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A Journey to Denmark in 1928

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It is now just 3 months ago that I packed my valise and said goodbye to Askov to make a journey to Denmark. It was with some mixed feelings. Half my life I have lived here and my other half over there in the old country.

Ah, but off on the "steam horse" I went to Minneapolis where my daughter, Astrid, and I paid a visit to the Scandinavian-American Line's Office and were received very kindly by Mr. Ellingsen, the line agent. He gave me a lot of good advice and recommendation letters to take with. That night we traveled on to Chicago where we arrived the next morning. I belong to the D. F. S. (Danish Society), the Danish Lutheran Church in America and Danish Young People's Association. We had been given identifying badges so that those in our party would know each other. It did not take long after our arrival in Chicago before we met several others who also belonged to our group, and before evening, when departure from Chicago was to take place, we were over a hundred total, all of whom belonged to our party. Agent P. A. Paulson of Chicago and all his staff were very active in helping us to make the best travel decisions. At 7 o'clock in the evening, after having spent the day touring Chicago, we boarded a Lakawanna special train, which would take us to New York. The next day at lunch time we arrived in Buffalo, where our train stopped until 7 PM. We took another train up to Niagara to see Niagara Falls. There was an "electric car line," which took us over the river. We drove down to the bottom of the Falls, a distance of several miles, to take a look at the powerful shower. This trip was included in the Denmark trip. After eating dinner our train went on, and the next morning at 7 o'clock we arrived in New York where we met the company's people who transported us on a bus down to the dock where the S. S. "United States" lay waiting for us. There was a swarm of people. Around 600 were scheduled to departure on the ship and of these about 200 were in
our group. There were thousands of other friends and acquaintances who had come to say a last farewell before departure.

Soon our papers were checked, and at 11 o'clock in the morning we sailed out of the harbor to the open sea, where we would spend a dozen eventful days. After a few hours we lost sight of land, and then we got busy making preparations to make everything as comfortable and enjoyable as possible. The weather was mild and warm. People were in a good humor, food was good and plentiful, and the service was excellent. All looked well for a good journey. Our group was so large that we could set the tone. All around was singing and talking and forming new acquaintances. No one thought of seasickness, storm or other adversity. But as these things occur in nature, after a few days of pleasant weather, the wind began to blow and it got cold and, for many, spirits fell. Lines of people stood along the rails and provided for the fish. As the days went by it became worse and worse. Many went to bed and the dining tables were very sparsely occupied. Well, days went by, and after a few more the dining tables again began to fill up. Soon everyone was back. You could hear jokes being told. Singing and playing could once again be heard across the liner.

Our group, as I said before, was big enough to set the tone and we did. In the morning, devotions were held and a homily read and sometimes there was a discussion by some of the ministers, practice of songs, folk dances and comedy plays. It drew attention to us as not infrequently our little shows and performances were attended by both the ship's officers and passengers from the first cabin. They were curious about us and admired our American-born youth in that they could speak, sing and read Danish. An American on board could not understand it. He asked an older farmer born in Nebraska if he spoke Danish at home and the older gentleman replied that he did when he knew that those he was speaking to could understand him. Well, time went by and we had sailed along Scotland's green coast where a dove came aboard and stayed with us to Copenhagen. We had to put in at Kristiansand, Norway, and on the 11th day at 7 P.M. we sailed into the port of Copenhagen.

Thousands of people stood on the quay to welcome us to Denmark. They waved and cried out welcome. People were singing on board and there was singing on the quay too. We looked into the crowd for faces known to us. Now and then, one was discovered and there were shouts of "good day" and "welcome home," but I looked
in vain. It was a disappointment, but perhaps there still was one in the swarm who would be glad to see me. One is always hopeful. Next it was time for the papers to be checked. Quite a lot of royal officials came on board and we had to line ourselves up in rows. It was quite easy. One got the feeling that it did not always go so well. My papers consisted only in a conduct book. It was stamped and I was allowed to keep up with those who had better papers. By the gangway a couple of policemen stood. I showed my conduct book to one of them.

"Do you not have other papers?" he asked. "No." "Well, have you done your last musters?" he asked. "No, but I have been an American citizen for 30 years."

Well, yes, then I could go ashore. We came down to customs where our things were to be checked, but it was late and the customs officers probably preferred to be at home, so a note was stuck on each piece of luggage. Then we could go. Outside the door in the crowd I caught sight of my wife and her sister who were standing there waiting for me. All was good. Now I felt that I had come home, and that I was welcome. So we hired a cab for four Kroner that took us all away from the harbor out into Frederiksberg.

The committee at home had done a very fine job in planning and taking care of everything for us in the best way. They all deserve thanks and appreciation for their work. I am afraid that we were so absorbed with our own tours and travels while we were at home that we completely forgot to thank them for all their sacrifice, yet I hope that they were in a position to see our bright, smiling faces and that their work to make us comfortable and happy was greatly appreciated.

The next day festivities began in Copenhagen with a prayer in the Marmor Church where Pastor Morten Larsen and Pastor Wagner spoke. Bishop Ostenfeldt should have preached but was prevented by illness. Then we entered the cars for a tour around the city so that all participants would have an opportunity to see the beautiful buildings and engineering feats, as there are so many in Copenhagen. We stopped at Grundtvig's Church. Only the tower had been built but there was still plenty of room for everyone. Pastor Sorensen, who is a minister there, welcomed us to Denmark and told us briefly of the church's history.

After touring for about two hours we all gathered at Wivel, a famous restaurant at the entrance to Tivoli Gardens Amusement Park, where we had a delicious lunch. Next we were invited into the
Town Hall of Copenhagen, where we were received and welcomed to Denmark and in particular to Copenhagen by one of the mayors, after which we were led around the Town Hall which is one of the most beautiful buildings in Europe. In the evening we paid a visit to Tivoli, which is famous for its concerts and its buffoonery. The crowds abounded. Everywhere one looked there were places where for 10 or 25 Øre one had the opportunity to win 'gold and green wood.' There were plenty that wanted to try their fortune, but only a few got the big prizes. The losers may have thrown in the sponge too soon or perhaps their purses were empty before the big win came. There, our first day in Denmark ended and we went each to our quarters to rest. The next day we toured the lovely cities alongside the Øresund and then our journey continued to Roskilde and Aarhus, Aalborg and Rebild. I could go on quite a lot about what we saw and experienced but in the end how much this matters? It would after all be only a dim glimmer of life's movement.

Wherever we went we got an impression of the country's ancient culture and riches. We had always heard and remembered from our childhood that Denmark is a small poor country. But now we got the impression that Denmark is a small, rich country where it literally flows with milk and honey. Everywhere stood fertility straightforward and eloquent; there was no place on earth where one could find more than there was here. The houses were well kept with lime and paint and seemed to be mounted in a frame of fences and flowers, particularly roses. Never in my life have I seen so many lovely roses. In town and country one saw roses and again more roses in full flower. At the edges of the towns were thousands upon thousands of farms each with its little house, painted white with a red roof and the Danish flag waving on the summit. Here come father and mother and all the toddlers out on Sundays and evenings after work hours to spend some enjoyable hours drinking coffee, reading the newspaper, smoking a pipe of tobacco and weeding and cultivating their small farms, which gives a considerable amount of family entertainment.

After *Rebildfesten* the various planned tours of Jutland and the Islands began. I was not along but those who attended spoke very highly of the management and enjoyment of them. My wife and I traveled up to Skagen and stayed there for several days. Here we found beauty even between the dunes where my early education tells me there should have been more sand and lyme grass. A large part
of the dunes are now overgrown with pine and spruce and tucked in between them are farms and houses with fertile fields. Skagen, the new Skagen, is a city which does not lack for beauty and modernism. There are no farms around the city but most houses have a garden behind as in small towns and cities in the country. The streets are paved and clean. Skagen has a large fishing harbor where many fishing-boats lay at anchor. The city also has several painting collections and many of the walls in private homes are hung with lovely paintings. Skagen is rich with painters. After the season is over and one must pay for food and lodging the painter has nothing but his productions with which to pay and, in this manner, many of the local people have become owners of real works of art.

Our journey lead us south with Askov as our goal. We were invited for a 2-day stay. On the way down, we paid a visit to Pastor R. R. Vestergaard, former principal at the Des Moines School (Grand View College). The years have whitened him, but otherwise he’s the same interested, lively, active man who still follows our journey over here in the West and carries the message of everything we do. He and his wife have a lovely home in Elling Præstegaard and I would look long and hard to find a more guest-friendly people. We spent an unforgettable day with them. Then we traveled to Sindahl, where we visited with Niels Hjort, one of *Vendsyssel’s brightest and most well known farmers. There we learned a great deal about conditions among the Danish farmers. “Things are not what they seem” was to be at the heart of the subject. The war has caused irreparable harm to the Danish peasants due to the abundance of money that was brought into the country. Values of houses rose unreasonably high and trade went wild. Each day you woke up much richer than when you went to bed. It was not only the money they already had that they used to speculate with but also they mortgaged and borrowed against house and home and personal property to get more money. They signed promissory notes for neighbors and friends, bought shares and German Marks and so on. And then the war ended as suddenly as it had begun. The things they had invested in were almost worthless. Finally, the Kroner rose in value and prices dropped further, but debt which had been incurred remained the same. Value of farms and movable property fell by half; mortgage debts, which are intended to be 50% of the farm’s sales price were now 100% and payments were expected to be in Kroner measured in gold and the same was true
with taxes and bills. But nowadays the outlook is slightly brighter, better prices, and perhaps we will make a go of it.

**Second installment**

Danish farmers where ever they are seem to be able to conjure up the value of top soil. They know their land, they know what to give it to produce high yields of corn and beets and they know what cows need and know how to look after their pigs and they do it. Denmark can be proud of its farmers. But compared to the Danish farmers, our American farmers seem somewhat behind.

Saturday morning we came to Askov, and before noon there were about a hundred Danish-Americans overall in this memorable, historic place. So many of the ministers and teachers who have come to America to help us in our churches and schools came originally from Askov. Superintendent Appel welcomed us and expressed the wish that we might gain something from our Tour of Denmark, not only for our own sake, but also for those at home. He believes that Denmark has received more from us in America than they have given back to us. In Askov we spent a few rich days of speeches and song and short excursions to historic places, of which there are many in the surrounding area.

On Sunday, Morten Larsen preached at the Independent Church after which there was Communion and many Danish-Americans participated. Saturday afternoon we all went walking in *Skibelund Krat to see the many beautiful memorial stones found there. Then we rumbled southward into the Kongeåen River area where the old border between Germany and Denmark was located for so many years. School Superintendent Kristian la Cour Pedersen was all the while telling us the history of the Krat, woven in with events during the war and how he had helped "his boys" safely flee from Germany when they came up into Denmark. Most of these boys were just kids from homes beyond the river.

Sunday afternoon a multitude of cars arrived. We drove by a circuitous road to the old *Skamlingsbanken. The area was hilly and the road was narrow with limited line of sight on both sides. It intertwined and twisted but the surroundings and the small villages we passed through were lush, luxuriant and beautiful. After a good hour's drive we reached Skamlingsbanken where we looked at the
many memorial stones. Of particular interest was the column which was erected in 1863 for the defenders of the Danish cause. There are twenty-five square blocks one laid on top of the other. In 1864 the Prussians blew up the tower and blocks lay spread out over the area. They were picked up by the neighboring population and in 1866 they again built the column with the recovered stone. Some blocks bear a trace of the explosion.

Pastor Nordentoft had come along with us and gave a brief overview of Skamling's history. There were many visitors that day at Skamlingsbanken, among them was a large group of deaf people. It was strange to behold and moved us to thank the creator that we had been given the great gifts of hearing and speech. The government officials of Kolding and Pastor Nordentoft's congregation had invited us for a visit to their beautiful city. Kolding is a friendly and idyllic place tucked under the forest along Kolding Fjord. We drove on Kongevej Road which was completely overshadowed by the crowns of the mighty trees that grow along it and at about 4 o'clock we arrived in Kolding. We drove up in front of the town hall where the mayor received us, assisted by town council members.

The mayor held a beautiful but short welcome address and we refreshed ourselves with the wine and cake that was provided. Then we inspected the beautiful old town hall. Marius Krog gave thanks from the Danish-Americans everywhere for the beautiful and cordial welcome which Kolding City through its representatives had given us. Afterward we walked up to look at the old Koldinghus which is now in ruins, but in spite of this stands imposingly over the surroundings. In one wing of the castle there is a museum where antiquities and historical records and some recent items are housed. These have all been found or given to the museum by residents in Kolding and the environs. There was one person in our party who by accident had sprained an ankle, so she had to use crutches. She had difficulty walking and permission was given to Marius Krog to drive his car into the courtyard to pick her up along with my wife who could not walk on the rugged stones either. It was said that it was the first time since the castle was built that a car had been allowed to drive into the courtyard. But Danish-Americans have to do what they will. The mayor had indeed given us the keys to the city.

From the castle we went into the reception hall where we were received by smiling female faces and found well-laid tables waiting
for us. It was reported that the city brewers had donated beer and the entire population had helped with gifts of food. The beer and food were good and disappeared into the hungry mouths. Then we made speeches and sang and before we knew it was 10 PM and we had to be once again on the move to Askov, where we were to spend the night. We all followed along with Nordentoft into his magnificent church where we arrived after midnight. Principal Appel and Mrs. Appel sat and waited for us with coffee. Appel was leaving the next morning before we could gather and so took the opportunity to bid farewell. The next morning at the breakfast table Mrs. Appel gave a beautiful farewell speech and thanked us for visiting. It might well have been us that did the thanking and so we each did before the cars drove us to the road where we boarded the train again, this time for Odense.

We arrived in Odense at noon where we were received by Th. Knudsen. We were all taken down to the school where we dined and then we went into town and paid a visit to Sankt Knuds Church, Hans Christian Andersen Museum and several other places. In the afternoon we boarded a special train at the South Fyn Railway, which took us to Ryslinge. Rail tours by the South Fyn Railway were probably the finest we had in Denmark as all coaches were second class. On the state railway we had to settle for third class. In Ryslinge we were received at the højskole, where Principal Monrad welcomed us. Then we ate supper and afterward listened to a talk given by Monrad on Ryslinge’s history. Finally, we were welcomed by our hosts who had come to take us home for the night.

The following day our special train was once again at the station, and we rode to Ollerup Folkehøjskole near Faaborg. It was not the fastest way to get there but we were better off not to come home later by a shortcut. School Superintendent Bækhøj and wife received us and bid us welcome and gave us permission to move freely about the place. That afternoon at the school Bækhøj told us the school’s history from Mads Hansen and Anton Nielsen days until current times. Then we went over to visit Niels Bukhs’ Gymnastics School, as a team of 150 girls was there practicing. Then we went down to the great magnificent pool and back to the station to board our special train and off we went to Svendborg. From there, we took a boat trip on the Sound. Fyn has perhaps Denmark’s most beautiful coast and sailing among the islands of the Svendborg Sound is unforgettable. At 7 o’clock in the evening, we arrived once again at Ryslinge Station.
The girls from the school were there waving Danish flags as they had come to receive us with a song. We all marched in ranks down to the school where festivities continued until late in the evening. The next morning we left Ryslinge and South Fyn and went our separate ways around the country. We had spent some unforgettable days in Askov and Ryslinge and felt that a bond of the heart had been formed. More flowers were merged into the memory's wreath. The next few weeks we visited with family and friends. There is much to write about but I must be brief so I'll just say that we felt most at home with the ministers and their families who had been in America; our second family. With the exception of siblings, others were strangers and it only took a few hours to exhaust the topics that interested us on both sides. They wanted to know all about the material conditions where we live at home and such things. And we - yes, it was well nigh the same as far as our interests went about them. Both sides were happy when it came time to part after food had been eaten and coffee drunk. There were some that seemed to pity us that we would soon return to America. I tried to explain to them that while we were happy to come on this trip, our journey was meant the whole time to lead us back home. When we really should say where our hearts were, it was America where we found peace now.

After visiting around Jutland we left Esbjerg late in the evening on a sleeper car and awakened the next morning in Copenhagen. The evening before in Esbjerg, a large steamer came in with a party of around 300 British tourists who had come to see Denmark, Norway and Sweden. They were all with our train to Copenhagen that night. They figured, of course, that Copenhagen was Denmark and that there was nothing else in this little land worth seeing. After a few days' stay in Copenhagen we went over to Vestbirk Højskole where we had been invited for eight days. The only Danish-Americans staying there were my wife and brother and I. However, there were Schleswigers and a good many Københavners who spent their holidays there, in total around fifty. We spent some rich, enjoyable and educational days with them at this famous school where Grønvald Nielsen has worked his entire adult life. We were received most heartily by Superintendent Nørgaard and wife, Grønvald Nielsen himself, and teachers Budde, Lund and Bidstrup. Not many hours passed before we felt at home in the large family circle of teachers and students. Mornings were used for lectures and singing, afternoons for trips to various places.
in the neighborhood, such as the *Ejer Bavnehøj, Villing Skov near Bryrup, Himmelbjerg, Rye and Silkeborg. Teachers accompanied us and informed us of the historical events, showed and explained to us the many monuments that are raised over the area, and led us to places where there were grandiose views.

Danish-Americans who travel to Denmark for a visit should try to put in their travel plans some time for a school stay. It has been demonstrated that nowhere in the old country does one get as good a reception and such good information. You get so much in return for the time spent at these schools.

But time passed, as I said, too quickly. We could easily have spent a month or two more without being wearied of touring and admiring this small seemingly rich and happy land. But we had to go with S. S. “Hellig Olav,” which sailed from Copenhagen on August 15th. Our tour group was not scheduled to sail until the 22nd but we had not made a reservation in time and this was our only opportunity as all ships in the Scandinavian-American Line were booked completely through to October. It would have been nicer to be traveling home on our return voyage with all our good friends we had made, but there is nothing so bad that it’s not good for something and it turned out to be a very nice group on the “Hellig Olav." The weather was good, so there was very little seasickness on the trip home.

After 11-days sailing we reached New York after putting into Halifax to disembark passengers for Canada. In the end, I would like to thank the Scandinavian-American Line representatives and ships' officers and crew for the excellent care, helpfulness and friendliness that we got from captain to cabin boy. Many seem to think that the journey across the sea takes a long time, which is not at all the case. The routes out of England are probably a little faster over the Atlantic, but when one considers the journey across England and then the North Sea, only exceedingly little time is saved and there are a great many annoyances avoided with the direct route. I do not think there was anyone who was tired of life aboard the Scandinavian-American Line. There were several passengers who expressed a wish that it might have taken several more days. I had the same sentiment.

*Rebildfesten At the turn of the century Max Henius, a wealthy Danish-American biochemist, began to be interested in Danish-American organizations in Chicago. Funds were being raised by Danish Americans to purchase 200 acres (0.81 km²) of heather-covered
hills, located in part of Rold Forest (Danish: Rold Skov), Denmark's largest forest. In 1912 Max Henius presented the deed to H. M. King Christian X as a permanent memorial from Danish Americans. Rebild National Park (Danish: Rebild Bakker) is today a Danish national park situated near the town of Skørping in Rebild municipality, Region Nordjylland in northern Jutland, Denmark. Every July 4th since 1912, except for the two world wars, large crowds have gathered in the heather-covered hills of Rebild to celebrate American Independence Day. On the slope north of Rebild, where the residence of Max Henius was once located, a bust is placed in his memory.

*Vendsyssel* is the northernmost traditional district of Denmark and of Jutland. Being divided from mainland Jutland by the Limfjord, it is technically a part of the North Jutlandic Island.

*Skibelund Krat* became a national meeting place after the defeat in the war against Prussia and Austria in 1864. This was where pro-Danish people from the north and south of Kongeåen River met. A meeting place with seating for about 4,000 people was set out on a south-facing slope. The highlight of the year was the Constitutional meeting. The theme was always democracy and Danish patriotism. A number of memorials for people who had taken active part in the national fight for a Danish identity in Southern Jutland were erected around the meeting place and in the nearby countryside. In about 1900, two national pieces of artwork, Magnusstenen and Modersmålet, were added to the memorials.

*Skamlingsbanken* is a large hill located in Vejstrup Parish, Jutland, Denmark between Kolding and Christiansfeld. With a peak rising to 113 metres (371 ft) above sea level, it is the highest point in Southern Jutland.

Several major historic public meetings took place here during and after the disputes over the territory of Schleswig-Holstein. When peace returned, there was an exchange of territories between the kingdom and the Duchy of Southern Jutland. As a result, eight non-Jutland parishes in the northern part of Tyrstrup Herred, including Vejstrup Parish were transferred to the kingdom and Skamlingsbanken thereafter fell within the borders of Denmark.

During the 16th century, Skamlingsbanken belonged to Frederick II of Denmark as part of his hunting ground which stretched all the way to Vejle. The area remained under crown ownership for many years, but in 1764 the monarch began to sell various areas. One area,
Grønninghoved Strandskov, remained under crown ownership and is currently state forest. Over many centuries, cultural historical sites such as mounds, depressions and dykes have developed in the wild forest. After the crisis in 19th-century Schleswig-Holstein, a desire to retain and strengthen the Danish spirit and the Danish language in South Jutland arose. A meeting in Stændersalen, Rendsburg in December 1842, caused a great stir when grocer Peter Hiort Lorenzen from Haderslev, Nis Lorentzen, Lilholt and Posselt from Københavnved, spoke Danish. The Germans regarded this as an insult, while Danisminded Schleswigers saw it as a patriotic victory to be celebrated. This resulted in a celebration held on 21 February 1843 at an inn in Sommersted where farmer Laurids Skau gave a speech and ended with the words;

“Like our ancestors, we empty a cup of oath. We will not promise so much, that we will turn our backs to German officials, who speak German to us, nor that we within three years will hunt Duke of Nordalbingia out of the country, but we will promise and keep – within three years to gather to feast again”

Whereupon Hans Ivar Staal shouted, “We will meet within three months.” He went on to explain that the patriotic men of his district had decided to celebrate on 14th May, to commemorate the royal decree introducing the Danish language in a number of public offices. They chose Skamlingsbanken where they had secured a place to gather. The surprised and enthusiastic participants immediately created a committee which would collect the 440 silver Thaler required to purchase the hill, which was raised within a few weeks. Skamlingsbanken then officially came under the association’s ownership in 1854, following confirmation by the king’s signature.

There is a 16-metre (52 ft) tall memorial column dedicated to 18 people who have contributed to the Danish cause in Schleswig-Holstein on Skamlingsbanken’s highest point, the Højskamling. Made of 25 granite blocks, the column was raised in 1863. The monument only stood for five months before its destruction on March 21, 1864 by occupying Prussian forces during the 2nd Schleswig War. The Prussians had difficulty destroying the monument, and after several unsuccessful attempts forced a local stonemason to drill blasting holes into the stone. By the evening of that day the Prussians set off a large
mine, which caused the pillar to fall in a southeasterly direction. On April 16th, the stones were sold at auction. Local farm owner Raaben had two locals buy the stones, thus keeping the Prussians in the dark. These were dragged into hiding in neighboring fields. After the war, the stones were recovered, and in May 1864, the pillar was raised again.

*Ejer Bavnehøj* is the third-highest natural point in Denmark (170.35 m). It lies in the southern part of Skanderborg municipality, between the villages of Riis and Ejer. At its summit is a 13 m tall tower, built in 1924, commemorating the reunion of the south of Jutland with the rest of Denmark after the First World War.

Historically Ejer Bavnehøj was mostly known as a site for a beacon where signal-fires were lit in order to warn the military and local population if the enemy were on the way. Ejer means owner. The second part of the name, “Bavnehøj,” can literally be translated into Bavne meaning Beacon and Høj from the Old Norse word *haugr* meaning hill.