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Oregon Danish Colony:
Ethnic Assimilation in Junction City,
1902-1952
by Gerald Rasmussen and Otto Larsen

Founding the Colony

"A most desired place for Danish folks to settle." That keynote launched the campaign to attract Danes to Junction City. Who was the herald? What were the tidings?

The records are not particularly informative about A. C. Nielsen. The Junction City Times only used the initials "A. C." to refer to him. According to his great-grandson, Alfred Christensen, his first name was Andreas and his middle name was Christian, both common names in Denmark.

Nielsen was described as a "businessman" by a Danish historian, Henrik Simonsen, in a book on the struggle of faith and nationality in the Danish congregations of America. Here, Nielsen was also characterized by the Danish word markant, which means outstanding or notable.

It is known that Nielsen had lived in Tyler, Minnesota. He was a member of the Danish Folk Society, an organization devoted to the perpetuation of Danish language and culture in America. To achieve that goal, the Society, among other activities, sponsored colonies in North America. The records of the organization suggest that Nielsen was an active member, perhaps even a leader.

It may also be surmised that Nielsen was a realtor. In April, 1891, he placed an advertisement in a journal in
Denmark offering both cultivated farmland and wild prairie acreage for sale in Tyler, Minnesota.²

At some time during the 1890s, Nielsen moved from Tyler to Withee, Wisconsin. That was not a great geographical or cultural leap. It was simply a move from one small midwestern Danish colony to another. In Withee, Nielsen stretched his outlook. His vision turned 2000 miles west. There, he thought, would be a grand place to start a new Danish colony.

To launch the enterprise, Nielsen visited several possible sites in California and Oregon. He found what he was looking for in Junction City.

**Land Purchase and Colony Promotion**

In the Willamette Valley, Nielsen struck a remarkable deal. He took an option on a 1600 acre block of land with the stipulation that for five years the land could only be sold to Danish immigrants. Later, restrictive sale clauses were declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.

What was Nielsen's intent, other than making a profit from a real estate transaction? He was a true colony builder. His contract provided financial support for the creation of a Danish Lutheran Church and a Danish cemetery. A few details were reported on February 6, 1902, in the *Weekly Register of Eugene*:

A. C. Nielson [sic], the Junction City colony man was in Eugene on business yesterday. Mr. Nielson will commence at once the erection of a residence for himself on the land, and the colonists will soon begin arriving to take up their abode in the new Western home. The land will be divided into lots of about 40 acres. The day of the big farms in Lane county is drifting into the past. Smaller areas and more intensified farming are the coming program with the Willamette valley farmers. That means thousands of new people and an increase in land values, all of which augurs well for all
lines of industry.

The campaign to promote the Oregon Danish Colony was launched on February 26, 1902. Nielsen inserted an ad in Dannevirke, a national Danish language newspaper published in Cedar Falls, Iowa. Not content to merely advertise about the Oregon Dansk Koloni, he wrote a personal message to the readers extolling the virtues of Junction City. As translated, Nielsen declared:

If one wishes to find a mild, healthy and good climate, then according to what I have found out and experienced, this is the most desired place to settle, as the climate here has much similarity to Denmark's, except it is much milder here in winter. Very little snow falls and freezing weather is rare and then so mild that people leave the root crops, cabbage, etc., out in the garden to harvest as one has use for them.

Fruit is cultivated a great deal here, and among the different kinds, prunes are the most noteworthy; 10 acres planted with good prune trees will, when well tended, give their owner an income of $500 to $800 a year. Similarly a good winter apple is of great value.

But one need not recommend fruit growing only, since general farming is also well regarded, both with reference to crops and livestock. During the open mild winters most animals, especially yearlings, graze outdoors, but milk cows must, in order to give the best results, be provided with some feed in the barns. On 20 acres of the land that has been guaranteed to the Danes, last summer there was 300 tons of cattle feed grown, and on 100 acres they harvested 6000 bushels of barley.

There could be many things I hope will serve as evidence of the fertility of the soil. Finally, just this, the land can be purchased in plots from 20 to 160 acres, and the price is from $15 to $50 (per acre). Only a few lots which have significant improvements are higher priced.

Now let this matter be recommended to fellow countrymen in the hope that I have been fortunate enough to serve a good cause and that in a few years we may gather here around our own church
and school, because even though there is plenty of opportunity for just earning a good income, it would only be a desert if we did not have the church roots and the cultural togetherness; and this is precisely why we gather in colonies—to preserve our Christian life and our cultural uniqueness. It is also the case here that 80 acres will be contributed to the congregation as soon as half of the 1600 acres have been sold.

With this hearty greeting to friends among Dannevirke's readers from my wife and myself

A. C. Nielsen Junction City, Oregon, February 11, 1902

Two scenes from the life of A.C. Nielsen, founder of the Danish Colony in Junction City. Top, his home on Dane Lane. Below, Mr. and Mrs. A.C. Nielsen in their flower garden.

(Photos courtesy of Marie and Fred Aasted)
This was a personal testament. It denoted goals and reflected ideals: "our own church and school," and..."to preserve our Christian life and our cultural uniqueness." The words yielded a prompt response. A few months later, Junction City had a Danish Lutheran congregation. Nielsen understood that a church was essential if a large number of Danes were to be attracted to the new colony.3

In September, 1902, two sons of the founder came to Junction City. Their intent was to settle permanently in the new Colony. They also gathered information to help recruit others from back home. Soon they returned to Withee with samples of grain and fruit from the new land of opportunity. The samples were magnetic. A group of settlers accompanied A.C. Nielsen, Jr. back to Junction City in February, 1903. "Settlers" was the term used by The Times; which also reported that yet another 25 were due to arrive from the east in March. Danes were beginning to set roots in the fertile soil of the Willamette Valley.

Coda

Creating a colony of Danes in Junction City did not follow all the patterns experienced elsewhere. Missing was official endorsement and absent was doctrinal religious controversy. The founding was, at the outset, a private entrepreneurial venture not certified or ratified by church or by Danish promotional organizations. Many other settlements had the official endorsement of one of the two Danish churches in America, and sometimes also the support of the Danish Folk Society.

The other contrast centered on the church.4 Unlike older settlements in the mid-west, Junction City avoided the dissent and the bitter controversy that shook and split the Danish-American church into two separate bodies. One faction, the followers of N.F.S. Grundtvig, set up its seminary
at Grand View College, Des Moines, Iowa. The other faction, the Inner Mission synod, located its seminary in Blair, Nebraska. This schism took place less than a decade before the Danish settlement in Junction City was founded.

A. C. Nielsen was an adherent of the Grundtvigian viewpoint. His real estate ads emphasized that Junction City would follow that tradition. No doubt, this influenced decisions to migrate, and affected the social-religious orientation of the Colony. Later, a lore developed about a presumed contrast between so-called "Happy Danes" and "Holy Danes." The offspring of Junction City immigrants would be sent to Des Moines rather than to Blair if, in the future, they opted to enroll in a Danish-American college.

The Junction City Colony was distinct in one other matter. From the start, Danes were in a small minority. Yet, the influx of foreign born Danes caused curiosity in the larger community. The local newspaper regularly reported on the activities of the members of the new Colony.

When, in 1919, Yard Nelson moved to Junction City with his family (his father became editor of The Times) he realized, sometime during the first 24 hours, that there was a noticeable foreign element in his new home town.

When Yard was asked, "Why is that so vivid in your memory?" he responded with a story of how, the day after his family moved to town, a woman came to the door with a welcoming gift. She spoke an incomprehensible language no one in the family understood. It took Mrs. Nelson a few minutes to convince the visitor of that fact. The visitor, switching to English, then explained that since their name was Nelson, she assumed they were also Danes. Of course, Nelson would have been Nielsen in Danish. But many Danes "Americanized" their names. Hence the confusion.
Sign of assimilation, Junction City, circa 1910. Looking west from Southern Pacific railroad tracks down 6th Street. A Danish immigrant owned and operated the first store on the left. He anglicized his name. The sign reads:

Leo E. Cook
Confectionery and Cigars
Lunch and Coffee

(Photo used by permission of the Oregon Historical Society)
Organized Social Bonding

Danish immigrants like almost all immigrants, were joiners. Once they had established colonies, homes, and churches, they created a variety of secular organizations, clubs, and societies to meet with their own kind, to celebrate heritage, to enjoy social fellowship, to engage in recreation, or to undertake a variety of collective efforts to improve self and economic well-being.

In Oregon, for example the Czechs in Scio formed what they called the Sokol for gymnastics, sports, music and other nationalistic activities. To the south, the Danes of Junction City formed their own voluntary associations. In the early days, the most prominent of these were the Danish Brotherhood and Sisterhood Lodges, the Danish Young Peoples' Society, the Danish Language Lending Library and the Danish Gymnastic Teams. The social bonding that arose in these groups sustained ethnic identity and nourished elements of the Danish cultural heritage. Ultimately, it also helped breach the gap between Danish and American folkways.

The Danish Brotherhood Lodge

On January 4, 1908, nineteen men, all born in Denmark, organized the first of several Danish social organizations in Junction City, a local chapter of a national lodge called the Danish Brotherhood in Americas.

The national lodge, formed in 1882 in Chicago, was an outgrowth of a military veteran's club organized for Danish army veterans of the war with Prussia in 1864. Participation in that war could not have been motivation for the charter members in Junction City, the oldest of whom was 47, and the youngest a mere 19. The names of the charter members
do, however, clearly indicate that the Junction City Lodge would indeed constitute a brotherhood of Danes.\textsuperscript{7} New members were recruited. within the first year, Anders Jacobsen, Jens Nielsen, and Laurits Hansen joined the Lodge.

A few men held membership in the Brotherhood prior to their arrival in Junction City. They probably were instrumental in founding the local Lodge. Two were among the first elected officers: Julius Wilde, Executive President, had been a member in Dannebrog, Nebraska. Rasmus Andersen, President, had been a member in Marinette, Wisconsin. At the first formal meeting, Wilde and Andersen were installed, along with other officers, by A.P. Gram who had traveled from Portland, Oregon, for the ceremony. Perhaps he was persuaded to make the trip by Jens (Jim) Larsen, a charter member who once had belonged to the Portland Lodge.

By-laws and rules were adopted at the second meeting of the Lodge. Then, as the minutes indicate, one of the important functions of the organization became apparent with the appointment of the first committee. Its mandate was to implement a remarkable support system, where members cared for members.

Three men were the first to serve on the "Sick Committee." The task for Hans Bodtker, Chris Mortensen, and Mads Jensen was to visit ill members, or those suffering from other forms of distress, and report their findings to the members. The Lodge as a whole acted on the committee recommendations after it received written verification of conditions from a medical doctor. In the 1930s, the amount that could be allocated for support was $5 for one week of homebound illness, with $3 a week if the illness continued.

What was the general intent, and the specific goals of this organization? The minutes of early Lodge meetings clarify this matter in operational terms. In addition to providing aid and comfort for the ill and the distressed, two other elements stand out. The Brotherhood served as a life insurance society
where policies could be purchased at reasonable rates. It was also very active in devising opportunities for fun and fellowship for members, families, and friends.

The third meeting of the new Lodge exemplified the latter intent. It consisted of a dinner and dance at the Junction City Opera House. Over time, the Lodge sponsored a variety of social activities and supported various causes both Danish and American. Prominent in the recreational domain were the noted summer Brotherhood picnics.

**In the Good Old Summertime**

Picnics were a priority social activity for almost every organization in Junction City. They required planning, resources, and a suitable place for fun and food for families.

The Brotherhood understood that, and was successful, but not without effort. Some accounts inform us not only about the folkways of the period, but about how the symbols of assimilation began to appear early in the Danish Colony. Indeed, whereas there was formal resistance in the Danish Church to the penetration of American cultural traits, the Brotherhood and other Danish social organizations were more exposed and more receptive to such “alien” intrusion.

One of the early decisions by the Brotherhood was to identify and rent a location for holding picnics, an activity that remained an annual favorite for more than 30 years. The first location on record was on the Johan Hentze farm, two miles east of town and close enough to a slough off the Willamette River to provide a swimming hole. The members celebrated Independence Day, July 4, at that site in 1910. The symbols are significant. The Danes were in a new environment, and they acknowledged it by observing this key American holiday.

One year later, in 1911, the Brotherhood rented a picnic site about one mile, closer to town beside what the Danes
called "Andersen's Lake." The rent was $15 per year which included the right to build a 40'x 40' platform for dancing and permission to erect booths and place tables. This site served the Brotherhood well for years until they ventured out to try other sites.

Scene from Brotherhood picnic at "Andersen's Lake." There were many Andersens in Junction City. Danes referred to this family as Andersen ved Laken (by the Lake), yet another example of Chicago Dansk.

In 1917, a 4th of July picnic was held at Peter Bodtker's farm in the afternoon, followed by a dance that night in the Dane Hall. In 1922, there were two picnics, one at Triangle Lake, some 20 miles west of town, and the other at Peoria, about 20 miles downstream on the Willamette River. In 1936, the Brotherhood paid Hans Bodtker $15 for the use of Bodtker's Grove, a favorite spot with maple, cottonwood and ash trees near the river. The minutes of July 2, 1940 read, "ask Hans Bodtker if we can rent the picnic ground for one picnic at a time instead of renting it by the year. If he will not rent it that way it was decided to drop it." Apparently an agreement was not reached. The following August, a picnic was held at "Mossy Maples." Then in July and September,
1941, picnics were held at Benton Lane park, owned by the Oregon Electric Railroad station master, Mr. Mallory. The park was six miles northwest of town and featured a fine swimming pool, tall fir trees, and a dance hall. The war years were now in force. Picnics were curtailed. After the war, the Brotherhood stopped supporting what had been marvelous ethnic excursions.

So much for the picnic grounds. Now the question becomes, what made these outings so popular? What took place?

At any Danish picnic, or gathering for that matter, the first priority was food, or, what's on the table? In the early days of the Brotherhood picnic each family brought its own meal. Later, the American practice of pot-luck was adopted. Informants today do not have a clear recall of the culinary customs of that period. Certainly Danish meat balls were on the menu. Later, second-generation married couples introduced both pie and cake. While no doubt delicious, they were not typically Danish.

Conversation. A marvelous word, and a cherished practice among Danes at a picnic. It was a major activity interspersed with everything else that went on. After food, games dominated the scene. Children were constantly active, and often creative in their playful interaction. Adults and children participated together in horseshoe pitching, softball, and in relays such as sack races and three-legged races. Sometimes these were contests with prizes, like ice-cream cones, awarded to the winners. Once an egg throwing contest was tried. Persons paired off to play catch with an egg. After each throw, the partners moved back one step. The pair that moved the greatest distance apart without breaking an egg won the contest. However, some were offended by the wastefulness, and that contest was not repeated.

The most prized activity for children and younger people was to take advantage of the swimming hole, whether it be
slough, river, lake, or pool. One rule, the interminable one hour wait after eating, was rigidly enforced. It was universally understood that if you did not wait one hour after eating you would surely get cramps and drown.

The afternoon refreshments included ice cream and soda pop, "Orange Crush" was one of the favorites. Some older members of the Brotherhood recall that beer was sometimes available, even during the prohibition era which ended in 1933. Beer, and even stronger beverages, were not commonly served but may have been smuggled in by a few individuals. If and when this became known, there was considerable critical discussion of the matter in the larger Danish community.\(^{10}\)

Traditionally, the Brotherhood had a relaxed attitude about the consumption of alcohol. As early as 1912, a motion not to have intoxicating beverages served at the Founders Day Party was defeated. This was followed by a motion to serve en snaps\(^{11}\) with the meal. That proposal was approved. The actual vote was not recorded.

**Where Should the Lodge be Lodged?**

Throughout the life of the Brotherhood in Junction City, one issue resisted decisive resolution. This eternal enigma involved a mundane matter: should the Lodge rent, buy, or build its own meeting hall?

The question surfaced time and again. First there was indecisive discussion in 1909. Then, in 1916, the Brothers explored a proposal for a joint construction project with another lodge, and appointed a committee. No further action was recorded.

Rental was the solution throughout the decade of the 1920s. The Brotherhood held meetings in the Odd Fellows Hall, the Lee Building, the Dane Hall, and in a building owned by the Woodmen of the World.
In 1931, a move was made to purchase the Lee building. Debt retirement required an annual payment of $100. To meet that obligation, each member would be assessed a special fee. The vote was 24 to 3 to proceed with the purchase. A committee pursued the details. On November 4, 1931, the Brotherhood canceled the effort. The Lee building would not be bought. No explanation is offered in the record. Perhaps the impact of the Great Depression was the deciding factor.

In April, 1936, the Brotherhood voted 14 to 10 to investigate whether to cooperate with the Grange to build a new hall. One month later, the Lodge decided not to pursue that possibility.

Some members wanted the Lodge to erect its own building. A site was purchased. In May, 1937, a committee reported that they could build for about $4000. This would include $943.43 for the cost of lumber. The decision was deferred until the next meeting.

To build a new or to buy an old hall, that was the question. The answer was a compromise. By a vote of 15 to 3, the Brotherhood decided to buy part of the Woodmen hall (now the Junction City Library), if the amount did not exceed $1000. Money was tight. The minutes register that a $200 loan could be made from member Jim Larsen “if necessary.” The financial picture brightened when the Brotherhood sold the lot they had held for a possible building site. In 1938, the deal between the American Lodge and the Danish Lodge was consummated. Joint tenancy proved to be an uneasy relationship.

The 1940s churned with inter-lodge discussions. The Woodmen Lodge finally offered either to sell or to buy half of the building for $2000. “By a large majority,” the Brotherhood voted to sell. Once again, by 1945, the Brothers were without a regular meeting place. Interest in permanent housing faded. From that day forward, the Brotherhood rented meeting facilities. Currently it rents space from the
Lodge Activities

The Brotherhood supported various charitable and social causes. Some were Danish, others not. Most were directed to the local area, but some reached out to the northwest and to the national scene. The Lodge minutes contain many examples.

In 1916, the Junction City Lodge sent money to assist their Brothers in Solvang, California who had suffered losses from a damaging flood. There was reciprocity. In 1917, Andreas Jacobsen suffered serious health problems resulting in the amputation of a leg, a condition that eventually cost him his life. The local Lodge appealed to the national organization for aid when their own resources were insufficient to meet the need.

In 1918, support of the war effort became a major lodge activity. The Brotherhood sponsored a concert featuring a Danish singer, A. Bjørnskjold (who also sang a hymn at the regular church service so movingly that it was remembered years later). The concert brought in nine dollars which was contributed to the Red Cross. The Brotherhood bought $300 worth of war bonds and war stamps. Moreover, they voted to waive, or to pay, the dues for servicemen who were lodge members.

There was also a post-war foreign-aid effort, although to the Brotherhood it was hardly thought of in those terms. The Lodge wanted to support Danes in the province of Slesvig, who had worked hard and successfully to have the territory returned to Danish jurisdiction following the defeat of the Germans in World War I. A committee worked with the church congregation to collect money. Individuals contributed, but some of the money for the Lodge effort was generated indirectly when the Brotherhood ordered a commemorative "reunion" calendar for every member and paid for them out
of lodge entertainment funds.

Care for the elderly and children was a regular concern of the Brotherhood. The Lodge sent contributions to the Northwest Danish Old Peoples' Home in Seattle. It also bought four sheets of stamps sold to support an old peoples' home on the eastern seaboard. No region was overlooked. Money was sent to support the creation of an orphanage for children of Danish descent in the mid-west.

Benevolent acts by the Brotherhood sometimes involved novel ways to collect resources. In 1924, the Lodge, as a collective body, participated in a lottery to support the Old Peoples' Home in Seattle. Luck struck, and the Lodge won the grand prize, a Ford car. Brother Krog then bought the car from the Lodge, but with an understanding that the Lodge would use the money to purchase seven life membership policies for Junction City residents eligible to enter the Old Peoples' Home. Who would get these awards? In December, 1924, the Brotherhood voted to present one life membership to each of the Danish organizations in town. Each would have the responsibility for selecting one person to enter the retirement home.

National political issues occasionally reached the agenda. In February, 1928, the Lodge voted to send a protest to the United States Congress with reference to the immigration question. Unfortunately, the reason for the protest is not included in the minutes. The latest immigration law had been enacted in 1924. The national political debate was over. Somehow, the echo must have reached the Junction City Lodge four years later. Perhaps it had lasting resonance because the entire decade of the 1920s reverberated with anti immigration sentiment as a result of new immigrants coming to America from southern and eastern Europe.
Membership

Two vital questions bearing on the health of an organization frequently found their way on the agenda of Brotherhood meetings. The Brothers asked how do we recruit new members? They also asked how do we promote improved attendance at meetings?

To build membership, contests were held to see which team could recruit the most new members, with losers treating the winners to dinner.

To increase attendance, the Lodge introduced a lottery at each meeting. The member whose name was drawn had to be present to win. For the next three consecutive meetings the designated winner was not present. When the Brothers drew names for the lottery in December, 1917, the winner was a visiting member now living in Pendleton. One other prize is recorded. In January, 1918, Carl Petersen won one dollar. If the lottery continued after that date, the outcomes were not recorded in the minutes.

How successful were these efforts to increase membership and to improve attendance? The state of the records does not afford a clear answer. The minutes of meetings paid less attention to statistics than to problems in general. The Brotherhood probably had a slightly larger membership than the Sisterhood. Married couples joined their appropriate gender based lodges. Men could join the Sisterhood, a rare but possible choice, but women could not be members of the Brotherhood. A count of the number of votes cast at Brotherhood meetings between 1908 and 1924 provides an estimate of membership size. By that measure, an average of 16 persons attended meetings, assuming that all members present voted.

For a speech at the 75th anniversary of the Brotherhood in 1983, Arnold Bodtler plumbed the records for additional facts. He found that from its founding in 1908 up to 1923, 125
men had been members of the Lodge; 110 of them were immigrants. It was also noted that membership at that time was restricted to Danish male immigrants and their male children. This strict criterion ultimately was changed.

As one generation followed another, the call for new interpretations of membership rules accelerated. For example, in the 1930s, the Lodge asked the national headquarters if an American whose grandparents were born in Denmark could be admitted to membership. The record implies that approval was granted.

Symbols power perceptions. National flags are potent in this regard. In 1932, the Brotherhood decided to put the Danish flag aside for a while. Then they voted to purchase an American flag. So speaks the record. Curiously, longtime members of the Lodge only remember that they added, but did not substitute, an American flag to the display of the Danish flag at meetings.

The early members had little formal education. Grammar, spelling, and punctuation often departed from standard Danish practices in the minutes. There was also a frequent blending of Danish and English referred to earlier as Chicago Dansk. A common practice included the use of an English word because no Danish word existed, or where the Danish word was quite out of place. In one instance, a member “volunteerede” for a committee assignment. That involved taking a pure English word and simply adding the Danish past tense. Words like ballot box, acre, hall, and convention appear in the minutes of Brotherhood meetings in what would otherwise have been all Danish sentences.

Another example underscores the complexity of cultural transition. When a charter member of the Brotherhood died, the original charter document was draped in black crepe to honor that member. The minutes read as follows: “Det var foreslaaet og vedtaget to drape the charter.” The first five Danish words translate into “It was moved and carried.”
Apparently, the phrase "to drape the charter" was an act easier to convey in English than in Danish.

The Lodge and its members were becoming "Americanized" in other ways. Prior to World War I, initiation rites tended to be formal and followed prescribed ritual. That began to change in the 1920s. The thrust might have come from the exposure of second generation American-Danes to the more light-hearted and joke-playing practices of some American organizations. Pranks and tricks were added to the initiation exercises. This included wiring a chair to send mild electric shocks to the posterior of the initiate, who believed that he was seated in the place of honor. In another case, an initiate was presumably branded to signify membership. Of course, the initiate had to be in on the prank. They did place a branding iron on his chest, but, before doing so, they had arranged to have in place a thick piece of meat. According to an eyewitness, Joen Bodtker, the deceit was so effective that one squeamish member ran out of the hall.

The language question surfaced for action in the mid-1930s. Up to then, the minutes of meetings were recorded in Danish. Now the question was whether or not to use English. In 1935, 18 new members were admitted to the Lodge. Only one of the 18 was born in Denmark. It can be assumed that the others were most fluent in English, a factor affecting the move toward a policy change.

The minutes of the February, 1936 meeting record the first lodge action on a language change. The opening statement was routine. Then half-way through the page, the Secretary, Danish-born Martin Pedersen, began writing in English. Then, a bit further on he wrote, "it was moved and seconded that the minits (sic) be written in the American Language efter (sic) this meeting." Efter is the Danish for after. From that point forward, all the records of the Danish Brotherhood in Junction City have been kept in English.

In 1940, Brochner Mikkelsen was elected secretary. This
signaled a historic shift. Mikkelsen was the first American born member to attain high office. He was not fluent in Danish. A transition had taken place.

By the time of World War II the children of immigrants had assumed the leadership of the Brotherhood, and almost all active members had been born in the United States. “Danishness” in Junction City barely lingered on. However, the Brotherhood, while small, persists with some symbolic gestures to honor their Danish heritage. Overall, over several decades, some 350 members had devoted energy to that effort. Symbols are still proudly displayed. Danish and American flags share a place of honor at meetings and signify a harmonious merger.

The Danish Sisterhood Lodge

On March 30, 1911, three years after the Brotherhood was established, the women of the Danish colony in Junction City founded a chapter of the Danish Sisterhood of America. Lodge 122 was called Godthaab, in English meaning “Good Hope.” Twenty women were charter members. Petra Jensen, an active member of the colony, was missing from the list although she would have liked to have been a charter member. A rule delayed her entry. She was pregnant. Soon after her child was born, Petra Jensen became the 21st member of the Sisterhood.

Like the initiators of the Brotherhood, the founders of “Good Hope” were members of the national organization before they came to Junction City. The opening meeting was convened by Bodil Winther and Amalie Petersen. Winther was elected the first President. She had been a member of Lodge 21 in Denver. Petersen was a member of Lodge 89 in Eugene. Along with Anne Wilde, who had been a member of Lodge 62, these three women did the groundwork for establishing Lodge 122 in Junction City.
The primary aim of the Sisterhood ran parallel to the stated purpose of the Brotherhood. The objectives were posted clearly on the first page of the journal of minutes: “For mutual help and assistance in the event of sickness or death.” To implement these goals, two standing committees were immediately appointed; one to visit the sick, and the other to assist with funeral arrangements. An ad hoc committee was also formed to write by-laws and rules to guide allocation of aid to the sick and support for those who requested assistance.

Some start-up costs were involved in launching the Lodge. The charter members assessed themselves 65 cents each to cover the initial expense. Institutional concern about money management, perhaps required by the national charter, led the Sisterhood to appoint two men as “bondsmen” who would be auditors and guarantors for the Lodge. P. J. Mosegaard and P. N. Bodtker were the first appointees. Early on, a fund raiser, called a Rosefest earned $22.50.

One of the first things the Sisterhood purchased, was a “ballot box med Ogler,” (Chicago Dansk for ballot box with marbles) a device for approving or disapproving membership applications. A vote with a white marble meant yes, a black marble was a no vote. Their use of the English “ballot box” instead of the Danish equivalent indicates that it was, to them, an unfamiliar Danish term. This could be expected because, given their social class and gender, they had never voted in any formal way in Denmark.

After one year, it was time to celebrate. A Founders Day Party resulted. The Danish term is Stiftelsesfest, meaning a celebration for the founding of the organization. It became a joyful annual event. It was also notable for the tradition it established by having a dance at the center of activities. The music for the first dance was provided by a band from Coburg, a town smaller than Junction City located just across the Willamette River. The band was led by a Mr. Tonnesen.
His name suggests that a network of Danes reached all through the valley.

Other entries in the minutes reinforce the idea that dances were of great interest to the Sisters. On one occasion, the Sisterhood offered to serve coffee and cake and to arrange a “surprise party” (that English phrase was used in the minutes) for two musicians, Fred Rasmussen (violin) and Christian Andersen (flute), who frequently provided music for dances.

In the early days, Sisterhood meetings followed a fairly regular pattern. Unlike the Brotherhood, they often met in private homes. An alternating routine emerged. A meeting hosted by a member in her home was followed by a meeting held in a rented hall. Among the latter sites were the Lee House, the Odd Fellows Hall, a room in the bank building, and, most often, in the Dane Hall.

In 1915, the Sisterhood paid the Church one dollar for the use of the Dane Hall in order to conduct an installation ceremony and to present a performance of its drill team. It appears that the Brotherhood officers were installed at the same ceremony. Later, a more permanent arrangement was made with the Church when the Sisterhood approved an amount of $10 to use the Dane Hall for four months.

In the 1920s, the Sisterhood decided to hold meetings in the kitchen of the Dane Hall on the same evening that the Brotherhood held its meetings in the main room. However, there was a stipulation between the Lodges. If the Brotherhood would pay the rent and buy coffee, the Sisterhood would bring cake and make and serve the coffee.

Sisterhood meetings began and ended with a song. Sometimes they simply sang old and favorite songs for their entertainment. On one occasion, the singing was canceled because “all the strong singers were absent.” The business meeting followed the opening song, after which there was entertainment and refreshments.
What amusement was afforded? Members sometimes read aloud poetry or a short story. Occasionally, there were musical performances, or readings by younger persons from the community. In 1924, the Sisterhood decided that each member would respond to the roll call with a bit of “patriotic verse.” Internal evidence from the minutes indicate that they referred to patriotism for the United States. Another time they decided that responses should follow the theme of “old Denmark,” and members recited poetry to convey nostalgic feelings about Denmark and the loved ones left behind. Occasionally the closing ceremonies were omitted. No hint reveals why. Perhaps the hour was late, or perhaps the entertainment was fulfilling enough.

External events sometime impinged on the meeting schedules of the Sisterhood. When the great flu epidemic struck in 1919, the Lodge suspended at least one meeting. At another point, the farm crisis was identified as the reason for terminating the formal meeting. The secretary reported that too few were present to hold a regular session, so those present simply sat around and talked about the “high cost of living” (she wrote the phrase in English). Further, the secretary wrote that they had a cup of coffee and went home determined to persevere in the struggle against the “HCL.”

Membership and Attendance

From its very start, matters about membership and attendance at meetings mattered much to the Lodge of Good Hope. Contests were held to recruit new members. Susanne Bodtker’s team recruited five active and four passive members to win the prize in March, 1927. The nature of the award was not specified. Laura Ruder’s team came in second with three active and two passive recruits.¹⁶

At one point, the members debated whether or not to give prizes for good attendance, but the matter was dropped only
to be resurrected later. In 1933, a visitor came to the Sisterhood meeting. Her report did not alleviate concerns, especially since she was from Askov, Minnesota, a Danish American town with many more Danes in residence than was the case in Junction City. She informed the members that Askov had the same problems that alarmed them, namely, a shortage of money and a decline in membership.

Estimates of membership size and trends are not easy to formulate. There is a list of all who joined the Sisterhood on the last page of the first volume of the lodge minutes. By checking names against the charter members, it can be stated that the records go back to the founding date, 1911. There are 42 members on the list. Fifteen are crossed out. Either they died or they moved away. Twenty-seven remain. That, of course, is a small membership base. On the second page of volume two of the journal minutes, the secretary records that there were 33 active members and 22 passive members. There were also six men on the Sisterhood membership list.

The standards for record-keeping were not uniform or constant. Some secretaries reported the number of members present at meetings, others did not. Christine Blirup did make such reports for 13 meetings in 1926-1928. The average attendance was 13, with a low of six in August, 1926, and a high of 20 in June, 1928.

In the mid-1930s, another secretary recorded attendance numbers. The story was much the same as a decade earlier. For the 24 meetings listed, the average number attending was 11, with two high totals of 16. However, two meetings were not held because there were too few members present to constitute a quorum.

Yes, the numbers for membership and attendance were small. But so, too, was the size of the eligibility pool. The estimates for the exact size of the Danish colony range between 100 and 130 families. Hans Rasmussen remembered just under 200 Danish families who lived in Junction City at
one time or another, over 50 of whom had moved from the
community. A significant, but uncounted, number of these
did not participate in Danish activities and moved more
quickly into the mainstream American culture.

**Do Unto Others, Especially if They are Danish**

Aid to needy members was the special focus of the
Sisterhood. A medical doctor was selected by the Lodge to
certify the need for aid. In 1915, Dr. and Mrs. Dale in nearby
Harrisburg contributed five dollars to the Lodge. This suggests
that he was the designated referee for care-provision at that
time. In 1916, the records indicate that Dr. Howard, a resident
of Junction City, was elected to the post. In 1926, Dr. Rogers,
another town resident, filled this position.

As implied above, a member's request for assistance from
the Lodge did not yield an automatic response. The doctor
had to review and approve the application. Moreover, the
papers had to be notarized. When these requirements were
met, standard amounts were usually allocated. Initially, $4 a
week was authorized, but later, during the Great Depression,
the amount was lowered.

Pleas for support also came from outside the community.
A cause was deemed worthy by the Sisterhood if it had a
clear linkage to their Danish heritage. In 1911, the Lodge
contributed one dollar to the Danish Building in San
Francisco for the upcoming International Exhibition. In 1913,
the Sisterhood gave $16.75 for the Denmark Building at the
San Francisco International Fair. The money was earned by
staging and selling tickets to a play. The Lodge also gave a
dollar to the Los Angeles Danish Olympic Committee. The
sums were small, but things Danish mattered.

The Lodge of Good Hope was particularly disposed to
helping the aged, the orphans, and the victims of disasters.
Items were sold to support the creation of the Danish Old
Peoples’ Home in Seattle. The Danish children’s homes in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, and in Tyler, Minnesota each received five dollars. One dollar was sent to a Danish retirement home in Metuchen, New Jersey. Some aid was prompted by an appeal in the Danish language newspaper *Den Danske Pioneer*. Thus, ten dollars was sent to a Danish woman in Florida, and 15 dollars to the Omaha chapter to assist fellow Danes who had suffered serious property damage from storms.

Charitable acts were not limited to distant locales. The Sisterhood rushed aid to a Junction City family, the Peter Skovbos, who lost everything in a house fire. It also commemorated special occasions with flowers and cards. For a time, the Sisterhood routinely celebrated silver wedding anniversaries with small gifts. The practice was discontinued when the anniversaries began to occur too often—an indicator of the aging of the colony. Special achievements by persons in the community also prompted recognition and reward. Thus, Pastor Borgaard received a $25 honorarium for his speech at the Harvest Festival in 1913.

**Dancing for Dollars, and Also for Fun**

Many motives move lodges to undertake benevolent acts. But benevolence requires resources. The Sisterhood had more than one avenue for gaining revenue. They collected membership dues, but they also staged an innovative array of fund-raising events.

Fund-raising had a rich social context. There were rewarding moments for participants, as when plays were produced and performed. A variety of other efforts engaged the talents of the Sisters. They held bazaars, collected freewill offerings and made and sold quilts. There was fun for all when they sponsored dances including the *Maskeradebal* and a “Hard Times” dance. Both involved costumes, masks for
one, and work-clothes, preferably ragged attire, for the other.

Almost from its start, dancing was on the Sisterhood agenda. In 1912, Johanne Mikkelsen was granted free admission to membership for her contribution as a leader of folk dancing performed for the Danish community. Thus, in 1914, a joint meeting of the Sisterhood and Brotherhood enjoyed a gala folk dance review. Also that year, some members set about learning the stately old court dance called Les Lanciers. As late as 1949, this dance was still being taught in Denmark. 17

Organized Social Bonding. Members of the Danish Sisterhood Lodge in Junction City. Judging from the style of clothing, this picture was taken soon after the founding of the organization in 1911. Back row: Bodil Winther, unknown, Anne Wilde, Mrs. Bertelsen, unknown, unknown, Mrs. L.P. Johnson, Christine Petersen, and Mrs. Charles Toftdahl. Middle row: Augusta Hatt, Dorthe Madsen, Marie Bodtker, unknown, Mrs. Hansen, Susanne Bodtker, unknown. Front row: unknown, Mrs. Soren Fries, Bertha Mikkelsen, Petra Jensen, Christine Blirup, and Louise Markussen.

(Photo courtesy of Ellinor Borgaard)
It has also been performed in recent years by the Scandinavian Festival Folk Dancers in Junction City.

There was a link between folk dancing in Junction City and attendance at the Grundtvigian folk schools in Denmark. Alumni from those schools no doubt spurred interest and taught others the fetching intricacies of folk dancing. Indeed, the Danes with that disposition were called the "Dancing Danes." There is justification for that symbol being attached to the Junction City Colony because of the number and frequency of social dances held and sponsored by the Sisterhood and Brotherhood.

Other Modes of Pleasure and Edification

The social activities of the Sisterhood were clearly marked by dances and picnics, but other modes also brought delight and challenge.

The Sisterhood produced some amateur plays. In 1913, they charged 15 cents for a ticket bought in advance or 35 cents if purchased at the door. This price included entry to the dance that followed after the final applause for the actors and the fall of the curtain. Later on, the Sisterhood ceded the theatrical stage to the Danish Young Peoples' Society.

The Sisterhood also had a drill team. This marching unit performed with practiced precision at joint installations with the Brotherhood. The 1915 team had 16 members. Resplendent in Danish colors, it engaged in closely coordinated and intricate patterns of crossing and weaving in step with the music.

Social events were also the vehicle for improving the financial status of the Lodge. An admission fee was charged for the annual banquet. In 1913, the Sisterhood began a new annual event, the Harvest Festival. This festivity involved a dinner that, of course, was followed by a dance. The initial harvest for the treasury was $33.29.
The Sisterhood budget was certainly modest by contemporary standards. But it was also noteworthy in that the annual expenditures always matched the annual income. Through most of the years, the annual balanced budget involved between $50 and $200. Until the Great Depression of the 1930s, the finances of the Lodge were quite stable.

Americans suffered real hardship during the Depression. At some points, the cupboard was bare and there were no funds to assist members who became ill. Moreover, other support programs had to be curtailed. Now and then, there was an exception. For example, the Sisterhood managed to purchase an altar cloth for the Danish church. Bodil Winther offered the Lodge a personal loan to tide it over until the economy improved. As the Depression persisted, members became delinquent in paying dues. In 1933, the weekly benefit to ill sisters was cut to two dollars, if the money was available. The predicament continued through most of the years of that decade.

The response to an earlier crisis is noteworthy. The Sisterhood apparently left most matters relating to World War I to the Brotherhood. In October, 1918 the minutes show that the Sisters received a filled out application from the Fourth Liberty Loan Committee for a $50 bond. The Sisterhood did not have that much money in its treasury. Moreover, the minutes stated that Junction City had already done its part. Perhaps this meant that the Brotherhood had acted, or that the Sisterhood members had participated as individuals. In any event, the Good Hope Lodge postponed action on the matter.

At the same meeting, the Sisterhood received an appeal from the Omaha League for Patriotic Service. It commanded attention because the letter was signed by Jacob Riis, a distinguished Danish-born journalist and photographer. Despite the ethnic link, action on that request was also postponed.
The next meeting came after Armistice Day. The war was over, and the postponed issues were not revisited.

The Sisterhood had not been indifferent to the war effort. Earlier, in January, 1918, they voted to make a patriotic contribution. Coffee was a scarce commodity. Americans were urged to reduce their consumption as a contribution to the war effort. The Lodge moved and approved a motion for members to stop drinking coffee at meetings for the duration of the war. A month later, they rescinded the ban on coffee and fashioned a trade-off. Henceforth, the coffee committee would serve either plain sandwiches, or only one kind of cake—without frosting. Immediately following this liberating decision, five sisters served coffee “as a surprise.” Secretary Dorthea Madsen commented: “without the coffee it would have been a dry meeting.”

Danish to English

The time had come for a fateful decision. The older members must have agonized over the question. Twenty seven years after its founding, the Sisterhood of Junction City took steps to change its official language from Danish to English. The Brotherhood and the Church were confronting the same issue at the same time. All records attest that no matter how painful, the move was inevitable.

The turning point came for the Sisterhood at its meeting in August, 1938. The minutes read: “After that there was a discussion as to whether or not we should conduct the meetings in the English language, or whether or not it would be possible to get more members if we did so. It was moved and passed that we should vote on that at the next meeting.” It was then agreed to make a concerted effort to get a big turn out for the next meeting. In addition, a request was to be sent to the national headquarters for membership application forms printed in English. And, finally, the members autho-
rized the appointment of a committee to translate the by­laws and the rules for sick benefits from Danish to English.

The formal vote came at the next meeting. The Sisterhood authorized the change to English. The iron fist of necessity was cloaked in a velvet glove. The motion read that the Sisterhood would conduct meetings in English if there were members present who did not understand Danish.

The vote count was not recorded. The size of the electorate and the nature of its composition suggests a unanimous outcome. Only 12 persons were in attendance. Three of those were new members, each born in the United States. Gladys Christensen Bodtker was a second-generation Dane, who spoke Danish. Mabel Phillips Bodtker and Hilda Kokkeler Petersen were not of Danish descent. Their marriage to second-generation Danes had not altered their minimal knowledge of the Danish language.

In October, all documents were translated into English. In November, all correspondence was written in English. The Lodge thereupon requested 18 English language copies of the constitution, and more copies of a dozen English songs from the national headquarters. Moreover, Christine Blirup, born in Denmark became the first secretary to record the minutes entirely in English. For 27 years, from 1911 to 1938, the Good Hope Lodge of Junction City had conducted its affairs in Danish. Now the mother tongue of the immigrants was officially muted.18

**Danish Young Peoples' Society (DYPS)**

By 1908, Junction City had a society for young Danes with about 30 active members on the roster. This organization was independent from, but cooperative with, other Danish groups in town. The DYPS did not require members to be affiliated with the Church. There were, however, informal expectations. One document asserts that the young people
were only to stand in a friendly relationship to the Church.

In 1912, a regional federation of Danish Young Peoples' Societies was formed in Tacoma, Washington. Junction City expressed an interest but was not among the founders. Despite encouragement to affiliate earlier, Junction City, with Frode Andreasen as representative, did not join the Pacific Northwest regional federation until 1917. From then on, the records of the annual meeting of the regional federation provide specific items and general insights into the development of the Junction City chapter.

In 1918, the DYPS of Junction City had 41 members. The regional minutes report that there was an especially good understanding between the young people and the Church. Perhaps this reflects an appreciation by the regional delegates of a choir concert performed by the Junction City chapter under the direction of Pastor Steve Mogensen.

The 1919 report indicated that there were 40 names on the Junction City membership roster with 25 designated as being "in good standing." Of special note was the observation that English had been introduced into Junction City DYPS activities.

The activity ledger had also expanded for the youth of Junction City. The DYPS held two meetings a month. They also gathered every Tuesday at the parsonage for a song session. Two dramatic plays were produced in 1919, one in Danish and one in English, proof of the members' bi-lingual skills. There was a drive to sell war-savings stamps. In addition, they started a collection of English language books to add to the Danish Lending Library. Junction City did not have a public library at that time.

It is apparent that DYPS had become a vital center of recreational, educational, and social activities by the early 1920s. The 1922 report to the Federation, delivered by Arnold Bodtker, records the broad thrust of the agenda. During the course of the year, the DYPS had sponsored two lectures, an evening of entertainment, a musical performance by Dagmar
Potholm from Hartford, Connecticut, a Christmas party, two picnics, and two plays, one in English, *Kribbs and Co.*, and one in Danish, *The Fool's April*. There was also progress in the DYPS' drive to add English books to the Danish Lending Library, with 65 volumes added to the collection.

The year 1922 merits recall as a vintage year for the Danish young people of Junction City. In addition to the items mentioned above, the DYPS sponsored two Danish films, *The King's Trip to Greenland* and *Beautiful Denmark*. Members also participated on the gymnastics team, led by Hans Reerslev, which met regularly throughout the year with 15 to 20 persons in attendance.

A year later the 1923 report, delivered to the Federation by Aage Gribskov, indicated little loss of momentum by the youth organization. A membership of 30 persons met three times a month. Continuing projects included adding 20 English language books to the Danish Lending Library. The DYPS also sponsored two picnics. 

**To Be or Not to Be: Here is the Answer**

The high activity level of the DYPS lasted up until the Depression years of the early 1930s. Novel efforts included basket socials, lectures, outings, picnics, musical events, and style shows, some of the latter where men dressed in women's clothing. However, throughout, perhaps the most prized and appreciated activity was the group production and presentation of plays. To this day, former members, almost without exception, recall their thespian roles first when asked, "What did you do in the DYPS?"

The scripts for many of these plays have survived in family collections, including works of two gifted Danish American authors, Enok Mortensen and Carl Hansen. The DYPS produced at least two plays from the pen of each writer. Perhaps one of them was referred to in *The Times*
when, on February 20, 1918, it reported, "the DYPS of the local Danish Church gave a pleasant entertainment in the Danish hall last Thursday evening."

Gerald Rasmussen has the scripts for three plays that the DYPS obviously presented since the names of the cast are written on the manuscripts. One script is a three-act play by Enok Mortensen, called *Livets Lykke*. The setting is a rural Danish-American colony. The plot concerns a relationship between a young woman courted by two men, both immigrants from Denmark.

The male characters approach accommodation to America in contrasting ways. The older man, just returned from a visit to Denmark, praises the United States and constantly belittles his homeland. The younger man, a recent immigrant, is not an outspoken critic, but finds problems in adjusting to the United States.

Enter the heroine, a second generation Danish American. Initially, she expresses dislike for foreigners and immigrants. Ultimately, she comes to love the younger man when he learns from her how to appreciate the full value of being a Danish American.

For humor, some of the dialogue contains a brisk mix of *Chicago Dansk*. The older man, the Americanized Dane, cannot speak a single sentence of English without interspersing Danish words. Moreover, he cannot speak Danish without a scattering of English words. The heroine speaks Danish well, but does use an occasional English phrase. The young man speaks only clear and concise Danish. The masterful mix of languages provoked laughter.

The play also memorializes a traveling salesman, based on a character well-known in the Danish communities of the mid-west. The use of Danish dialects is highlighted. That feature of language remained a cultural interest, popular for discussion, and demonstration, by successive generations of Danes in America.
When was this play performed in Junction City? An estimate can be made by the background of the actors. Two members of the cast, Dagny Martinsen Gribskov and Edith Gravesen Bodtker, were born and raised in Minnesota. They came to town in 1932. Their theatrical performance must have followed shortly after that.

The closing line of the play imparts the moral of the story: plow and harvest, build home and land, and that gives life happiness. As the curtain came down, the last two words, “life’s happiness” echo the Danish title of the play, Livets Lykke.

The array of plays performed by the DYPS was impressive. Its variety provides indisputable evidence of bilingual skill on the part of the young people. That cultural trait, characteristic of the children of immigrants, is another example of the assimilation process.

The Dutch Detective, a farce in three acts written in 1914 by Walter Ben Hare, engaged the English talent of ten young Danish-Americans. Five actors performed A Fireside Story written by Walter Gordon in 1884. It was characterized as a Christmas Comedietta in one act. Gladys Christensen Bodtker remembers a Danish play called Den Tredie (the Third One). Selma Petersen Vangsness recalls another entitled The Laughing Cure by a playwright named Painton written in 1916. She also remembers Fixing it for Father, with a plot that involved getting a widowed father married again. That production went on the road. The Times, April 3, 1930 reported that the DYPS would present the play in Wendling, Oregon, in eastern Lane county on April 9 to benefit the local Parent Teachers Association.

Once the ethnic mix was English-German. The author recalls a play in which the town’s German baker, Ernest Miller, performed a key part. The story revolved around the immigrant German’s inability to speak English, and his resolve to say Nein to everything. Phonetically, nein becomes
the number nine. That builds comical situations as miscommunication creates chaos. It seems likely that Danes in Junction City enjoyed the humor partly because, for once, it was not directed at themselves, but at the Germans.

The impact of bi-lingual skills was evident in a pronounced way as early as 1920. The DYPS reached outside its own community to present a double bill for the entire town. The first part was a play called *A Frat Initiation*. This was followed by a series of vaudeville sketches. *The Times* announced the event as a presentation by "home talent" where everything was to be presented in English so that all could attend. The performance was repeated, suggesting that the young Danes had success in launching entertainment with an appeal beyond their own colony. Further validation of that conclusion is found when *The Times*, in 1927 and 1928, reported that the DYPS hit the main stage by performing in the Rialto, the town's only theater. The 1928 production was called *Sowing Wild Oats*. With the advent of moving pictures, amateur theatrical productions became less popular.

**Folk Dancing**

Folk dancing continued to be a favorite recreation throughout the life-span of the DYPS. The robust, intricate and graceful dancing came to have a meaning beyond the sheer pleasure that it afforded participants. Symbolic significance emerged when, in 1918, a folk dance exhibition was used to express the support of the Danish community for the war effort at a war bond sales rally. Culturally, this was a coming out-of-the-closet party for the Danes. It was the first time they had displayed their folk dancing skills and ethnic costumes to a non-Danish audience. *The Times* on March 13, 1918 reported it this way: "One of the most attractive as well as novel features of the program was a set of folk dances presented by eight Danish young people...graceful, pleasing and
well executed...they were all the more appreciated because this is the first time they have been given outside of Danish gatherings.” The Danes had arrived in Junction City 16 years earlier.

This positive newspaper account ignited a larger message. Junction City began to be known as a town that had a Danish Colony in residence. Over the years, the myth emerged that Junction City was a Danish community. No doubt this fiction was nourished all through the 1930s when the Danish folk dancers performed at official town functions. They also gave exhibitions in towns and cities elsewhere. In the early 1940s, a contingent of high school folk dancers of Danish descent performed in the Oregon Trail Pageant in Eugene. The performances ceased during World War II, but were revived to become one of the most authentic, popular, and regular presentations of the annual Scandinavian Festival in Junction City.

This genuine Danish cultural activity outlived the life of the Danish organizations that introduced it into Junction City. The Danish Young Peoples' Society withered away after the mid-1930s. Aging membership, recruitment difficulties, and the impact of assimilation were all factors in its demise.

The Gymnastics Team

A Danish cultural activity that did not transfer to the larger community was brought to Junction City in 1909 and formalized as a gymnastics program in 1910. The man responsible was Hans P. Reerslev. Upon arrival from Denmark, he had first lived in Fresno, California and, although a farmer, his dream was to become a teacher of gymnastics.

To prepare for that career, Reerslev returned to Denmark to take a special course to qualify as a teacher. He thought he had been promised a job at the newly organized Atterdag
Folk High School in Solvang, California, but the job did not materialize. Reerslev moved to Junction City and became a dairy farmer. He also volunteered to be a gymnastics teacher. For about 16 years, starting in 1910, Reerslev had a memorable impact on students. He was respected for his dedication and skill, even though his requirements for participation were demanding.

Physical exercise was a key part of the curriculum of the Danish Folk High School. Gymnastics was a group activity guided by formal rules. Men and women participated, but were segregated and did not exercise together.

Gymnastics in Junction City followed the traditional Danish model. The gymnasts would march into the hall singing a rousing Danish song and disperse to assigned positions for the workout to begin. About 70 percent of the time allotted to a session was devoted to floor exercises carried out in unison. If done properly, and faithfully, four goals would be achieved: strength, balance, flexibility, and coordination.

Following the floor exercise, the gymnasts moved to wooden bars attached to the side walls of the hall. The top bar protruded. One would grasp it, then hang down in front of the other bars to undertake prescribed arm and leg movements. After that, a vaulting box, another piece of equipment called a horse, and floor mats were carried out. Jumping and tumbling followed. The session concluded as it had started. The gymnasts would line up and proceed to march out of the hall singing yet another inspirational song.

A Danish immigrant in Omaha, O.C. Olsen, composed a brisk marching song, Building for Tomorrow, that stirred many gymnasts as they sang their way in and out of halls. It also carried another message. Old Danish values were to be infused into the new homeland:
We are building for tomorrow, for a strong and active life, 
Not for fame or gold to borrow, nor to wage a war of strife. 
For our home and land we will labor, we will give our life each day. 
With this watchword as our saber, Forward for America!

The early gym teams performed for Danish gatherings, usually at the Dane Hall. In the 1920s, non-Danes attended the first public showing at Benton Lane Park. In 1924, Viggo Tarnow, a teacher from Denmark, conducted a rigorous one month training program in Junction City that concluded with a special exhibition for the general public.

Joen Bodtker, who had taken a special class at Atterdag Folk High School in 1924, taught gymnastics in Junction City for about four years after Reerslev retired. He recalls a large turnout where even non-Danes participated. Some applicants were denied entry to the class because the hall was too small.

The scene changed. More young people attended high school. Competitive sports accelerated. A new high school was built in 1937. There was now a real basketball court available. Baseball always thrived in the small towns of Oregon. Junction City supported two teams, the “Pinks” and the “Reds.” Twilight leagues for softball became popular. Teams were sponsored by commercial and civic groups. Thus contests flourished with Firemen vs. Odd Fellows, and Cannery vs. Merchants.

Danish gymnastics went out of style. For years, however, those glory days were marked by a lone symbol. The many wooden “stall bars” were not removed from the walls of the Dane Hall until late in the 1950s.

(Photo courtesy of Jens Reerslev)
Footnotes


4 Clearly described and sharply analyzed by Thorvald Hansen, *A Church Divided: Lutheranism Among the Danish Immigrants*, Grand View College, Des Moines, Iowa, 1992.

5 Information from John Klobas.


8 This may be one basis for a subtle, underlying friction between some faction of the “lodge folks” and some “church goers.”

9 Actually called “Love Lake” after Hugh Love who claimed the original site under the Donation Land Law.


11 Roughly meaning one shot of hard liquor. It was not Danish Akvavit, which only became available in Junction City after World War II.

12 Now the home of the Junction City Historical Society.

13 Since 1961, the festival association has conducted a four day festival each August in Junction City. This cultural-civic venture was founded by Dr. G.F. Fletchall, who was of Swiss ancestry. It celebrates the heritage of Danes, Norwegians, Swedes, and Finns. The festival building referred to here was built by L.C. Larsen, a former pastor of the Danish Church. It was the second site of his Junction City Woodworking Company.

14 The information about the Sisterhood comes primarily from reading
the Lodge minutes, 1911-1944, as translated from the Danish by the author.

15 As reported by her son, Ted Jensen. The twenty women who chartered the lodge were: Marie Jacobsen Bodtaker, Bodil Rasmussen Winther, Hanne Petersen, Susanne Catrine Jacobsen Bodtaker, Christine Andersen, Marie Christine Bertelsen, Nicotine Fries, Anna Marie Andreasen, Sophie Margrethe Jensen, Anna Johanne Christensen, Johanne Arine Christine Petersen, Bertha Brochner Mikkelsen, Kirstine Marie Holm, Christine Jorgensen, Nora Christine Jensen, Mette Kristine Toftdahl, Mary Anne Wilde, Dorothea Madsen, Augusta Hatt, and Mathilda Petersen.

16 Active members are those who have purchased life insurance, passive members are not insured.

17 At Askov Folk High School in Denmark.

18 The Danish Sisterhood Lodge No. 122 dissolved in 1995, after which a few members joined the Brotherhood Lodge.

19 The recorded minutes of DYPS meetings did not survive. Information about the Junction City chapter comes from living former members, from references to activities in newspapers, from notes in Rev. Hasle’s history of the Church, and from the minutes of some of the annual regional meetings of the Federation of Pacific Northwest Young Peoples’ Societies. These papers were recovered in Ella Junker’s home after her death.

20 The DYPS showed the adventurous spirit of youth by frequently selecting distant picnic sites such as along the Pacific Ocean, at Triangle Lake, or on the banks of the McKenzie or the Mohawk rivers.