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# The Danish Emigration Archives

by Birgit Flemming Larsen

The Danish Emigration Archives was founded in 1932 as the Dan-America Archives.

Max Henius, a native of Aalborg and an enterprising businessman in Chicago, was the immigrant behind the Archives. It might be seen as flexibility by Danish Americans and their descendants to place their own ethnic group's source materials at a distance to themselves. It did cause some discussions at that time.

The purpose of the Archives is to preserve the history of those Danes who left Denmark to settle in foreign countries. Through the years The Danish Emigration Archives has suffered under several changes due to World War II, insufficient resources and the necessity of several relocations.

Today The Danish Emigration Archives is supported by the City of Aalborg under the directorship of the Aalborg City Archives. The Archives holds personal papers as well as institutional records. The personal papers are the main strength of the Archives. They include original letters, diaries, manuscripts, autobiographies—but also speeches, sermons, poetry and songs. The older part of the archival collections is dominated by personal papers of ministers – e.g. those of Rasmus Andersen—which is the most extensive; it holds 72 volumes and 33 boxes—Peder Kjølhede, Frederik Lange Grundtvig, P.S. Vig and Kristian Østergaard, just to mention a few. The papers of Danish-American writers are worth mentioning too—such as Jens Chr. Bay, Anton Kvist and Enok Mortensen. Also of value are the collections of letters from the ordinary Danish emigrants, which can provide us with firsthand information about emigration lives. The Archives also contains an excellent sample of personal collections created by women. Material is still coming in, and our most recent collection is the papers of former professor Erik Helmer Pedersen, Copenhagen University.

Much of our holdings of personal papers and institutional records are accessible on the Internet through the Danish National

Database of Private Collections ([www.danpa.dk](http://www.danpa.dk)). Also we have computerized the official Danish emigration records from 1868-1908 which are available on our website ([www.emiarch.dk](http://www.emiarch.dk)).

We hold a sound collection of approximately 400 recordings. The most recent are created among the Danes in the southern part of Spain. Our photo collection holds about 20.000 photos related to emigration history. Furthermore I can mention a huge collection of vertical files of clippings covering the years from the 1920s to the present and a great deal of miscellaneous printed material or ephemera—leaflets, maps etc. e.g. material concerning the business of emigration agents.

From 1986 we have published a series of books concerning different aspects of Danish emigration history.

Why do we bother to hold and nurture these archives? You might say that an archive is the gift of one generation to another. The ultimate goal of keeping archives must be to make sure that they are used. Archives have to take care of the historical heritage and carry it on to the next generations. And I do feel that the contents of our Archives represent a treasure trove, and we have an obligation to make the Archives known and used—also by those who have not yet become users.

Who are the users? And what are their needs? Scholars in history and other similar disciplines. Students. Schoolchildren. Amateur researchers. Genealogists. Etc. etc. The users are manifold and their needs are different—and our mission is not only to serve those who already visit the Archives. It really is a question of marketing.

The Internet offers a lot of new possibilities for opening archives to entirely new audiences and for putting archives to entirely new uses. But of course all this is a question of resources, and it must be said that in small archives—such as most of those represented here—the individual archivist often will have to cope with all aspects and obligations of the profession which often will prove to be a hard job. I sincerely hope that this session will be a step further to a closer cooperation among our institutions. We all work for the same purpose.

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