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Opening Remarks

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Opening Remarks

by James Iversen

Ladies and gentlemen, as president of the Danish American Heritage Society (DAHS), it is my great pleasure and privilege to bid all of you a very sincere *velkommen* to this, the third international conference on Danish Immigration to North America. There are approximately 420 people registered for this conference, representing 31 of the 50 United States, plus Washington, D.C., and Denmark. I think one of the remarkable aspects of this conference is that so many people are here from different sections of the country and also from Denmark who have not met each other before, so it is a wonderful opportunity for us to make new acquaintances and to exchange new ideas.

Just as we did three years ago at our conference in Omaha, we have a number of anniversaries to celebrate, and this time those anniversaries form the theme and the content of our conference. The 200th anniversary of the birth of the great storyteller Hans Christian Andersen is the primary anniversary we are celebrating, but it is also the 200th anniversary of the birth of Danish ballet master August Bournonville, and the 150th anniversaries of the birth of Danish American poet Kristian Østergaard and the death of the great philosopher Søren Kirkegaard, and we will hear about those and others as the conference progresses.

We are very glad you came, and we hope you have a great experience while you are here in Central Iowa. The Midwest area was a most important destination for many of the early immigrants from Denmark in the latter half of the 19th century and the first quarter of the 20th, and many of their descendants continue to call the Midwest their home. Therefore, of course, we thus have a number of very important Danish American institutions here in Iowa and the adjacent states.

The DAHS publishes *The Bridge*, a journal of Danish American history and culture, and a *Newsletter*, each twice yearly. The Society was started 28 years ago—in 1977—by Arnold Bodtger and his

associates in Junction City, Oregon. We celebrate Arnold Bodtker's legacy with the Edith and Arnold Bodtker Grant for Research or Internship. Thus far, we have granted fellowship funds to six graduate students from various institutions: Aalborg University, the University of Southern Denmark, the University of Copenhagen, and the University of California, Berkeley. The first international conference of this sort took place 10 years ago. That was the Marcus Lee Hansen Immigration Conference held at the Danish Emigration Archive in Aalborg, Denmark in June and July, 1992.

We started planning for this conference more than two years ago, and it was about two years ago that Dr. Helle Mathiasen, a DAHS board members and professor at the University of Arizona, agreed to serve as the conference chairperson, and Vice President Carol Bamford at Grand View College agreed to be the vice-chair of the conference. I am happy to report that these two talented people have turned those two years of extreme hard work, diligence, and concern into what I am sure will be a great event these next couple of days.

I would like to recognize the leaders of the institutions which are co-sponsoring this conference: Janet Philipp, the President of Dana College, in Blair, Nebraska, founded by Danish Immigrants in 1884; Kent Henning, the President of Grand View College in Des Moines, Iowa, founded by Danish immigrants in 1896; John W. Nielsen, the leader of the Danish Immigrant Archive at Dana College; and John Mark Nielsen, the Executive Director of the Danish Immigrant Museum, founded in 1983 in Elk Horn, Iowa.

It is now my pleasure to introduce Minister Counselor Lene Balleby from the Danish Embassy in Washington, D.C., for her opening remarks.