, language and traditions, the Danish immigrants contributed to the communities of Cedar Falls and Fredsville as they are today. Visitors to the Cedar Falls Historical Society may be of Danish descent but do not know much about their heritage or they might consider their Danish heritage to be an

essential part of their identity. Others have an interest in the history of Cedar Falls as a whole. *Danish Cedar Falls: The Immigrant Experience* allows all of these visitors to learn about, celebrate and remember the impact of Danish immigrants on the Cedar Valley.

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