



2012

## The Danish-American Society (Dansk-amerikansk selskab)

C .H. W. Hasselriis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/thebridge>

 Part of the [European History Commons](#), [European Languages and Societies Commons](#), and the [Regional Sociology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Hasselriis, C .H. W. (2012) "The Danish-American Society (Dansk-amerikansk selskab)," *The Bridge*: Vol. 35 : No. 1 , Article 20.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/thebridge/vol35/iss1/20>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Bridge by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu), [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).

# The Danish-American Society (Dansk-amerikansk selskab)

by

C .H. W.Hasselriis

(Translated by Michele McNabb)

The purpose of the Danish-American Society is summarized in concise form in its Constitution: to promote a reciprocal and better understanding of the Danish and the American peoples, to knit closer ties between these two nations, and to advance the interests of both.

The work of solving these tasks is still only in its infancy, so, consequently, this is not a history of the Society.

## **Organization**

The Danish-American Society is a national organization, not a local group. It has around 400 members, among whom 33 in Denmark are supporters. The American members reside in 23 of the states in the union. To become an active member it is required that one be an American citizen or have legally declared one's intention to become a citizen.

The Society is led by a governing board of 17 members who are elected for three years by written secret ballot at the annual meeting. Its business is carried out by an executive committee of three members: the president or one of the three vice-presidents, the secretary, and the treasurer. At present the executive committee is based in Chicago. Local working, or district, committees have been established in New York, Chicago and San Francisco.

The Society was founded in 1906 as a limited liability society. Editor Ivar Kirkegaard of Racine, Wisconsin, may rightly be called the Father of the Society. Directly active in the founding of the Society were, additionally, Halvor Jacobsen, of San Francisco, E. V. Eskesen, of New York, and Henry L. Hertz and Charles Ryberg of Chicago. We could mention many men who embraced the idea, but that is not our intention here.

Since the aim of the Society's activities has not been to earn money, the form of a limited liability society did not serve its purposes and, therefore, reorganization took place in 1909. The

Society became an organization with dues-paying, active and supporting members. The dues are three dollars a year, and this is the only source of income for the Society.

### **Activities**

The Society was a child of its time. There was a need for that which became its purpose, and it is no accident that in the more than six years it has been active a far richer exchange of understanding and cultural values has occurred between the United States and Denmark than in any previous period. The honor for this falls far from exclusively to the Danish-American Society; the efforts of many have been contributory. But the bridge-building idea to which the Danish-American Society gave a conscious shape has been a stimulus in many areas. And the Society has in the recent past carried out a positive body of work that contains values and has left deep traces.

In many ways a pioneering work has been carried out, and thus it has had to go through its childhood diseases and be exposed to criticism. And Danish-Americans are not the least critical race. Its activities have played out in front of an open curtain, as have its difficulties. This has been a purposeful policy; collaboration has been sought with all circles within the Danish-American community and it was felt that the public needed to be informed, and that the solution of tasks could best be promoted through an open discussion of both fortune and misfortune.

The Society's activity as a producer of cultural events is that which is best known. This was not a new idea, since both of the Danish-American church synods have already sponsored lecture activities. But the Danish-American Society's idea was new, insofar that it was intended to reach all areas and circles, while the churches' lecture activities had essentially only been carried out within the religious camps.

In organizing tours of Danish artists, authors and popular scientists the Society has not in all cases had its desired fortune. But cooperation with many Danish-American organizations has been achieved, whereby the different groups have become closer to each other. In this lies the seed for much good in the future.

It was the same collaborative idea which created the idea of "The Danish-American Day," on July 4, 1909, at the national exhibition in Aarhus.

The Society's activities as a cultural producer have already been tied to a series of tours. Naming just a few names will be sufficient:

Mrs. Oda Nielsen, Professor Bernhard Bøggild,  
The Student Singing Society

Mrs. Oda Nielsen's was the first Danish-American artist tour that made its way out into the broader population. During Prof. Bøggild's tour contacts were also made with a large number of universities, learned societies and American clubs, and during the tour of the Student Singing Society with Norwegian and Swedish sister societies and the American public.

It has not always been easy to act as producer for the Danish guests, of whom a few perhaps were disappointed over the financial profits. But these very difficulties and the experiences gathered from them will serve for a reciprocal and better understanding and create guarantees that a sound basis for future tours can be developed.

Danish-America is not necessarily a market for Denmark's overproduction of artists and lecturers. But for those who wish to support the Danish-American efforts for cultural exchange, Danish-America will be an extremely grateful field of activity in all other than just pecuniary respects. Therefore, the tours of Prof. Bøggild and the Student Singers were uniquely successful.

The exchange of professors between Danish and American universities was another task for which the Society took the initiative and worked for in the beginning. This work was later passed on to other hands.

Where the Society has district committees, these have been in the forefront of many undertakings of a more or less local nature. Of these shall be mentioned a Danish theater evening in Chicago in January 1909, at which time Esmann's *Den kære Familie* (The Dear Family) was performed with exclusively local talent. Over 1100 attended the performance, which took place in one of Chicago's finest theaters.

## **Press Bureau**

A significant new undertaking – a Danish-American press bureau – has recently been started by the Society. The Society has contacted the American press many times with great success, and therefore the idea arose of establishing a press bureau as a permanent institution, which would seek through American magazines and newspapers to awaken interest in and spread knowledge about and an understanding of Denmark, Danish and Danish-American conditions. Its work will be carried out with fees.

As a part of this activity the Society will occasionally publish in English special accounts -- articles, lectures, and the like – that shed light on Danish circumstances. These will be sent out to newspapers, magazines, universities and libraries. This will be initiated by a special issue of the lecture on Danish agriculture and the cooperative movement, which the American envoy in Copenhagen, Dr. Maurice Francis Egan, held in America in the spring of 1912, and for which he graciously, has given the Society his manuscript.

The Danish-American Society sends free to its members a quarterly publication, which essentially only contains an account of its activities.

The Society would like to support all good Danish-American efforts. Therefore, at its last annual meeting it expressed its sympathy for and offered its support to the Rebild Hills affair, as well as plans for a Denmark Building at the World's Fair in San Francisco in 1915.