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The Danish Society Dania of California

by

Carl Plow

(Translated by Jane J. Kjems)

This society was established December 11th, 1879 in Oakland, California.

Its original name was "Den Danske Forening Dania af Oakland og Alameda" (The Danish Society Dania of Oakland and Alameda), and its original purpose was to further the social life among the Danish settlers in these twin cities.

It soon became evident, however, that if the young society were to grow and thrive and keep its membership, it would have to include other and more tenable points on its program, not just entertainment, and thus it was decided to establish a health and burial insurance, and it has been functioning as such until this very day.

A couple of years after the establishment of the Society, an affiliate of it was created on the other side of the bay in the city of San Francisco. This is where several of the original members had moved; simultaneously with this move the first Board of Directors was elected and the name was changed to: "Den Danske Forening Dania af California" (The Danish Society Dania of California).

A Constitution, which should be in effect for the existing and all future divisions, was approved. In this Constitution the young society stated its Mission, which in large measure is identical today to the one back then, namely:

to gather under its standard all Danes settled in the United States, west of the Rocky Mountains; to support members who are ill or in need; to procure work and income for its members; to maintain Danish language and literature and to further the knowledge thereof as well as of Danish art and science; to organize Danish get-togethers, discussions and lectures etc., as well as to support such organizations and movements, which in its estimation might serve the furtherance of the Society's welfare and the cause of

Danish civilization in addition to asserting our mother country's name among our fellow citizens.

From a modest start the Society has grown strongly, so that its membership now surpasses 2200 persons, almost all within the borders of a single state. There are 21 lodges in California and 2 in the state of Nevada. For information on each individual lodge please see "Tabulated Directory." Today the Society has a capital amounting to \$102,862.

During the last several years there has been a desire among the various lodges to own their own buildings; three branches already have feet under their own table in modern, up-to-date buildings, and others are considering building. Several branches also have their own self-furnished rooms.

The Society's primary leaders owe their allegiance to the Board of Directors; the board consists of the Top Management and representatives from the different branches; annual conventions are held in the month of April. The Board of Directors is the Society's highest authority, which is authorized to adopt and change rules and regulations for their own as well as for the collected Society's management. The Board has the authority to assess and collect taxes and fees for the implementation of the Society's mission and for its own as well as the collected Society's administration. The Board's leading officers are in charge of the main management of the Society's business during the time between conventions.

The Board of Director's income is divided into three funds:

The Administration Fund.

The Burial Fund.

The Reserve Fund.

The Administration Fund's income consists of the annual main dues; these dues amount to one dollar per member. These dues are forwarded by the individual lodges. This fund pays the salaries to the officers and travel expenses for representatives to the Convention, and whatever else might be included under the administration of the Board of Directors.

Assistance for burials is distributed from the Burial Fund. When an active member of the Society, who is in good standing, passes away, his bereaved family receives the sum of 175 dollars to help with the burial expenses. If the wife of a member in good standing

passes away, the sum of 50 dollars will be disbursed to help with the burial expenses.

The Burial Fund's income consists of burial contributions, which are collected from all active members through the local branches. A burial contribution amounts to 50 cents. These contributions are collected from two to four times each year, dependent upon the frequency with which deaths are occurring.

The Reserve Fund may only be used in cases, when there are more than six burial contributions within the year.

This fund was started in the year 1902 and has now reached an amount of almost \$3,000, which has never been drawn from. Its income equals 10 percent of each burial contribution plus self-generated interest.

As mentioned before, the Board of Directors consists of the officers and the representatives from the different lodges.

Each lodge is entitled to representation on the Board of Directors by one delegate for each 50 members or a fraction of this number. They are elected at the last meeting during the month of December each year.

The Chairman of the Board of Directors is the head of the entire Society; his tenure lasts one year. He must pay a visit to each local lodge at least once during the course of the year. He is authorized to establish new lodges anyplace where a sufficient number of compatriots may express the wish to establish a new lodge.

A lodge may be established when 15 applicants submit a petition to the Board of Directors of the Society. If it is granted, the petitioners must first provide a doctor's certificate stating that they are in good health, upon which they will be accepted as members according to the Society's formal rules and regulations and must sign the Constitution. Following this the members decide upon a name for their Branch, and the Top Management provides them with a number.

The members of a branch are divided into two classes – active and passive members.

Active members are entitled to health and burial assistance and to fill the highest positions in a branch. Passive members are those, who at their admission to membership were over 50 years of age or couldn't provide a favorable doctor's certificate. They may hold

minor positions in the branch, but they have no right to receive assistance with health or burial insurance.

The active members' entrance fee varies from 2 ½ dollars to 10 dollars, depending on whatever a branch finds suitable. Passive members pay an entrance fee of 1 dollar when they join and 25 cents each month as a subscription fee. Active members pay 1 dollar each month as a subscription fee.

Each branch has its own bylaws; these must be approved by the Board of Directors' Legal Committee, before they can go into effect. Likewise each branch manages its own health insurance independently of the Board of Directors.

The size of the assistance from the health insurance varies in the various branches from 6 to 10 dollars per week, depending upon what the financial circumstances allow. The health insurance income consists of entrance fees from new members and the monthly subscription fees. When a member fails to pay the subscription fee for three months, he is no longer in good standing and thus not entitled to health insurance assistance. When he doesn't pay for a full year, he'll be dropped from the membership list.

From the aforementioned it may be perceived that the Danish Society Dania of California constitutes a rather significant activity. From a start counting 11 members and 40 dollars in the account it has now grown to a membership of more than 2200 compatriots signed up under its standard; it has for several years disbursed about 10,000 dollars in health insurance and over 2,000 dollars in burial insurance annually. Its sphere of activity has so far been limited to California and Nevada.

Naturally, nobody can assess the dollar and cents value of what it has achieved in the direction of strengthening the interest for everything Danish, and of nurturing the love for language and mother country among compatriots in these two states.

Its annual conventions more and more assume the characteristics of days of national rejoicing where hundreds of Danish men and women rally together. These events, more than anything else, have contributed to strengthening our self-awareness as Danes, without actually preventing our development as Americans.

On Convention days many towns in California are decorated festively in the Danish colors in order to honor the members;

governors, judges and mayors have wished welcome and spoken in praise of Dania and the Danish population.

And who, you may ask, deserves the credit for these efforts to gather people together, which has been carried out during years past? Yes, names of men might be mentioned, who have stood tall above the throngs and have impressed their stamp on the Society. Men, who with love and ingenuity have carried rocks for the erection of Dania's mighty stronghold, and their names will not be forgotten; the greatest honor, however, is not due just a few men, but the entire large, faithful host of members, who in ever growing numbers for almost 33 years have rallied around the standard of the pioneer among all the combined Danish societies in America: The Danish Society Dania of California.