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Introduction

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Introduction

by John Mark Nielsen, Chair
Conference Planning Committee

In 1992 a conference was held in Aalborg, Denmark, sponsored by the Danes Worldwide Archives (now The Danish Emigration Archive). The purpose of this conference was to celebrate the centennial of the birth of Marcus Lee Hansen, an American historian of Danish descent. Hansen had played a major role in challenging historians to consider the wider forces of migration. Before him historians tended to focus on immigrants in America while paying little attention to the conditions that had motivated individuals to emigrate from the lands of their birth. Although Hansen did not discuss this experience using the terms of "push factors" and "pull factors," terms that have come to dominate current immigration studies, his research suggested the need to understand the economic, social and political conditions in Europe that inspired emigration from that continent. The papers presented at the Aalborg conference and later published under the title *On Distant Shores* treated the "classical" period of Danish immigration, a period dating from 1870 to 1925.

As the 1990s were drawing to a close, members of the Danish American Heritage Society in Denmark and the United States suggested the need for a follow-up conference that might explore what had occurred in Danish immigrant/emigrant studies since the Aalborg conference. There was, however, a shared feeling that the focus should be on the relations between Denmark, Canada and the United States, rather than revisiting the earlier period of immigration. Many Danes had emigrated to Canada and the United States following World War II. These first generation immigrants were growing older and an effort was needed to record and explore their experiences. Finally there was recognition that with the advent of air travel and electronic communication, the nature of the immigrant experience was changing.

At its spring meeting in April 2000, the Board of Directors of the Danish American Heritage Society determined to host a conference

in Omaha, Nebraska, in October 2002. The city and year were selected for several reasons. Omaha played an important role in the Danish immigrant experience. *Den Danske Pioneer*, a newspaper that linked the widely scattered Danish immigrant communities together, was founded in Omaha in 1872. Shortly after this date, the Danish Brotherhood in America was established and headquartered in Omaha. The year 2002 marked the 130th anniversary of *Den Danske Pioneer*; it also was the 25th anniversary of the Danish American Heritage Society.

From its inception, the intent and hope was that this conference would enjoy wide support, bringing together both the scholarly and the more popular. Sessions would not only highlight academic research, but also would allow time and place for the stories of post World War II immigrants to be told. Finally, participants would have the opportunity to visit several important immigrant institutions: The Danish Immigrant Museum in Elk Horn, Iowa, Dana College in Blair, Nebraska, and the Danish Immigrant Archive-Dana College located on the campus. From the opening address by Bo Lidegaard on the Henrik Kauffmann, Danish Ambassador to the United States during World War II, to the closing banquet and address by Edward E. Elson, the former United States Ambassador to Denmark, our hopes were realized.

The generosity of many donors made possible the Conference on Danish-North American Relations since World War II. All were listed in the conference program. Several deserve recognition again. Bruce R. Lauritzen, Royal Danish Consul for Nebraska and CEO of First National Bank of Omaha, provided the initial major gift that set conference planning in motion, and he hosted the wonderful reception in the newly opened First National Tower following the keynote address on Thursday evening, October 10, 2002. Finally, Mr. and Mrs. Harold Andersen of Omaha, Nebraska, and Mr. Claus Lund of Belvedere, California, are acknowledged for their major gifts that made possible publication of the conference proceedings. The Board of Directors of the Danish American Heritage Society is grateful to these and all the donors and participants for making the 2002 conference such a success.