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Editorial Statement

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Editorial Statement

This special issue of *The Bridge* contains a representative sample of the thirty-seven presentations given at the fortieth anniversary conference of the Danish American Heritage Society that was held in Schaumburg, Illinois from October 5-7, 2017. The conference theme, “Danish American Fusion,” brought together a wide range of speakers on topics from *smørrebrød* to Grundtvig, airport bathrooms to folk-songs, all of them tied together by the question of how processes of cultural contact, exchange, and fusion have shaped and continue to shape Danish and Danish American culture. While many presenters, for a variety of reasons, were not in a position to share their contributions in print with readers of *The Bridge*, the present collection should provide valuable insights into much of the research and stories shared at the conference.

This issue opens with a translation of the Danish poet Benny Andersen’s poem “Morgenhymne” by Michael Goldman. A gifted translator of many of Denmark’s most important contemporary writers, Goldman brings Danish and American culture together by giving English-speakers access to the wry, powerful poetry and fiction of writers like Andersen, Knut Sønderby, Cecil Bødker, Marianne Kolda Hansen, and Knud Sørensen. This poem, which Goldman read at the conference’s gala banquet, captures both the genius of Andersen’s art and Goldman’s sensitivity to the nuances of Danish language and culture.

The first section in this volume contains four articles dealing with aspects of Danish cultural identity, in particular the question of who gets to be regarded as Danish and what qualities are associated with Danishness. Poul Houe investigates how the much-vaunted concept of *hygge* doesn’t always lead to *lykke*, especially when people are excluded from the national community, while Delane Ingalls Vanada showcases the resilience and creativity of her own Danish ancestors. Nete Schmidt and Julie Allen each look at how the plurality of ethnicities that has emerged in Denmark in recent decades plays out in public institutions, such as schools and churches, in an attempt to understand how Danish society and immigrants to Denmark are finding ways to work together and where there is still room for improvement.

This topic is in many ways an inversion of the Danish American immigration history that we so often address in this journal, so we hope these glimpses into contemporary Denmark's struggles to accommodate newcomers will resonate with our readers, whose ancestors faced similar challenges when they arrived in the US.

The second section turns to Danish history and literature as a vehicle for exploring cultural fusion, through exploration, migration, transformation, and conversion. Danes have been a seafaring people for centuries, which has brought them into contact with many different places and cultures over time. There was even a Dane on board Captain Cook's ship *Endeavor* when he charted the Australian continent in 1770. Otto Christensen takes us back to the ill-fated seventeenth-century quest by Jens Munk to discover the Northwest Passage, showing some of the possible dangers of the Danes' exploratory drive, while Cynthia Larsen Adams highlights some of its benefits in her chronicle of the connections between the inhabitants of the island of Ærø and two counties (Audubon and Shelby) in Iowa. Johs. Nørregaard Frandsen uses the lens of nineteenth-century Danish literature to show how Danes positioned themselves and their national identity with regard to the swaths of wild heathland in Jutland that disappeared almost entirely due to modernization efforts. Finally, Sarah Reed introduces us to the twentieth-century Danish American writer Virginia Sorensen, whose novels try to come to terms with the cultural legacy left by Danish immigrants to their second- and third-generation descendants.

The third section of this issue engages with the question of Danish heritage in America in a more granular way, looking at very concrete moments of cultural transmission and inspiration. The first article in this section is Joy Ibsen's introduction to N. F. S. Grundtvig's influence on American religious life, which pairs very effectively with Tina Langholm Larsen's investigation of how Grundtvigian Danes in America tried to maintain their cultural ties while still integrating into American society. In the next article, Bob Olsen presents a sweeping overview of the ways in which various non-Lutheran denominations in the US used the Danish language in their worship services, hymns, and publications, while Laurie Sommers describes ongoing efforts to help Danish American churches tell their stories and preserve

their historic buildings. In the last two articles, Jens Vange and Sune Frederiksen draw attention to two very different ways in which the blend of Danish and American ideas, talents, insights, and priorities in areas as diverse as airport bathroom design and folk dancing enrich both American and Danish society.

The fortieth anniversary conference of the DAHS was a success because so many of our members were willing to share their expertise and enthusiasm for such diverse aspects of the Danish American experience. In a world where public discourse so often reduces itself to the simplest version of events and attitudes, it is helpful to be reminded of how richly nuanced life can be—and how much those nuances matter in actual people’s lives. Whether it be the language used in the church where you worship, the size of the bathroom stall at the airport, the selection of hymns brought together in your hymnal, the ability to celebrate American Independence Day at Rebild in northern Jutland, or the ethnic makeup of your school class or church congregation, people’s lives are made up of small but decisive details. Taken together, such details shape the picture of Danish and Danish American culture at any given time, but as they shift in small, almost imperceptible ways, the contours of those cultures change too.