



2012

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Recommended Citation

Henningsen, Mads (2012) "The Danish-American Press," *The Bridge*: Vol. 35 : No. 1 , Article 14.
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/thebridge/vol35/iss1/14>

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The Danish-American Press

by

Mads Henningsen

(Translated by Christa Holm Vogelius)

A half century ago, the split between Danish and Norwegian in the United States was not as sharply delineated as it is now. The two nations' work and interests overlapped on many points. Thus it was a Danish man, Claus Lauridsen Clausen, who was the first pastor among the Norwegians in America. This same man began in 1853 the publication of the magazine "Emigranten" [The Emigrant], which addressed both Norwegian and Danish readers. This magazine still exists as "Minneapolis Tidende" [The Minneapolis Times] and is one of the largest and most widely-distributed Norwegian-American magazines. In 1847, a Danish man in New York, Hans Peter Christian Hansen, founded "Scandinavia," which came out for a short time in Danish-Norwegian and Swedish, but which has long since gone under.¹

It was not until around 1875 that exclusively Danish magazines began to appear. From that time, around fifteen magazines, besides those currently in print, saw the light of day, but most ceased publication almost as quickly as they appeared. The most short-lived was "Danmarksposten" [The Danish Mail] in Brooklyn, which only published two issues in the fall of 1911. One of the magazines that remained in circulation the longest was Emil Opffer's well-edited "Dansk-Amerikaneren" [Danish-American]. After about a five year's run, it also succumbed in the fierce struggle for existence that all Danish-American magazines fight, with almost only a single exception.

¹ Note: The word "Danish-American" has gradually entered common parlance, though it is in and of itself a meaningless term. Like German-American, Irish-American, and so on, it undoubtedly originally emerged through use by U.S. politicians, who wished to win immigrants' support and votes, and thought it easiest to achieve this end through appealing to nationalism and therefore used these expressions in their election materials.

Two monthly magazines and twelve weekly magazines are currently published in the United States. One magazine, "Danskeren" [The Dane] comes out twice a week, another, "Ungdom" [Youth] twice a month. In addition, half a dozen didactic children's magazines are published by the two Danish churches and are discussed in that chapter.

Of the two monthly magazines, "Norden" [The North] is published in Racine, Wisconsin. It was started in 1903 by "The Norden Publ. Co." The current publisher and editor, Ivar Kirkegaard, has been the magazine's editor since its launch. "The North" is richly illustrated; the magazine contains well-written articles about Danish-American issues, original stories, travel descriptions and poetry, along with Danish correspondences and stories by Danish authors.

"Uglen" [The Owl] was started in December 1908 in Alameda, California by "Uglen Publ. Co" with Michael Salomon as the editor. The magazine is now published in Seattle, Washington and is still edited by Mr. Salomon.² "Uglen" has brought out many worthy articles and often hits the nail on the head in its sharp and relentless criticism of various fissures in Danish-American relations.

Weekly Magazines

The Danish-American weeklies are pretty much all cut from the same cloth. The majority are published in a large eight-sided format, while a single one, "Den Danske Pioneer" [The Danish Pioneer], is twelve pages long. They include editorials, news articles from Denmark, shorter news from America, along with local news from the town where they are published. One or more serial works are also common. Just as these magazines resemble one another in length and content, so do they in quality and the quality is with very few exceptions not particularly high. The Danish news is generally the most informative part of the papers. The local news is often restricted to records of birthdays and other celebrations; the editorials are (likewise with a few exceptions) embarrassing and

² After this article was written, the publisher sent notice in June that he, for lack of support, was forced to let the magazine go under.

insignificant, sometimes degenerating to personal attacks on enemies; and the serials are often novels of the tawdriest kind.

On the entire East Coast there is at this time only one Danish-American weekly, "Nordlyset" [The Northern Lights] in New York. Besides the earlier-mentioned "Danmarksposten" and "Dansk-Amerikaneren" [Danish-American], "Den Danske-Amerikaner" [The Danish-American] and "Perth Amboy Folkeblad" [The Perth Amboy People's Magazine] were previously published in Perth Amboy, New Jersey; the first had only a very short life, and the second was merged with "Danish-American" and moved to New York when its publisher acquired this magazine.

"Nordlyset" was founded by John Volk in 1890 with Lecturer Clemens Petersen and A. Riise as contributors. The magazine quickly acquired a not inconsiderable influence in spite of its limited audience, since both editorials as well as news articles were well-edited and Clemens Petersen's literary and foreign review articles were read with great interest. After Volk's death, "Nordlyset" has changed owners and editors several times. It is currently published by Karl Mathiasen, Inc.³ Since the editor Strandvold left the magazine in the fall of 1911, it has stopped publishing editorials and is now only a bare-bones news magazine without an independent opinion and without the slightest influence.

In Chicago, "Chicago-Posten" [The Chicago Post] is published; the first seven pages are reprints of a magazine in Minneapolis, and the eighth offers local news.

"Revyen" [The Revue] (publisher and editor Christian Bøtker) is the only one of the Danish-American magazines to publish very good serial works of literary value. The magazine's editorial leaning is socialist, its Danish news judiciously chosen and well-edited.

"Social-Demokraten" [The Social-Democrat] is the youngest Danish-American magazine; it was started at the beginning of this year by the Scandinavian Socialist Federation in America.

"Hejmdal" was at an earlier time distributed in Chicago, with M. Salmonsens as the publisher and editor. Mr. Salmonsens published the magazine for four years from 1875 to 1879, after which Professor

³ "Inc.," the abbreviation of "Incorporated," means "Aktieselskab" [a joint-stock company].

N.C. Frederiksen took over. Not long after, the magazine folded. In the eighties, a socialist weekly, ""Den Ny Tid" [The New Time] ran for a short time, and at the beginning of the nineties, Peter Ceder started "Lynet" [The Lightning Flash] which, however, only lasted a few weeks.

In Racine is "Folkets Avis" [The People's Newspaper], which from 1882 to 1903 was edited by "Old Elberg," the choir director so revered in Danish and Norwegian choir circles. "Folkets Avis" was once printed in Racine, but since C. Rasmussen Publ. Co. took over the magazine, it has been printed in Minneapolis like "Chicago-Posten" and "St. Paul Tidende"[The St. Paul Times] with shared content on seven pages and one page of local announcements and news.

In addition to the three named magazines, C. Rasmussen Publ. Co. also prints "Ugebladet" [The Weekly Magazine] and "Illustreret Familie-Journal" [The Illustrated Family Journal]. "Scandinavisk Farmer Journal" [The Scandinavian Farmer Journal], published by the same company, went under a couple of years ago.

"Dannevirke" [Danes' Work], which was founded in 1881 by Pastor J.J. Nylund, is printed in Cedar Falls, Iowa. The current owner and editor, M. Holst, has been connected with the magazine since 1882. Without being exactly the official voice of "The Danish Church," "Dannevirke" works for the same religious and secular concerns, and the leaders in the Church are often contributors. "Dannevirke" is well-edited, and one of the few magazines where objective criticism and discussion is undertaken. Holst also issues "The Child's Friend" and prints "Youth." The latter magazine, which comes out two times a month, is the organ for "United Danish Youth" and is discussed in detail on page 134 in the section on youth organizations.

"Den Danske Pioneer" is the oldest of the existing Danish-American periodicals. It was started by Mark Hansen in Omaha, Nebraska forty years ago and was taken over by the current publisher, Sophus F. Neble, in 1886. "Den Danske Pioneer" is, in addition to being the oldest, also the most widely distributed of the Danish-American magazines, and there is scarcely a Danish colony where it is not read. The magazine's wide distribution and influence are the result of editor Neble's intelligent leadership, and the strong

support that he through many years had from the recently deceased co-editor, R. Tofteman-Fredericksen. "Den Danske Pioneer" has often had the final word on Danish-American issues, and the magazine's editorials are as a rule characterized by informed and sound perceptions of the circumstances. "The Danish Pioneer" is published in a large twelve-page format and offers truly varied reading material. Headlining articles on American politics, on American and Danish-American issues, and on issues of general interest can be found on a regular basis in the magazine. This is joined by an overview of events at home and abroad, substantive correspondences and news from Denmark, articles about agriculture, and correspondence from practically all cities and villages where Danish-Americans live in large numbers. A couple of columns satirize, often with sound humor, the day's events. One of the magazine's co-editors is Axel Andersen, who for some years published "Dansk Folketidende" in Council Bluffs, Iowa, and another is A. Sorensen, who for several years was the editor of Rasmussen's magazines in Minneapolis.

"Danskeren," the only Danish-American magazine to come out twice a week, is published in Blair, Nebraska. The magazine, which is edited by Pastor A.M. Andersen, is owned by "Den Forenede Kirke" [The United Church] and is, along with the society's other (religious) magazines, discussed in Professor Vig's article about "The United Church."

"Bikuben" [The Beehive] in Salt Lake City is Danish-Norwegian, but is discussed here because the editorial work has through many years been in Danish hands. The magazine is owned by the Mormon church and is the mouthpiece of the Latter-Day Saints of Danish and Norwegian origin. The current editor is Hans J. Christensen; before him the magazine was edited by Andrew Jensen, who in the eighties published a religious Mormon magazine, "Morgenstjernen" [The Morning Star], which ran for four years.

In San Francisco there has been a weekly magazine since 1873, when "California-Posten" was started by P. Freese and F. Iversen. When this magazine went under after a short time, it was replaced by "California Scandinav," which only held on for four months. Later, "Valkyrien" [The Valkyrie] and "Pacific Scandinav" appeared. For the time being only one Danish-American weekly, "Bien" [The

Bee], is published on the entire West Coast, by Sophus Hartwick in San Francisco. "Bien" is a quite colorless magazine of an ordinary type. They have, however, for a long time done an excellent job in petitioning for the construction of a Danish House at the World's Fair in San Francisco.

Once a month, Axel Kringelbach in Perth Amboy publishes a humorous little magazine, "Spøgefuglen" [The Joker]. In order to be comprehensive, we should also mention "Danmark Statue Tidende" [Danish Statue Times] in New York (published by Georg Kirkegaard), the main goal of which is to collect money for a statue to be presented to Denmark.