



2018

Editorial Statement

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Recommended Citation

(2018) "Editorial Statement," *The Bridge*: Vol. 41 : No. 1 , Article 12.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/thebridge/vol41/iss1/12>

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Editorial Statement

When I was a child, I remember learning a song that began: “Family history, I am doing it, / my family history. / And the love I feel when I’m doing it / Is very sweet to me. / I learn stories of my progenitors; / I write their history. / I keep records of my loved ones / On my own family tree.” The song was written by Jeanne P. Lawler, who was born in Minneapolis, a major Scandinavian American population center, in 1924, right when the great wave of Scandinavian immigration to the United States was coming to a close. I loved this song because it expressed the excitement and emotional satisfaction that comes from finding stories of our ancestors and making sure those stories are remembered for our own posterity. Since so many DAHS members share this passion, we decided to make family history the focus of this issue of *The Bridge*, with a range of approaches to the topic that we hope will entertain and inspire our readers.

Since it can be daunting to get started on tackling Danish patronymics and deciphering the Gothic script of Danish church books and census records, our lead article in this issue is an introduction to doing family history research into Danish American ancestors, written by Kara McKeever of the Genealogy Center at the Museum of Danish America in Elk Horn, Iowa. Once you know how to search productively, the thrill of making family history discoveries is much more accessible.

In order to illustrate the many exciting stories that emerge from family history sleuthing, we asked DAHS members to submit their own family history discoveries to include in this issue. We’re delighted to be able to include seven individual family history stories that showcase different kinds of sources, a range of relationships to the immigrant experience, and a variety of time periods. Our first example is Johannes Bundgaard Schou’s travel diary from 1912, translated by his son Bertel Schou. This fascinating personal history allows us to follow Johannes and his brother Niels on their journey, as teenagers, to join their brother in the United States just a few years before World War I. The intimate diary form offers a highly personal glimpse into how they felt about the journey and the places it took them to. This story forms a pair with our second example, which is a letter that Mary

Ann Hansen's grandmother wrote from the *S/S Stavangerfjord*, on her journey back to Denmark in 1953 after visiting her son and daughter-in-law in Illinois. Many of our ancestors didn't leave behind diaries or memoirs, but nearly all of them wrote letters to the people they loved. Even though the content of letters can seem rather mundane, they give us insights into what our ancestors cared enough to write about.

The next two articles share excerpts from the life stories of two Danish American immigrants, written by close relatives. The first of these is Inga Kromann's essay about some of the highlights of her father Hans Kromann's life story, which he wrote before his death. He immigrated in 1909, along with his brother Maurice, and built a life for himself and, eventually, his wife Karen, during one of the most tumultuous periods of American history. Alongside Inga's reminiscences of her father, the fifth article in this issue is Otto Brask's essay about his maternal aunt, "Moster Marie," whose courageous example contributed to his own decision to immigrate to the US.

The sixth article, the personal essay, "My Uncle in America," by Lars Handesten, a professor at the University of Southern Denmark, also tells of immigrant relatives, but from the perspective of their relatives back in Denmark. Adapted from a talk given to a meeting of the Danish Academic Network in America (DANA) in New Orleans in May 2016, this humorous essay explores the love-hate relationship between Danes and the country that swallowed so many of their relatives, offering up pop culture and dreams of wealth in return.

The last two articles in this issue investigate the long-term effects of migration on families of Danes and Danish Americans. In researching his own family history back several generations, Jørgen Jørgensen discovered a plethora of relatives who had emigrated and whose descendants now live in the United States, with whom he was able to connect after immigrating himself with his wife Birgit. The companion piece to Jorgen Jorgensen's article is Kai Aage Jensen's "Those Who Stayed Behind: Søren Nielsen's Family History from Denmark," translated by Erik S. Hansen, which traces an equally fascinating family tree back several generations, but focuses on those Danes who made the often-difficult choice not to leave their home and family, but to remain behind and build the Denmark that we know and love today.

Each of these stories tells of courage and hardship, joys and losses, dangers braved and goals accomplished. It has been a pleasure for me to get to know the family histories of a few DAHS members, and I hope that you will derive as much enjoyment from their stories as I have. One of the marvels of family history research is not just how unique each of our ancestors' lives and experiences were, but also how much their life stories resonate with our own, as they grappled with the challenges of providing for their families, the agony of deciding which risks were worth taking for the sake of those families, the excitement of going to new places and starting over, as well as the nostalgia associated with the places they left behind. By researching and writing the stories of our ancestors, we are, of course, also writing our own.