Editorial Statement

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When children in US schools learn about famous trailblazers and heroes, few Danes or Danish Americans appear in the curriculum. Although they included the voyages of Christopher Columbus and the discovery of the double-helix structure of DNA by the Englishmen Francis Crick and James Watson, my children’s history classes never covered the classic Danish children’s song *Jeg vil synge om en helt* about Peter Tordenskjold (1691-1720), the famous—albeit short-lived—Dano-Norwegian naval hero who destroyed the supply fleet of Charles XII of Sweden at the Battle of Dynekilen, which caused the Swedish siege of the Norwegian fortress of Frederiksten to fail. They probably heard in physics class about Niels Bohr’s contributions to understanding atomic structure and quantum theory, but not about his experiences of the tumultuous period of Danish history in which he lived, including the shift to a truly representative democracy, the rise of the Danish welfare state, the German occupation of Denmark, and the birth of a new world order in the aftermath of World War II.

Fortunately, one of the great benefits of this journal’s focus on Danish and Danish American history is giving our readers the chance to learn about the many people of Danish ancestry who lived adventurous, noteworthy lives. In hopes of bolstering our readers’ courage in this tense, uncertain time, with the Covid-19 pandemic still raging across the globe, this issue of *The Bridge* highlights some of these brave pioneering Danes and Danish Americans. To get us started, our first article takes us back to the Danish Renaissance, to focus on the Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe. John Robert Christianson shares a few of the fascinating things he has learned in a lifetime of research and writing about Brahe, whose meticulous observations of the skies above Hven underlie our modern understanding of our planet’s place in the universe.

The next three articles deal with a period and area of history more familiar to most of our readers, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Danish immigration to the United States, but from very different, equally compelling angles. First, Jim Lewis offers curated excerpts from his book *Unsung Pioneers* to illuminate the lives, challenges, and triumphs of his own Danish American ancestors on the prairies of South Dakota, while Frans Ørsted Andersen takes a deep dive into the exploits and accomplishments of Chris Madsen, a Danish American who overcame a troubled youth to become a deputy US marshal and
Wild West legend. In our fourth article, museum director Flemming Just focuses our attention on the Danish American photojournalist and social reformer Jacob A. Riis, whose unflinching depictions of the poverty and misery of the slums of New York helped bring about meaningful public policy changes to protect American and immigrant lives.

The last article in this issue begins to tell a story that has been largely forgotten but deserves to be rediscovered. With the support of a DAHS Bodtker grant, Bjarne S. Bendtsen was able to dig into the archival record to recover the story of many of the Danish Americans who fought in the US Army and Navy during World War I. While recent books, for example by Anders Bo Rasmussen, have drawn attention to the contributions of Danish American in the Civil War and others to the plight of Danish-speaking Slesvigians forced to serve in the German army during World War I, both Danish and American historians have largely overlooked the thousands of Danish Americans who chose to defend the cause of freedom and put their lives on the line for their (or their parents') adopted homeland. As impressive as Bendtsen's article in this issue is, the author is just at the beginning of his research, so he welcomes any information or leads that our readers might have about the personal histories and private letters of these heroic Danish American doughboys.

This issue also features one book review, by Troy Wellington Smith, of an exciting new volume that contextualizes the Danish literary canon within a world literature context, which illuminates the role of Danish trailblazers in soft power contexts. Aarhus University professors Mads Rosendahl Thomsen and Dan Ringgaard have compiled an anthology of articles about how major Danish literary figures and products, from Saxo Grammaticus to Nordic Noir, interacted with the wider world at the time of their creation and have moved in international circles ever since. We hope that you’ll enjoy this sneak peek into that impressive volume as well.

Due to the pandemic, the Danish American Heritage Society has had to cancel our planned conference in Seattle in May 2021. Instead, while we work on planning a conference in 2022 to celebrate the forty-fifth anniversary of the DAHS, we will also be sponsoring several panels on our original conference theme, “Traditions and Transitions: Ways of Being Danish,” as part of the virtual annual meeting of the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study. Those talks will be made available online to DAHS members in May 2021.