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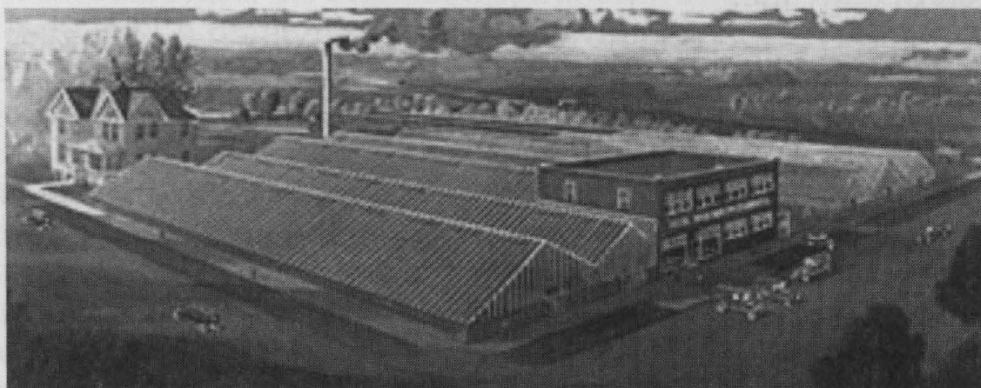
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Danish Gardening Traditions

From Jutland to America

By
J. R. Christianson

When I was a boy, my mother sometimes took me along to Neil Neilsen Florists when she needed flowers for a special occasion. Upon arriving, she always went into the greenhouse to look for Agnes Neilsen. I remember the humid, earthy atmosphere under those immense glass roofs. We walked between endless rows of plants until we spied Agnes at work by one of the flowerbeds. Mother always liked to visit with her. The Neilsens were Danish, and so were we.



<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/components/6642c04.html> (9.11.2009)

Neil Neilsen Florists in Mankato, Minnesota, in 1921.

By the time I was a boy, the greenhouses were more than twice as large.

Lots of Danish immigrants went into business as gardeners, landscape architects, and greenhouse operators in America. Among the most famous was Jens Jensen (1860-1951), who designed and built the West Parks of Chicago. He became the great landscape artist of the Prairie School and achieved worldwide renown for introducing the use of native plants to landscape design.¹

Of course, gardening is not only for professionals. Many ordinary Danish Americans had gardens on the farm or back yard or on a vacant yard in the neighborhood, like our Victory Garden during World War II. Danes seem to have a love of gardening, whether as amateurs or as professionals like Jens Jensen and the Neilsens. My grandparents were among the amateurs, but they truly put their hearts into their garden.²

Grandmother was an infant when her family migrated from Vejle Amt to Iowa in 1868.³ Her gardening traditions must have

been those she learned while growing up in a Danish-American community in central Iowa. Many of the Danes around Story City and Randall, including Grandmother's family, had come from the vicinity of Hvejsel Parish, so local traditions from that part of eastern Jutland must have been strong.

Grandfather, on the other hand, grew up in Denmark and attended Askov Folk School before emigrating at the age of twenty-one in 1888.⁴ His gardening experience went back to his boyhood in Lindeballe Parish, where he was born, Give Parish, where he grew up, and Gesten Parish on the German border, where his grandfather came from.

The late nineteenth century was a time of cultural change in rural Jutland. Change emanated in part from places like Askov and affected many aspects of daily life. The cooperative movement was growing as well, and farmers were playing a larger part in public affairs. These changes, and the growing self-confidence of the farming population, affected gardening, as it did so many other aspects of daily life.

Traditional Danish Farm Gardens

Danish gardening traditions were very old, but they did change as time went by. Denmark became a Christian country at the end of the Viking Age. Soon, communities of monks and nuns were established throughout the country and flourished in the centuries from AD 1150-1550, until Denmark changed from a Roman Catholic to a Lutheran country. These rural and urban religious communities greatly enriched Danish gardening traditions. The monks and nuns introduced many new crops and methods for laying out and maintaining gardens. Because monks and nuns were vegetarians, they raised many plants for food, but they also cared for the sick and therefore grew plants with medicinal properties. Moreover, they needed crops to produce beverages like ale, cider, perry, and wine, which were also considered to be beneficial to health. Finally, the monks and nuns liked to use gardens as places for contemplation and relaxation. Consequently, the garden areas of a monastery included a pleasure garden as well as an herb garden, a kitchen garden, and an orchard. In addition to bringing many new plants and gardening plans to Denmark, the monks and nuns also introduced new systems for raising, fertilizing, and watering plants.

The impact of these medieval monastic gardening traditions was still felt in the gardens of Danish farms and cottages of the middle years of the nineteenth century, when my grandfather was growing up on the farm of Ramskovgaard in Give Parish, northwest of Vejle.

For many long centuries, gardening on Danish farms and cottages had been women's work, as it still was in the late nineteenth century. However, boys as well as girls always got some experience in helping their mother plant, weed, hoe, and harvest the

family garden. Working in the garden was part of growing up in rural Denmark.

Eastern Jutland was a good place for gardening. True, it could not match the mild climate and rich soils of Fyn, Lolland-Falster, and southern Sjælland, but it was not far behind. Certainly, it was better than trying to garden in the sandy soils and biting wind of western and northern Jutland, where a cabbage patch, a stunted elderberry bush, and wild berries gathered on the moor might be the full extent of the family gardening.

In the more favored parts of Denmark, a housewife generally wanted to raise some herbs, flowers, vegetables, a row or two of berry bushes, a few fruit trees, and maybe even some hops. All of this took a certain amount of planning, but the layout generally followed traditional lines.

The typical vegetable garden was laid out in rectangular beds separated by footpaths, often with four beds around a circular bed at the center. This was a layout that went back to the monastic gardens of the Middle Ages. Its original inspiration was the Islamic tradition of a garden as a reminder of Paradise, with a well or fountain in the center circle and paths between the beds representing the four rivers of Eden.

Square and circular beds were easy to lay out with a length of cord and a couple of posts, and the paths gave easy access for cultivation. In England, a smaller garden laid out according to this plan was called a Vicarage Garden, which sounds like something out of Jane Austen.⁵ In Denmark, however, rectangular beds separated by sand or gravel paths and often arranged in groups of four still comprised the common layout for a farm or rural cottage garden of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The beds were generally raised and surrounded by wooden borders or low boxwood hedges, or even by plantings of lavender or flowers. The garden was enclosed by a stone wall, an earthen dike, or a fence of willow fretwork (*risgårde, pilehegn*). It was planted with onions, carrots, leeks, curly kale, green cabbage, later also red cabbage and potatoes. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, new plants like cucumbers, green tomatoes, beans, radishes, and spinach started to find a place in Danish farm gardens, and the gardeners began to plant their vegetables in straight rows instead of scattering seed in the beds.

A separate herb garden was usually located near the kitchen door and frequently contained roses (used to make rose hip tea or tisane) and hollyhocks (used to make a tisane for coughs), as well as herbs for seasoning and medicinal use, such as caraway, mustard, parsley, thyme, wormwood, and horseradish.

Other parts of the garden had locations elsewhere. Gooseberry and currant bushes were planted in rows in a separate part of the garden, as was rhubarb. There would usually be an elder bush

nearby. An orchard of apple and pear trees would also be in an area apart from the garden. There was generally a beehive or two, made of coiled straw, near the garden and orchard, and a poultry pen.⁶ Chickens and geese helped to keep the garden free of insect pests.

Gardens of these types have been reconstructed around the old cottages and farmhouses at Frilandsmuseet, the open-air museum in Sorgenfri near Copenhagen.⁷



J. R. Christianson photo

Historic farm garden hedged with boxwood at Frilandsmuseet, 2005

Lawns and Pleasure Gardens

One thing lacking in the landscape of the Danish farm, however, was a lawn. In the days when lawns were mowed laboriously with a scythe or smoothed with heavy rollers, they were too labor intensive to be part of the grounds of an ordinary farmyard or cottage. If you wanted to find a lawn, you had to go up the lane to the local manor house or to the castles and rural palaces of the nobility and royalty, where the wide lawns or "parks" sometimes included fountains, moats, and other water features, gazebos and tea houses, and paths that led into the surrounding woodlands.⁸

However, that also began to change as innovation swept through the Danish countryside. The first mechanical lawn mowers were invented in England in the early decades of the nineteenth century. These were large, horse-drawn machines intended for use on the broad lawns of large estates and playing fields for croquet, tennis, cricket, or rugby. The smaller, human-pushed lawn mower, suitable for home gardens, was invented in America in 1870. It finally created a practical opportunity for ordinary people to have a lawn. By the last decade of the century, Danish farmers and cottagers were acquiring lawn mowers and establishing lawns and pleasure gardens of their own.

The models presented by manorial gardens had also been affected by changing styles of garden design over the centuries. Many Danish manor houses and gardens went back to the sixteenth or seventeenth century. Most of the small, walled knot gardens of

manors built during the Renaissance had been replaced over time with Baroque gardens in the French style, featuring fountains, rectangular ponds, ornate parterres close to the house for viewing from upstairs windows, and long allées of hedges and trees to lead the eye to a distant prospect. During the eighteenth century, these formal baroque landscapes had often been replaced or supplemented by gardens in the Neoclassical English style, where the garden beyond the manor house was designed as an Arcadian meadow meandering through surrounding woodland to a small classical temple, grotto, or waterfall. Exotic specimen trees lent a picturesque quality to this style of landscape. Some manors even had a menagerie or deer park beyond the pleasure garden, and many had elaborate beds of tulips, roses, and other ornamental flowers close to the house. At smaller manors (*proprietærgaarde*), these garden designs might be reduced to an expansive lawn surrounded by woodland, possibly with a teahouse or a pond as a remnant of a former moat.

When ordinary Danish farmers began to establish lawns and pleasure gardens of their own towards the end of the nineteenth century, they picked up on these features from the large gardens of palaces and manor houses. The pleasure gardens of Danish farms and cottages became highly elaborate and ornamental, combining mown laws with pathways, rock gardens, flowerbeds, and water features.

The gardening ideal of the late nineteenth century was the Romantic garden, which featured meandering paths and an emphasis on the exotic, decorative, and picturesque. When a traditional Danish farm garden was changed into a pleasure garden in this new style, however, it was sometimes hard to transform the rigid geometrical layout of past centuries into the new look of the Romantic style.



Munkholmgaard in Give Parish, Vejle Amt, around 1900

Take the example of the farm of Munkholmgaard near Farre in Vejle Amt. My grandfather's sister, Christine (1874-1963), lived there with her husband, Jesper Munkholm (1876-1967), and their two sons. Munkholmgaard was an old family farm on meadowlands

along a stream called the Ommeaa. The farm still had its four wings of thatched buildings surrounding a cobblestone courtyard when I visited there for the first time in 1957. The main house was T-shaped, with a parlor wing projecting into the garden in back. The parlor was furnished with a piano, easy chairs, sofa, and tables in the style of the late nineteenth century. It was decorated with sculpture and landscape paintings of Denmark and Italy by Christine's brother, Hans Gyde-Petersen (1862-1943).⁹ French doors at the far end of the room opened onto the garden.



*Christine and Jesper Munkholm with their sons Homo and Herluf
in the ornamental garden of Munkholmgaard, ca. 1917*

The garden behind the house was no longer a vegetable garden laid out in quadrangles. A photograph of the family posing in the garden around 1917 shows a circle that may once have stood amidst rectangular vegetable beds but had become a rose garden with some sixteen to twenty rose bushes, surrounded by a low hedge of boxwood or possibly lavender, since this was an "aromatic" bed, and also enclosed by a ring of light-colored, sweet-smelling plants. This circular rose garden had become the central feature of a lawn and pleasure garden, enclosed within a circular sand path, with additional paths to the sides and back. The circle and paths no longer divided beds of onions, carrots, and kale but were surrounded by a neatly mown lawn.

Behind the rose circle stood a picturesque pedestal made of irregular slabs of stone, reminiscent of rune stones, bearing a basin that held a large sculpted eagle. The path undulated around the eagle and ran straight back to the orchard gate in a high wall of

shrubbery. On either side of the eagle, trees pruned into spiral shapes enhanced the picturesque effect of the garden.

Two parallel paths led straight off to the right, both of them lined by low boxwood hedges enclosing narrow rose beds. There may have been similar paths on the left to maintain the symmetry on the crossing axis, perhaps even incorporating paths between the former beds of the old geometrical garden. In the lawn between these side paths stood an ornamental urn surrounded by plantings of hosta. At the far edge of the lawn on the right were the vertical stones of a rock garden.

Finally, in the foreground of the picture, just outside the French doors of the parlor, was a large, symmetrical bed surrounded by lawn and shaped as a circle extended to the sides by smaller circles. Within a border of low flowering plants, this bed was densely planted with exotics featuring huge, ornamental foliage.

All in all, with its raked paths, trimmed hedges, pruned trees, carefully tended roses, and annuals as well as perennials, this was a high-maintenance Romantic pleasure garden, organized in the latest style of the early twentieth century but also reflecting the geometrical heritage of the traditional garden that had long occupied the same site.

Many years later, the author, Viggo Hedegaard Thomsen published a vivid description of his own visits to this rural farm home in Jutland:

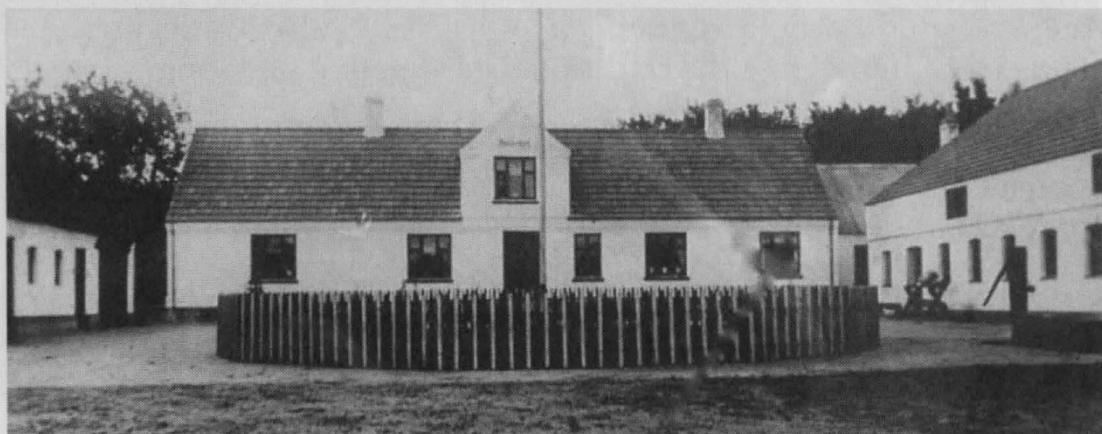
My earliest historical knowledge of ancient Rome is associated with a large painting of the Coliseum, glistening in the bright Italian sun under a blue sky, which was probably one of Gyde Petersen's first oil paintings. Together with several other paintings, including some that showed Danish rural scenes, it hangs in the attractive, cultivated home at Munkholmgaard in Silleshoved near Farre, in the artist's home area, west of Vejle. Here the artist's jolly and hospitable sister, Christine or "Stinne," her good natured husband, Jesper Munkholm, and two musical sons have created a home, surrounded by a park-like garden, which can only be described as "an Eden on the moor." Here he came in search of peace and harmony when he grew tired of the hectic artistic life in the capital city.

Hedegaard Thomsen was especially taken with Stinne Munkholm's colorful artist brother and the lively music that filled the parlor at Munkholmgaard:

The artist, Gyde Petersen, was also a fascinating personality. There was an air of festivity about him; lively good spirits shone in his strong, penetrating glance. There were many festive occasions when we gathered in Jesper and Stinne's

home, where I spent my summer vacations as a boy. Pastor Carl Noring of Ringive, later provost of Viborg cathedral, who also had his share of good humor and wit, was a frequent guest, and so was the popular Frederik Iversen of Gadbjerg Inn, later of Trædballehus, who came to play "old time" music, accompanied by Jesper. Among ordinary people as among the most distinguished, Gyde Petersen stood out as a grand seigneur. A remarkable combination of dry Jutland humor and Gallic verve made him a man of the world who was equally at home in any circle. No wonder he was always surrounded by members of the fair sex.¹⁰

Such was life on the farm of Munkholmgaard near Vejle in the early years of the twentieth century. Ornamental gardening helped to set the scene. Visitors were always taken for a walk around the garden, as I was in 1957, and in fair weather, the whole party would move outside the French doors to socialize in the garden.



Ramskovgaard in Givø Parish, Vejle Amt, around 1890

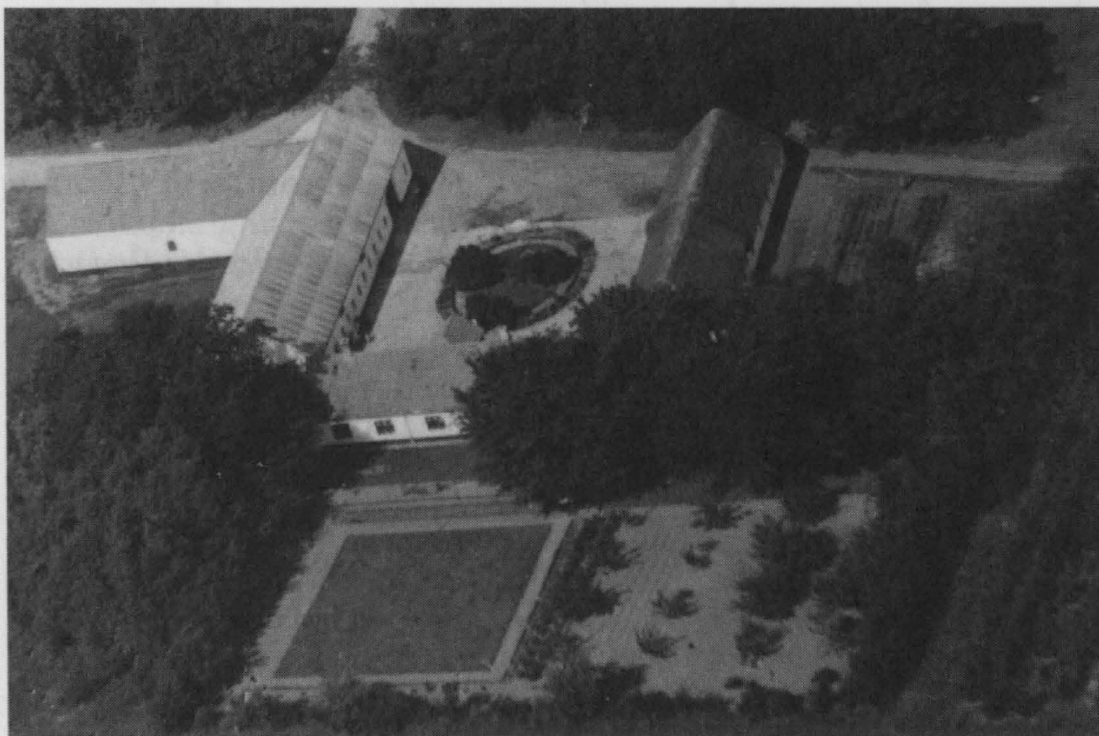
Gardens and Orchards on a Typical Jutland Farm

Stinne Munkholm and her brother, my grandfather, grew up on a farm named Ramskovgaard. Their father was known as Jens Christian Pedersen Ramschou (1838-1912) after the old spelling of the name of his farm. When Grandfather was a student at Askov, he signed his name as Kristen Peder Pedersen, but in America, he was known as Chris and signed his name as C. P. Peterson. In time, he earned the title of "Dr." to put in front and the initials, "D. D. S.," behind his name.

Ramskovgaard was a three-winged Danish farmstead, with a courtyard between the three wings, open on the north side. In the middle of the courtyard was a circular enclosure centered on a flagpole, which was surrounded by a fenced ornamental garden. The family home was the central or south wing of the three buildings, with a large barn on the right or west side and a thatched building on the left or east side, which contained living quarters for

farmhands and a retired couple, as well as workrooms and storage space.

The main garden and orchard could not be seen from the courtyard, and no other old photographs survive. However, an aerial view of Ramskovgaard, taken in the mid-twentieth century, shows the general layout of the farm and gardens at a later time and gives some indication of what might have been there when Stinne and Chris were growing up.



Ramskovgaard, Give Parish, around 1950

The round bed of ornamentals still marked the center of the courtyard, enclosed now by a wire fence instead of a picket fence. A circle of rose bushes and other ornamental plantings followed the fence all the way around this circular courtyard garden, with a path along its inside edge. A low hedge lined the path on both sides. Inside the circle of the path, ornamental trees marked the east and west sides. The center contained floral or other ornamental plantings in a lawn. Two more small trees stood on either side of the gate that entered the garden circle on the south edge, directly opposite the front door of the house. This garden maintained the site, shape, and general arrangement of the earlier, circular garden behind a picket fence, which stood there when Stinne and Chris were young.

The circular courtyard garden was the first of several garden spaces at Ramskovgaard. Similar arrangements were found on farms throughout eastern Jutland and, with modifications, throughout rural Denmark.

The aerial photograph shows a large vegetable garden behind the thatched east building on the right side of the courtyard, in a sunny site protected from the prevailing west wind. The traditional pattern of hedged geometrical beds separated by paths, which would have been found a generation or two earlier, had given way to a twentieth century vegetable garden planted in parallel rows.

Immediately behind the house was a long, narrow lawn that enclosed a small navette planted with ornamentals or herbs. A narrow strip of border plants appeared to line the outer edge of this narrow lawn on the lower side of a bank that rose to a long, rectangular garden enclosed by a low hedge. This looked like a former row of small, rectangular beds merged into one. It apparently continued to function as a place to raise potherbs and plants for home remedies, as well as flowers to beautify the vicinity of the large, square lawn that continued up the rising slope. Low hedges lined both sides of the sand path surrounding the quadrangular lawn.

Immediately to the east of the back lawn were two long rows of bushes, undoubtedly currant, gooseberry, and possibly also black currant. Beyond these bushes was the orchard, laid out in neat rows running north and south. There would have had several varieties of summer and fall apples and pears. Cherries and plums would have been less likely in this part of Denmark.

The aerial photograph from around 1950 showed that the gardens and orchard at Ramskovgaard were different than they had been fifty or seventy-five years earlier, but the photograph still gave some hint of what things had been like when Chris and Stinne were growing up on the farm in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Both of them married around the turn of the century and began to lay out gardens of their own. Stinne's was at Munkholmgaard in her home parish, as we have seen, and Chris's was far away, in Mankato, Minnesota. How rural Danish gardening traditions fared in an American urban setting is what we need to look at next.

A Danish-American Garden in Minnesota

Christen Peder Pedersen was born at Rubjerggaard in Lindeballe Parish in 1867 but grew up from the age of eight on Ramskovgaard in Give Parish. After finishing Danish public schools, he attended Askov Folk School in 1886 and then worked for a year as a merchant's apprentice in Ejstrup before emigrating to America in 1888. His destination was Randall, Iowa, where one of his maternal uncles was a farmer and where his older brother, John, had come in 1885. After several years in America, he enrolled as Chris Peterson in the buttermaking program at the Iowa Agricultural College in Ames, graduated in 1895, and was hired by the Danish farmers' cooperative dairy in Randall, the first cooperative dairy in Iowa. In 1898, he was married to Jennie Christianson in the home of her

parents in Randall.¹¹ He continued to work as a buttermaker until 1899, when he enrolled in Keokuk Dental College and graduated in 1902 as a Doctor of Dental Surgery. He was certified to practice in Minnesota and settled in Mankato, where he served as dentist for more than fifty years.

Jacobine Christiansen was born in 1867 on Havgaard in Hvejsel Parish near Jelling and came to America as an infant with her parents.¹² She grew up as Jennie Christianson in Randall, Iowa, where she spoke Danish at home and in the local Danish-American community, which included immigrants from both Sjælland and her family's home area in Jutland. After tutoring at home by a Danish governess, she attended American public schools and went on to graduate from the teacher's certification course at Cornell Academy, Mount Vernon, Iowa, in 1890. She taught for a while before marrying Chris Peterson in 1898 (her sister, Anna, had married his brother, John, in 1893). Jennie's gardening traditions would have been those she learned from her mother, her governess, Sine Jensen, and other friends and family members in the Randall community.¹³ Her parents both had family memories from Danish manorial gardens as well as farm gardens.¹⁴

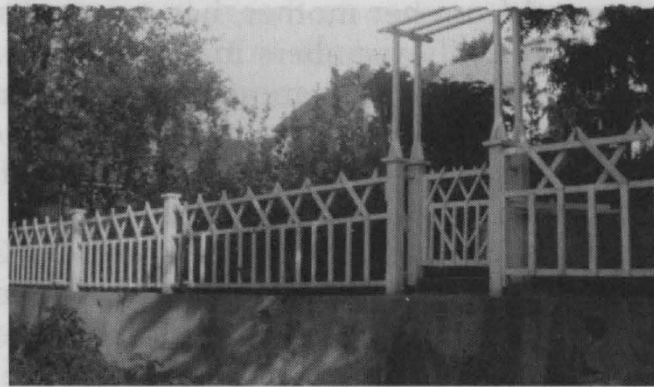
Chris and Jennie moved to Mankato, Minnesota, in 1902, where he began to practice dentistry. In 1904, they bought a sixty-six foot lot at what became 214 Pleasant Street, near Pleasant Grove School, and engaged a local architect, Henry Christian Gerlach, to design their house.¹⁵ A substantial gift from Jennie's father helped them to build the house quickly during the fall and winter of 1905-06, at a time when master carpenters were paid \$3.50 per day for ten hours of work and their helpers two dollars. Some years later, Chris recalled the construction process:

I would pay off the carpenters on Saturday nights—five or six of them—with my week's earnings in the office. When the carpenter work was far enough along, I started installing the heating plant by working nights and Sundays. Many times, it would be after midnight, and Jennie would come over and tell me to stop. How I managed to move and handle the heavy radiators alone, I do not know. All winter, I worked at this job. I could not do it now.

In the spring of the year, the carpenters had completed their work, so the painting could be done safely. We let the contract for finishing all the interior woodwork to Gronquist and Endicott for one hundred dollars, and they did a very splendid job . . . We moved in, as soon as the finish was dry, having lived three years in the little house on the corner. The dream of earlier times, of a lovely home, had at last come true . . . We now turned our attention to luxuries. We bought rugs and furniture and even a piano, and a year or two after

moving into our new home, we had electric lights and power in Mankato.

For the first time in his life, Chris had central heat provided by a large, coal-fired furnace, hot water, and iron radiators, while his sister, Stinne, was still stoking the stoves of Munkholmgaard with peat from a nearby bog. Gaslight fixtures were installed throughout the house on Pleasant Street but were wired for electricity, which became available within a couple of years. Then the gas was turned off and the electric lights switched on. Jennie also had a gas stove and oven in the kitchen, as well as the usual wood-fired cook stove, and she had a gas-powered mangle iron that she continued to hook up to a gas jet for the rest of her life, lighting it with a match and using it to mangle clothes. This was life in a modern American home in 1906.

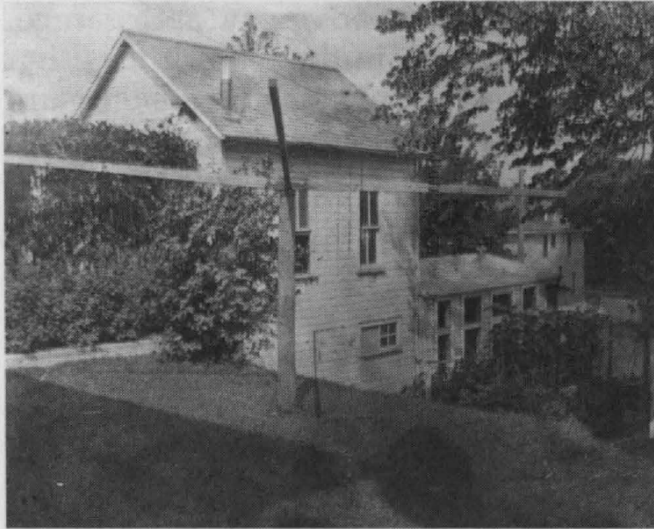


Although the lot looked perfectly flat from the front, it fell off sharply in the back. The site was graded into a gently sloping lower yard, separated from the house and the front yard by a steep bank and held above the alley in the rear by a four-foot concrete retaining wall erected in 1907. On the alley side, Chris built an ornamental picket fence along the top of the retaining wall, with an ornamental gate that never opened because of the four-foot drop.

On the left or west side of the lower back yard, a two-story "barn" was built in 1907 with a heated workshop in the upper level, a potting room and garden storage below, and a low chicken coop at the far end. Raising fowl in town was a common practice in those days. An early photo taken from the upper level of the lot shows a rotary rack for drying clothes in the foreground and what looks like a berry patch in front of the chicken coop on the lower level.

Chris had many hobbies, including carpentry and woodworking. In the early years, he raised purebred Plymouth Rocks and other prize poultry. He entered them in state and local competitions and won several cups and blue ribbons. Among the surviving ribbons are a first premium cockerel from the Breeders and Fanciers Association of Minnesota in 1912, first premium

cockerel in 1913, first premium hen, pullet, cock and cockerel in 1914, two first prizes and a second of the Minnesota Fanciers' Association in 1914, and two undated champion hen, two champion cockerel, and one champion pullet from the American Partridge Plymouth Rock Club.¹⁶ In time, however, Chris developed other hobbies, and the chicken coop grounds were put to other uses, including a large garden composting area.

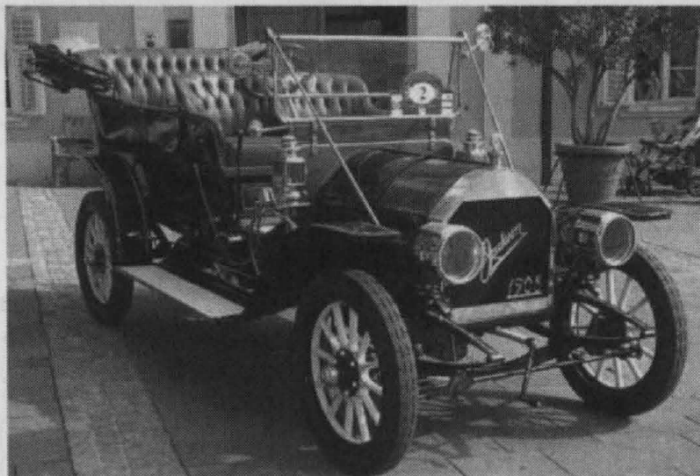


The barn and chicken coop, ca. 1908



Birdhouse & tower

Around 1908, Chris bought a big, red Jackson automobile with brass carbide lights and an open top. A garage was built in the barn on the upper level of the yard, with a driveway from Pleasant Street along the west side of the house. A privet hedge ran along both sides of the lot and was eventually pruned to shoulder height.



Royal Feltner website, <<http://www.earlyamericanautomobile.com/autos5.htm>> (15.01.2010)

1908 Jackson Touring Car

Inveterate hobbyist that he was, Chris built a high tower and birdhouse on the roof of the garage, for he was also a birdwatcher. He erected a pergola over the garage door and planted concord

grape vines. During the summer, we grandchildren used to admire the clusters of purple grapes hanging from this arbor, and in the fall, our grandmother, Jennie, used the grapes to make wine.

The home became a mixture of Danish and American elements. The two-story white frame house was definitely American in style and had many features that would not have been found in a Danish farmhouse: wooden frame construction in two stories over a high cellar, front and back stairs, a screened front porch, attic space for hanging the washing in the winter, even a driveway and garage. The garden layout, however, was definitely in the Danish tradition and drew on age-old patterns as well as the new fashion for pleasure gardens like the one of Chris's sister at Munkholmgaard.



The Peterson home at 214 Pleasant Street, ca. 1910

Danish Traditions in the Back Yard, American Look in Front

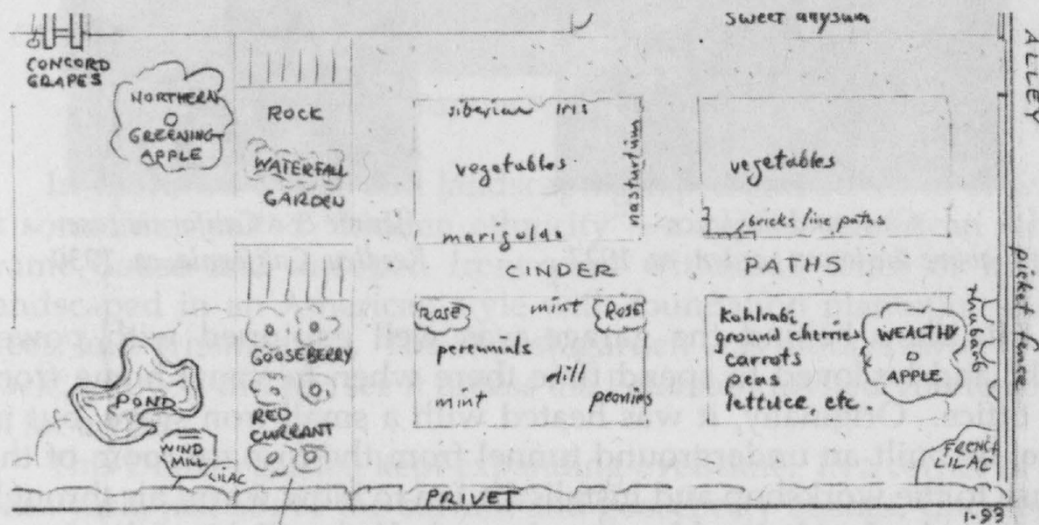
By the kitchen door on the garage side in back, Jennie planted her kitchen herbs and a few hollyhocks, as at many a Danish farmhouse. Her main vegetable garden was on the lower level of the back yard. A concrete stairway along the side of the garage led down to the potting room, while steps from the middle of the yard led directly to the garden. Paths divided the garden into four rectangular beds in the traditional Danish way. In Jennie's garden, the paths were of cinders that crunched underfoot, and they were lined with bricks. Chris had grown up with a similar garden at Ramskovgaard. Jennie's parents had done so as well in Hvejsel Parish, and they may have laid out their Iowa garden in the same

way. Jennie probably knew this style of garden layout from her childhood.

Jennie liked to border her vegetables beds with flowers, as many Danish farming women did. She used marigolds and nasturtiums for their repellent properties but also planted ornamental perennials in the borders, including roses, peonies, and Siberian iris. In one of her four beds, she raised mint, dill, parsley, and other herbs, as well as perennial flowers. In the other three beds, she raised common cool weather vegetables like beets, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, peas, radishes, spinach, and kohlrabi, as well as warm weather vegetables like beans, cucumbers, tomatoes, and ground cherries. Chris built a cold frame to give an earlier start to some long-season plants.

There was not room for an orchard on a city lot, but Chris did plant a two apple trees, a Greening on the upper level, close to the house and above the rock garden, and a Wealthy at the far end of the lower garden, where it would not shade the vegetable beds.

A good photo of Jennie's vegetable garden was not available, but her daughter, Marian, helped to prepare this sketch of the layout in 1993.

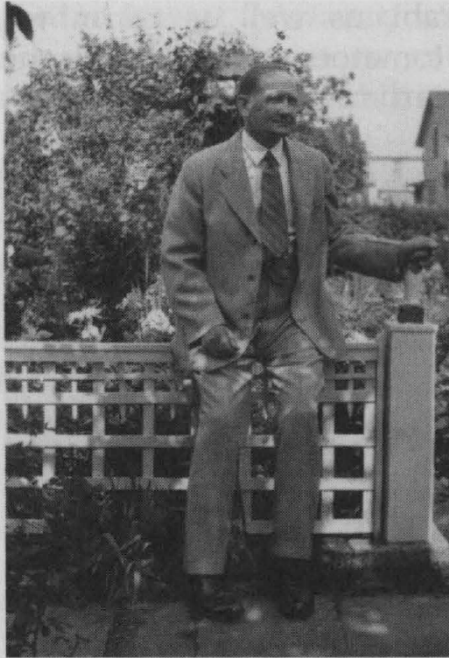


On the north-facing slope between the two levels of the yard, red currant and gooseberry bushes were planted on the eastern side (bottom in the sketch). On the other side, between the two sidewalks going down this slope, Chris built an elaborate rock garden with a series of cascades between small cement basins on this shady patch of hillside, which was planted with ferns, moss, and wildflowers.

When grandchildren came to visit, Chris went first of all to the rhubarb bed at the top of the slope and pulled a stalk of rhubarb for each child. Then, as they stood on the middle stairs and chewed their rhubarb, he went to the faucet on the side of the garage, turned it on, and caused the waterfall to bubble down through the rock

garden from basin to basin, to the constant pleasure of the young ones.

Chris loved to read magazines like *Popular Science* and *Popular Mechanics* in search of new projects, including improvements in garden ornamentation. In the 1920s, he built an ornamental fence along the upper edge of the slope between the two levels of the yard. He was photographed seated on it around 1927, with the lower garden level barely visible behind him.



*Chris and the fence
above the lower garden, ca. 1927*



*Jennie & a California rose
Reedley, California, ca. 1930*

His shop behind the garage was well equipped with power tools, and he loved to spend time there when he came home from the office. Originally, it was heated with a small iron stove, but in time, he built an underground tunnel from the furnace room of the house to the workshop and installed a fan to blow warm air through the tunnel. Jennie could come down half the flight of basement stairs and call to him through the tunnel when supper was ready. His projects were endless: walnut furniture for the house, two duck boats, a motor launch for fishing at their Lake Madison cottage, and of course fences, structures, bird houses, and other ornaments for the yard.

If you were walking down Pleasant Street in the 1930s and looked at the Peterson house, you would probably not notice anything that looked especially Danish, either in the house or in the front yard. Immigrants generally preferred not to put their ethnicity on public display in those years between the two world wars. The architecture and landscaping of the Peterson house were typical of a two-story

Midwestern house of the early twentieth century. The front screen porch was enclosed by the 1930s, and a portico was added over the entrance, but some other houses in the neighborhood also had enclosed porches. The foundation plantings of perennials were typically American, and so were the trees and shrubs: spirea on either side of the entrance, an ornamental catalpa and a green spruce as specimen trees, and an elm for shade on the boulevard.



The Peterson house on Pleasant Street, ca. 1935

In short, the house and landscaping represented a form of what is sometimes called “hidden ethnicity”—a typical American white frame house and an open front yard without a fence or hedge, landscaped in an American style with foundation plantings, shade trees, and ornamentals. The Danish garden was hidden away in the back, and you did not see it unless the Petersons invited you to come in for a visit.

This Danish garden kept expanding over time. In a corner of the back yard, just above the currant and gooseberry bushes, Chris built a goldfish pond. He and Jennie filled the area around the pond with a rich array of perennials, including bleeding heart, peonies, iris, and some annuals. Grandchildren from the Christianson, Peterson, Sogard, and Mueller families loved stand by the pond and watch the goldfish dart through the water plants. Like the rock garden hidden on the slope, this area was reminiscent of the Romantic garden of Chris’s sister, Stinne, and her husband, Jesper, at Munkholmgaard. In 1947, one of the Munkholm sons visited Mankato with his wife. By then, Chris had added a clear symbol of Danish ethnicity: a miniature windmill. He built it with a door that opened to a dark interior, providing one more garden adventure for visiting grandchildren.

All the parts of a traditional rural Danish garden and orchard were here, crowded together and hidden away in the back yard of what looked like an ordinary American family home: the four rectangular garden plots and paths in the Danish medieval tradition, a couple of apple trees representing the orchard, a berry patch, even a grape arbour, a poultry yard for a time, and Romantic features that included a goldfish pond, waterfall, rock garden, perennial garden packed with plants, ornamental fences and gates, a birdhouse on a tower, and a miniature windmill. Gardeners liked to go all out in Denmark as well as in Danish America in the era between the two world wars, and my grandparents were among them.



Wanita Sogard by the pond, ca. 1937



Chris & Mela Munkholm, 1947

Gardens as Eden in Jutland, California, and an Artist's Vision

All except one of Chris's siblings visited the home on Pleasant Street in Mankato at one time or another. Several of them were enthusiastic gardeners in their own right, and they were scattered to many climate zones. They adapted to local conditions and traditions, kept up with the latest trends in gardening and landscape design, but never forgot their memories of childhood gardening at Ramskovgaard. They never lost the love of gardening they had learned from their mother.

Stinne and Jesper Munkholm visited her siblings in America early in the twentieth century. A generation later in 1947, their oldest son visited with his Austrian wife, Mela. Stinne corresponded with her siblings for decades and sent photographs of Munkholm, her family, and her garden.

Chris's brother, John, had a general store in Randall, Iowa. He was an avid conservationist who maintained a large vegetable garden and planted trees all over his little prairie community. He was married to Jennie's sister, and the two families kept in close contact.

Another brother, Hans, immigrated first to the Randall, Iowa, area and married a Danish American but then, they headed west and became fruit growers in Reedley near Fresno, California.¹⁷ They lived in a California-style ranch house surrounded by palm trees and broad acres of orchard crops, including apples, pears, peaches, plums, apricots, figs, lemons, and many varieties of table, raisin, and wine grapes. This California experience represented gardening expanded into a large-scale commercial enterprise, and Hans was very successful at it. He corresponded regularly with his siblings and sent them fruit from his ranches every year. Chris and Jennie visited Hans and his wife, Mary, around 1930 and were astonished by the great variety of fruit, flowers, and other perennials, that could be grown in the San Joaquin Valley in those days when water for irrigation was plentiful.



Hans Peterson digging in his yard while Crislyne Peterson watches, ca. 1950

The youngest sister, Mathilde, came to America in 1904, married, and lived for a number of years in the Danish-American community of Ringsted, Iowa, later in Chicago. She also kept in contact with her siblings, but little is known about her gardening practices.

Finally, the eldest of the siblings, Hans Gyde-Petersen (1862-1943), was a landscape painter who saw nature not so much as something to cultivate by farming or gardening, but rather, as the object of an artist's vision and creativity. He was briefly married, twice, but lived as a bachelor for most of his life, residing in a number of idyllic locations including Skagen and Munkebjerg in Jutland, Nyhavn and St. Jørgen's Lake in Copenhagen, and the shores of Vejlesø in Holte, north of Copenhagen.

As time passed, he was drawn more and more to the classic Danish landscapes of the large Deer Park (*Dyrehaven*) in northern

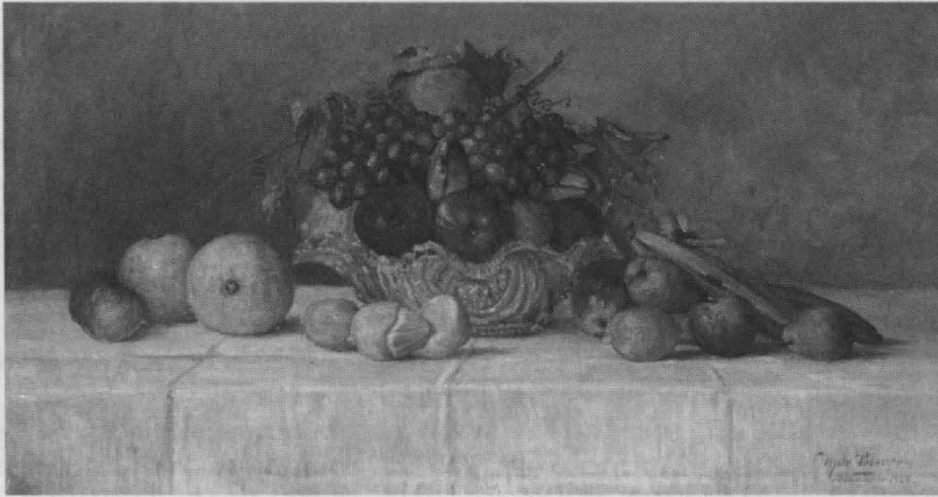
Sjælland, where dozens of other landscape artists also painted. In 1913, he helped to organize them into an organization called *Dyrehavens Malere* (Deer Park Painters Guild) and served as its first president. Around 1923, he settled in Klampenborg on the edge of Dyrehaven and spent the remaining twenty years of his life painting *plein air* landscapes in the vast park in all kinds of weather. The day's work at the easel was often broken by long, festive lunches at Peter Liep's Hus, the picturesque inn on the edge of the park. Dozens of landscape artists congregated there, lunched together, enjoyed their beer and snaps, conducted the affairs of *Dyrehavens Malere*, and planned their annual exhibits.



Hans Gyde-Petersen on the way to paint in Dyrehaven

Early in his Klampenborg years, Gyde-Petersen took an extended trip to America in 1924-26. He visited his siblings and was especially taken with the Mankato and Reedley areas, painting a number of landscapes in and around both places.¹⁸

He also expressed his fascination with the fruits of the garden when a box arrived in Mankato, where he was staying with Chris and Jennie, from their brother, Hans, in California. Gyde-Petersen was so taken with the abundance of colors, tastes, and aromas pouring out of the box that he decided to postpone his painting in the *plein air* for a time and do a still life of the fruit, adding a banana or two from the pantry. The painting that resulted was hung in the dining room of Chris and Jennie's house as an image of the abundance of nature. It never failed to draw my admiration when I visited my grandparents' home as a child.



Hans Gyde-Petersen, *Bowl of Fruit*. Oil on canvas. Mankato, 1924

With Gyde-Petersen, we have come to the end of the story. The gardening traditions of eastern Jutland that Maren Gydesen (1837-1903), the wife of Jens Christian Pedersen Ramschou, taught to her children at Ramskovgaard were scattered far and wide in the generation of those children. At Munkholmgaard, they produced a Romantic pleasure garden that made a traditional farmhouse into an "Eden on the moor." In Mankato, Minnesota, they produced a backyard of an American family home that contained all the elements of a traditional Danish garden, rearranged and adapted to a Midwestern urban setting. In California, they expanded into acre upon acre of orchards and vineyards. And in Klampenborg on the northern edge of Copenhagen, they produced landscapes in oil paints on canvas that created hundreds of visual variations on the theme of a Danish Eden.

¹ J. R. Christianson, "Scandinavia and the Prairie School: Chicago Landscape Artist Jens Jensen" *The Bridge* 1986, 5/2: 5-18. Robert E. Grese, *Jens Jensen: Maker of Natural Parks and Gardens* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). Penelope Hobhouse, *Gardening Through the Ages* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 299-301 and 310-11 discusses Jensen's contribution to world gardening traditions. Another eminent Danish-American figure in agriculture was James Madison (1859-1927), born Jens Madsen in Hviding near Ribe, Denmark. He was the driving force in establishing a Scandinavian-American raisin-producing cooperative that grew into the Sun-Maid Growers of California, today the world's largest processor of raisins and dried fruits. See Erik Helmer Pedersen, *Drømmen om Amerika* (Copenhagen: Politikens Forlag, 1985), 202-05.

² Thanks to my brother, Paul Christianson of Kingston, Ontario, for helpful comments and additions to the manuscript of this article.

³ See the letter written to relatives in Denmark by her father on 26 December 1868 in *The Bridge* 2002, 25/2: 15-35.

⁴ See his autobiography in *The Bridge* 2002, 25/2: 36-49.

- ⁵ On the vicarage garden, see Pierre Anglade, ed., *Larousse Gardening and Gardens* (New York: Facts On File, 1990), 81-83.
- ⁶ Mette Skougaard, Helle Thordur Hansen & Mona Rasmussen, *Bondens have: Bondehavnernes udformning dyrkning og anvendelse i 1800-årene* (Copenhagen: Nationalmuseet, 1984) gives a concise overview. See also the sections on "Kvindens ager," "Den duftende have," "Humlegården," and "Bier og honning" in Ole Højrup, *Landbokvinden: Rok og kærne, grovbrød og vadmæl* (Copenhagen: Nationalmuseet, 1972), 13-63.
- ⁷ Peter Michelsen, *Frilandsmuseet ved Sorgenfri: Museets historie og gamle huse* (Copenhagen: Nationalmuseet, 1973). For a general introduction to the museum in English, see <<http://www.nationalmuseet.dk/sw20384.asp>> (accessed 4.03.2010). For more detailed information on individual gardens in Danish, see <<http://www.natmus.dk/sw4700.asp>> (4.03.2010).
- ⁸ Marie-Louise Wanscher & Kirsten Rykind-Eriksen, "To herregårdshaver," *Vejle amts årbog* 2007, 77-99, describe the gardens of Engelsholm and Tirsbæk, two manors in Vejle Amt. Ellen Andersen, *En jysk herregård* (Copenhagen: Nationalmuseet, 1983), 57-69, describes the park, orchard, and kitchen garden of Serridslevgaard, a manor house near Horsens, in the early twentieth century.
- ⁹ John Robert Christianson, "Gyde-Petersen, A Skagen Artist in America," *The Bridge* 2006, 29/1: 264-77. For a biography and museum holdings list of Gyde-Petersen, see *Kunstindeks Danmark & Weilbachs Kunstnerleksikon* at <<http://www.kulturarv.dk/kid/VisKunstner.do?kunstnerId=868>> (accessed 4.12.2009).
- ¹⁰ V. Hedegaard Thomsen, "En berømt Vejle-maler, i hundredaaret for Hans Gyde Petersens Død," *Vejle Amts Folkblad*, 10 November 1962, translated by J. R. Christianson.
- ¹¹ J. R. Christianson, ed., "Becoming American: The Autobiography of C. P. Peterson, D. D. S.," *The Bridge* 2002, 25/2: 99.
- ¹² Christian Poul Christiansen, "From Vejle Amt to Iowa in 1868: An Immigrant's Christmas Letter," *The Bridge* 2002, 25/2: 20-21.
- ¹³ Sine Jensen was born 1819 as Lausine Jensdatter on her family's farm in Tofthøj, Gadbjerg Parish, and lived in the Christianson household for half a century.
- ¹⁴ Jennie's paternal grandmother grew up on Skovgaard manor in Kollerup, and her father's aunts lived on Hammergaard and Tammestrup manors. Mindstrup manor in Hvejsel had been in her mother's family.
- ¹⁵ The Mankato neighborhood around Pleasant Grove School later served as the setting for the Betsy-Tacy stories by Maud Hart Lovelace, and H. C. Gerlach was her model for the father of Tib, the third girl in a circle of friends. See Sharla S. Whalen, *The Betsy-Tacy Companion* (Whitehall PA: Portalington Press, 1995).
- ¹⁶ The ribbons are in the possession of the author. None of the championship cups have survived.
- ¹⁷ Marianne T. Stecher, "Danish Settlement in Fresno County, California: An Example of Acculturation to a Foreign Environment, 1880-1920," *The Bridge* 1981, 6: 8-21, sketches the agricultural practices of Fresno County and describes three paths of migration to the area from Denmark: directly from Denmark, from German-occupied Schleswig, or from the Midwest.
- ¹⁸ John Robert Christianson, "Gyde-Petersen, A Skagen Artist in America," *The Bridge* 2006, 29/2: 264-77 and images 1-11 between pages 190-91.