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Submission Guidelines for The Bridge

The Bridge: Journal of the Danish American Heritage Society appears twice a year and contains articles and book reviews dealing with all aspects of Danish and Danish American culture, literature, and history, particularly the Danish experience in North America. Manuscripts can be more scholarly or more popular in style, but all articles should demonstrate critical reflection and responsible scholarly practice.

Past issues of The Bridge have also contained Danish American memoirs, essays, short stories, collections of letters, and historical documents. Book reviews and review essays in The Bridge deal with Danish life and history and the broader Scandinavian experience in North America as well as the Danish American experience. The Bridge occasionally reprints previously published material.

Manuscript submissions should conform to the Chicago Manual of Style. Please submit an electronic version of the manuscript file via the "Submit Article" link located in the left margin of the web page: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/thebridge, or as an attachment via email in MS Word or Open Office, with illustrations in a separate file, to Julie K. Allen, editor of The Bridge, at julie_allen@byu.edu. It is the author’s responsibility to obtain permission to publish any illustrations included in an article. Please include a brief, fifty- to one-hundred-word author’s biography suitable for the journal’s “Contributors to This Issue” section.

All manuscripts are reviewed by the editor in consultation with the associate editor. However, there is an option to have manuscripts peer-reviewed. Authors who want to have their articles subject to double-blind peer review should indicate this at the time of submission. Accepted peer-reviewed articles will be identified as such in the published issue of The Bridge in which they appear.

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Editorial Statement

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 Slesvigiens 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.
Contributors to this Issue
(in alphabetical order)

Frans Ørsted Andersen is an associate professor, PhD, in the School of Education at Aarhus University, Denmark. He works in Aarhus but lives in Odense. He graduated from Aarhus University in the 1990s with a double major in psychology and education. Around the turn of the century he did part of his PhD program at the Quality of Life Research Center, Claremont Graduate University in California. In 2016-18 he participated in a project, run by the Danish Ministry of Culture, for which he wrote and published a biography (in Danish) of the Danish American Chris Madsen: *Et liv på kanten. En biografisk fortælling om Chris Madsens utrolige liv* (2018). Other publications on Chris Madsen followed, including teaching materials freely available for all at https://padlet.com/ammd/chrismadsen. Frans continues with his Chris Madsen studies, cooperating with both Danish and American colleagues, with the aim of publishing a new thorough, comprehensive biography of Chris Madsen in English with Aarhus University Press in cooperation with Nebraska University Press in 2024. Frans is married to Annemette Jeppesen, who is a schoolteacher, and together they have two children, Kasper (36) and Karen (31). Kasper is a hospital doctor in Copenhagen, while Karen is known, both in Denmark and the US, as the pop singer “MØ” (mo).

Bjarne S. Bendtsen (born 1970) is a high school teacher at Odder Gymnasium, near Aarhus, Denmark, where he teaches Danish and English. He has an MA in Scandinavian languages and literature and English from Aarhus University and received his PhD in history from the University of Southern Denmark, Odense, in 2011. He taught in the history department at Aarhus University before becoming a full-time high school teacher. He has published numerous articles on different aspects of World War I. *Mellem fronterne: Første Verdenskrigs aftryk i dansk litteratur og kultur 1914-1939* (Aarhus: Klim, 2018) is his first book.

John Robert Christianson is professor emeritus of history at Luther College, where he taught for thirty years. He was the editor of *The Bridge* from 1998-2003 and 2009-10. He has worked as an author, editor, and translator of various works of Scandinavian and Scandina-
vian American history, including Scandinavians in America: Literary Life (1985) and On Tycho’s Island: Tycho Brahe and His Assistants, 1570-1601 (1999). He has served as a member of the executive board of both the Danish American Heritage Society and the Norwegian American Historical Association, as well as assistant director for academic relations of Vesterheim, the Norwegian American Museum in Decorah, Iowa. His new biography, Tycho Brahe and the Measure of the Heavens (Reaktion Books, 2020), with ninety-eight illustrations, fifty-nine in color, is available in bookstores and on Amazon.com for $22.50 (hardcover).

Flemming Just (born 1957), has been the director of the Museum of Southwest Jutland in Ribe, Denmark since 2011. Before that, he was a professor of contemporary history at the University of Southern Denmark. He is still an honorary professor and is chairman of the Association of Danish Museums. His fields of research include the cooperative movement, Danish and European agricultural policy, and the relationship between organizations and government. As museum director his research focuses on Jacob A. Riis and museology.

Jim Lewis was born and raised in Sioux Falls. He joined the US Army immediately following graduation in 1964 and spent the next thirty-three years in the military in one form or another. His business career was in engineering, and he continues to do consulting work for companies interested in improving productivity. He has always enjoyed writing and was a contributing editor for a business publication for seventeen years. So far, he has ten published works, split between business and inspirational books. He currently lives in Michigan with his wife, Pat. They enjoy travelling, especially in the winter. He is a father of four, grandfather, and great-grandfather. Jim and Pat have made three trips to Denmark and are planning on returning for a family reunion at some point in 2021. The countryside around the area where his great-grandfather grew up is breathtaking. The Norgaard farm northeast of Aalborg is still occupied and mostly unchanged. The current owners have been very gracious and welcoming. Visiting there is like stepping back in time.

Troy Wellington Smith is a PhD candidate in the Department of Scandinavian at the University of California, Berkeley, where he has taught reading and composition courses on Hans Christian Andersen and the Danish Golden Age, and an elective on Kierkegaard. He has
been a visiting researcher at the Søren Kierkegaard Centre of the University of Copenhagen, and a Summer Fellow at the Hong Kierkegaard Library of St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota. He spent winter semester 2019–20 in Germany as a UCB Institute of European Studies Fellow at the University of Greifswald.
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Today, we are constantly using data; some even say that we live in an Age of Data. Most of us hardly realize that a Danish astronomer set the whole process in motion more than four hundred years ago. Tycho Brahe (1546-1601) changed the world with his innovative approach to astronomy and observational data. My interest in him started with a college term paper and eventually led to writing and editing books and articles about his life and work in Renaissance Denmark. This research led me to develop new interpretations of his revolutionary approach to understanding the heavens and the natural world.  

Tycho’s discoveries came at a crucial time in history, when the entire world was becoming more interconnected than ever before. The Renaissance was an exciting time to be alive. New knowledge and new perspectives sprang to life from the achievements of Renaissance innovators like Columbus, Copernicus, Gutenberg, Luther, da Vinci, and Michelangelo. Their names are household names to this day – but what about Tycho Brahe? Who has ever heard of him outside of Denmark?  

In order to imagine Denmark in that distant time, it helps to think of three famous Danish castles. If you have visited Denmark, you have probably seen Rosenborg Castle in the center of modern Copenhagen, Frederiksborg Castle rising from a lake in Hillerød, or Kronborg Castle guarding the entrance to the Baltic in Helsingør, maybe even all three of them. These castles were built between 1550 and 1650, during the heyday of the Renaissance in Denmark. Imagine what these castles were like when they were new and full of life, swarming with all the energy of a mighty Danish court. Kronborg and Frederiksborg in particular were the power centers and cultural showplaces of a Danish empire that included Greenland, Iceland, and Norway, and extended down into Germany and out to the edge of Russia. The Danish royal castles were connected to the very planets and stars by their statues of Mars, Venus, Jupiter, and other celestial gods. The royal astrologer
was the one who interpreted these connections and read the stars to foretell the future.

When you think of all that, you're envisioning Renaissance life in Denmark. It was not the Italian Renaissance of Venice or Florence, but a Danish Renaissance centered on the courts of King Frederik II (reigned 1559-88) and his son, King Christian IV (reigned 1588-1648). We can still step into the Danish Renaissance when we visit these castles. Sadly, however, one of the greatest monuments of the Danish Renaissance, perhaps the greatest of them all in terms of its lasting influence, is gone forever. This was Uraniborg on the island of Hven, the palace and observatory of Tycho Brahe, the Danish court astronomer. My most recent book, *Tycho Brahe and the Measure of the Heavens*, describes what Renaissance life was like at Uraniborg and what makes Tycho Brahe’s achievement so important in the history of the world.

Tycho Brahe was born to wealth and privilege in one of Denmark’s most powerful noble families. His ancestors had been courtiers and commanders of castles for time out of mind. Among the ancestral coats of arms around his portrait were famous families like Rosenkrantz and Gyldenstierne, mentioned in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, and even the royal Swedish house of Vasa. Tycho Brahe’s four younger brothers all followed the path of their illustrious ancestors. They learned courtesy at foreign courts and fought as armored knights on European battlefields before coming home to serve the Danish crown in high offices. Tycho was the
oldest of the five brothers, but he was the rebel. He did not want to be a courtier and governor of great royal castles. He wanted to be an astronomer. This choice puzzled most of his aristocratic relatives, but his younger sister Sophie Brahe (1559-1643) shared his love of astronomy, chemistry, and gardening; she even worked as his assistant in observing the stars.²

King Frederik II also understood Tycho’s passion and liked his ideas. Every Renaissance monarch longed for an astrologer who could see into the future and predict the fates of rulers and kingdoms, and King Frederik knew that every astronomer was an astrologer. In 1576, he put Tycho in charge of the little island of Hven, which he could see from a tower window at Kronborg Castle, and commanded him to build a royal observatory there. From this base, he wanted Tycho to study the stars, become famous as an astronomer, and also serve as the king’s astrologer. Why should Danes have to travel to Germany or Italy or England to learn about things like astronomy, King Frederik asked Tycho. Instead, people of other nations who wanted to know about such things should come to Denmark to see and learn that which they could hardly find elsewhere.
And so, they did. On his little island, Tycho Brahe built Uraniborg to serve as his combined palace, observatory, laboratory, and research center. It was the first modern observatory in the world and became a model for the observatories of Paris and Beijing nearly a century later, and for the Greenwich Observatory exactly one hundred years later. Uraniborg was the place where modern observational astronomy began.

Uraniborg was a lively place. The royal astrologer directed a large staff of astronomers, instrument makers, keen-eyed observers, calculators, natural philosophers, chemists, and cartographers. Since this was the Renaissance, his staff also included classical scholars, artists, poets, historians, musicians, and a prophetic dwarf jester. When the day’s work was done and before the night’s work of observing began, they would gather for supper around a long table and review the day and the coming night together. Sometimes it ended with wine, music, song, and dance. Other times, to make his astronomical observations more challenging and fun on cold winter nights, Tycho set up two or three teams of observers and had them observe the same star to see which team could get the best results. No matter who won, there would always be more celebration.

On occasion, when princely guests arrived, elaborate Renaissance entertainments were staged. Frederik II’s much younger wife, Queen Sophie, came on two occasions with all her court, headed by her lady-in-waiting Beate Bille, Tycho’s own mother. The Duke and Duchess of Mecklenburg visited with their nephew and attendants. In 1582, the English ambassador came to bestow the Order of the Garter on King Frederik II at Kronborg Castle and then sailed over to visit Uraniborg. Other guests included the King of Scotland and his court, the Duke of Braunschweig with his court, and the list goes on.

Tycho’s career unfolded a full generation before Galileo discovered the telescope. Tycho and his teams had to observe the stars with the naked eye, without the benefit of magnification. Tycho wanted his assistants to achieve the highest possible accuracy under those circumstances, and he put a priority on developing new methods of observation and verification. The better the methods, the more precise the results. This challenge stimulated Tycho Brahe to develop concepts never before used in astronomy or any other science.
Many astronomers had preceded Tycho Brahe, all the way back to ancient Babylon and Egypt, not to mention Greece, China, the Muslims, and the Mayans. They had compiled many observations of the sun, moon, planets, comets, and stars over the centuries. They wrote down their observations or borrowed from others and assumed that they were accurate. Each observation was a record of a celestial position within a given reference grid at a given time. However, none of these earlier astronomers had ever dealt with the problem of verifying their observations. Tycho Brahe was the first person in the history of science to face this problem and develop methods for establishing limits of accuracy and verifying the accuracy of observations within those limits.

His innovative approach began with remarkable simplicity. Tycho liked to repeat the same observation over and over again, simply because he loved to observe the stars. When he did so, he expected the results to be the same, but he soon discovered that they varied, which led him to wonder what went wrong. Did the problem lie in the instrument he was using? Did it lie in his method of observing? Had he simply made a mistake? Had something changed in the object he was observing? Tycho began to add new steps to the process of observing nature in order to answer these and similar questions. This eventually left him with a pile of data that he needed to reduce to a verified result. In the end, his new approach allowed him to replace the single, unverified location for a given star accepted by earlier astronomers with a whole data set that established the location of that one star within stated limits of accuracy. He used the same methods to produce verified positions of a thousand other stars, as well as the
planets, sun, and moon. Tycho Brahe’s new methods of observation and data reduction laid the foundation for exact empirical science.

My new biography of Tycho Brahe is rather short, but it deals with his methods more fully than ever before. Seventeenth-century scientists built on the foundation of these new methods, starting with Tycho’s former assistant, Johannes Kepler, who was able to work out his three laws of planetary motion because he used Tycho’s data and knew the limits of accuracy Tycho had established for this data. The new foundation has endured. Ever since Tycho Brahe, scientists have known that data needs to be verified to establish its limits of accuracy, but few of them realize that they owe that fundamental awareness—and some basic principles for achieving it—to a Danish astronomer named Tycho Brahe.

His insights still have modern implications, but Tycho was not a modern person. He was a Renaissance man, and he thought with a Renaissance mind. He believed that God had created the divine geometry of the universe, and that an understanding of this geometry of celestial motion would ultimately reveal the mind of the Creator. To know the mind of God was why he studied the stars. In the Renaissance, other natural philosophers thought as he did, but their thinking did not lead them to the results that Tycho achieved. His breakthrough emerged from applying the mindset of the Renaissance in a unique way, yet, ultimately, it helped to destroy that mindset forever.

Tycho Brahe also lived the lavish lifestyle of a Danish Renaissance aristocrat, attending the court of King Frederick II and King Christian IV at Frederiksborg Castle, helping the royal architects design Kronborg Castle, building his own palace and immense observational apparatus, experimenting with Paracelsian chemistry, writing Latin epigrams, enjoying royal festivals at court, promoting the music of Italian motets and Danish ballads, banqueting and savoring Renaissance life with colleagues, friends, and highborn guests. My biography goes on to cover the rest of Tycho Brahe’s eventful life after he left Denmark and came to the court of the Holy Roman Emperor in Prague, where he died and was buried in 1601. I was able to discover what happened to his descendants and show that some of them still continue to live distinguished lives far from Denmark.
In 2013, Luisa Cifarelli of Bologna University, one of Europe’s leading nuclear physicists and the first woman president of the European Physical Society (EPS), acknowledged the importance of Tycho Brahe’s work in the history of modern astrophysics. She came to Hven with a host of other European dignitaries in order to designate the site of Uraniborg as an EPS Historic Site. None of Tycho Brahe’s immense observational instruments have survived, but she and the others were able to enter the ruins of the site where those instruments once stood. It is now a part of the Tycho Brahe Museum, documenting the life and work of this important Danish trailblazer. Tycho Brahe did not live in vain. His innovative approach to observational data helped to change the world.

Endnotes


2 John Robert Christianson, “Tycho Brahe and Sophie Brahe: Gender and Science in the Late Sixteenth Century,” in Christianson et al., eds., Tycho Brahe and Prague, 30-45.
Remembering Our Unsung Pioneer Ancestors

by
Jim Lewis

My great-grandparents, Niels Jensen Norgaard (1848-1920) and Karen Sorensen Norgaard (1852-1949) immigrated to America in 1869 and 1871, respectively. They had both been raised in the Aalborg area of northern Jutland. Niels left his family and a comfortable home at the age of twenty to travel alone to a new, yet unknown, destination. His immediate objective was Harlan, Iowa, where relatives had a farm. It was twelve hundred miles across unfamiliar land between New York City and Harlan, Iowa. Niels was alone in a strange land, didn’t know the language, and had little money to sustain himself. He traveled on grit and sheer determination to make a good life for himself and the family he hoped to have one day.

Karen (known as Carrie) Sorensen traveled to America at the age of nineteen, by sea and by rail, together with her entire family. They left all they had in Denmark and set out for their new life. Their destination was also Harlan, Iowa. Soon after they arrived, Niels walked to Moody County, Dakota Territory with a friend to stake a claim for 160 acres of free land. He found a beautiful spot overlooking, and adjacent to, the Big Sioux River. He constructed a hasty shanty, fashioned some crude furniture, buttoned it up for the winter, and walked back to Harlan. Karen would fall in love with and marry Niels, whom she had known back in Denmark, in 1872, after getting reacquainted at Cuppy’s Grove Baptist church near Harlan. The wedding took place as they were on their way to the new home Niels had built on the prairie of Dakota Territory. Karen’s family remained in Harlan while her father, Soren, searched for a homestead in Nebraska, just west of Omaha. Before he could bring his wife to their claim, he contracted typhoid fever and died. Karen’s mother, Ane, and her brother Anders joined Karen and Niels in Dakota Territory after Soren’s estate was settled.

My great-grandparents were among the first homesteaders in Moody County, Dakota Territory. In fact, Grandma Norgaard was purported to be one of the first white women in the county. The log
shanty that Niels hastily constructed, overlooked the Big Sioux River just northeast of Dell Rapids. When that home burned a few months after their marriage, they lived in a sod house built into the side of a hill. Their journey of sacrifice, hardship, joy, sorrow, crop failures, droughts, grasshopper plagues, devastating summer storms and winter blizzards, and ultimately their bountiful blessings, began in that tiny twelve-by-fourteen-foot shanty. They would have twelve children on the prairie homestead, but they would only see nine grow to adulthood. Such was the life of a pioneer. My great-grandparents were pioneers who left an inheritance that reaches beyond their children’s children. What they left for future generations cannot be measured in financial terms. In my book *Unsung Pioneers: The Spirit that Made America Great* (2018), I tell their story in extensive detail, enhanced by material from many other historical and literary sources, but in this article, I focus primarily on their role as pioneers in the settlement of the Dakota Territory in the late nineteenth century, based largely on a first-hand account by their son Charles (Charley) Norgaard, who was born on January 17, 1885 and died on March 30, 1977.

When he recorded his family history in the 1950s, Charley described his childhood home as sitting beside a dirt road, which was once crisscrossed by buffalo trails, going hither and thither. If you start in one direction on the road and travel far enough you will come to the effete east, and if you start in the opposite direction and travel a few hundred miles farther, you will come to the distinctive west. My birthplace is neither effete, nor is it distinctive. It isn’t particularly pleasing to anyone passing by either. It is beautiful only in the eyes of those who have lived here, and in the memories of the Dakota Territorially born whose dwelling in far off places has given them moments of homesickness for the low rolling and smiling hills, the swell and dip of the ripening grain, the fields of sinuously waving corn, and the elusively fragrant odor of the new mown hay.

In 1861, Congress declared the remaining north portion of the Louisiana Purchase as the Dakota Territory. The following year the Homestead Act opened the land for settling
by any and all who could meet the criteria for filing and working a claim. Many came to the territory, but not all of them were of the sturdy stock necessary to tame the wild lands of Dakota. In 1871 there was already a movement to separate the territory in two sections that might eventually be welcomed into Statehood. Politics would delay that initiative for several more years, but that didn’t stymie the optimism, courage, and determination of those set on making the territory their home. One such person was a young Danish immigrant, Niels Jensen Norgaard. Nels as he would later be known, came by foot with nothing but a shovel and axe to search out a homestead in the southeastern part of the territory. Nels possessed the pioneer grit that would endure him through many hardships over the ensuing thirty-plus years as he built his claim into a holding of 700 acres. Most of that acreage is still in the hands of extended family and it is still being farmed today, more than 80 years later [more than 140 years in 2020].

Nels, and those like him, would endure all the hardships and tests that the new land would throw at them, brush off the dust of the droughts, swim through the rivers of floods, shovel snow until their arms fell off, and fight the grasshopper devastation year after year. That was the kind of stock they were. Like most of his neighbors, Nels had come a long way seeking a new life. To return to Denmark without fulfilling his dream would mean he had failed, and failure was not an option.

These are the people who really built the Nation we are blessed to reside in today. They planted farms and trees. They built the first roads and bridges and fences. They built the first schools and churches. Some opened their homes to the other pioneer family children and taught them not only the three “Rs,” but about being thankful to God for the blessings that He lavished upon them. Some of those blessings were hard to deal with at the time, but they were necessary challenges that created the abundant harvests that followed. There were weeks when the drifting snow and
sullen sleet held communities in their bitter grasp. There were times when hot winds came out of the southwest to parch the land with its feverish breath. But, between those onslaughts there were days so perfect, so filled with the aroma of clover and alfalfa, and the rich, pungent smell of the newly turned loam that to the prairie-born, there were no others as lovely. God had created all that the pioneer enjoyed. How could there be anything better? There are few [none in this new century] people left who have seen the transitions, and who have witnessed the flicker of the last burnt-out embers.

When Dakota Territory was new, homes, like dresses, were constructed more for durability than beauty. Thrice a room was added to our small dwelling until it attained its present form and size. Mother kept everything that came into the house. As a consequence, there was in it a flotsam of her many years on the prairie. She often remarked, “They are not antiques, they are just old.” To her, and the other pioneers as well, there was no particular period of time. They lived through a breathtaking evolution of change. Mother had lived with candle sticks and spinning wheels, telephones and automobiles, push-button lights, and indoor flush toilets.

To those who persevered, may we take it upon ourselves to salute and respect in memory those who pioneered in Dakota Territory and built the foundation on which rests our heritage. They were not stylish, but they were strong. They were not highly educated or cultured, but they had innate refinement and courage. We owe our very existence to the unsung pioneer.

****

When Niels emigrated in 1869, he did so for the same reasons as many other young men his age, namely, to avoid conscription into the military and improve his economic situation. He wasn’t an unpatriotic person, but he had seen enough death and destruction in his country from the war with Germany in 1864. In addition, Niels was the oldest of eight children living on his stepfather’s copyhold farm,
which meant that the land was leased from a larger landowner. Land reforms of the 1850s gradually made it possible for many copyholders to buy their farms from the landowners, but it took decades for this to become the norm across Denmark, so Niels had no prospect of inheriting the farm to support his own family someday.

Niels traveled to New York on the SS *Northern Light*, a side-wheeled American cargo steamer that had been in service for seventeen years before Niels boarded it. Although it advertised accommodations for 250 first-class passengers, 150 second-class, and 400-500 in steerage, it had made fewer than ten passenger crossings up to then. Niels’ crossing in 1869 was its last passenger service, so conditions would not have been lavish. According to his son Charley:

Shortly after they had set sail in early March the weather became stormy and cold, continuing thus day and night for many days causing great numbers of these wayfaring folks to become very seasick. Some became hysterical in this rocking and cracking boat, tossed about by the turbulent seas. Many times it did look like they would be completely submerged by the on-coming mountainous waves or cracked
to bits by the monstrous icebergs seen floating nearby. The brave Captain and his crew were kept on constant alert day and night trying to guide and keep the ship, with all its passengers, safe and intact.

A few of these suffering sick folks died from the ordeal and burial services were held on the ship, usually by a sympathetic Christian fellow traveler, and the bodies lowered into the storm-tossed sea. Perhaps it was a dear child, wife and mother, or a master of a family on whom depended success and livelihood in the new and strange land whose life had departed, leaving behind dear sick ones to mourn their loss and mar their dreams of the happy days ahead.

The usual time for this ship to cross the Atlantic was about four weeks, but, due to the bad storms and hazardous sea, it was over six weeks before these worried and sick folks saw the long looked- and wished-for shores of America. Most of their provisions had become spoiled and unfit to eat, their drinking water was all gone. No doubt, but what there was great joy and loud shouts as they drew near the shore of this great and promising land of liberty.

From New York, Niels traveled by train to Harlan, Iowa, where his uncle Carl Hansen and his wife lived in a community of Danish immigrants. He worked on the Hansens' homestead through the summer in gratitude and commitment for their sponsorship. He attended the country school during his first winter to learn English and to learn more about what made his adopted country so great. He worked a number of different jobs to earn enough to strike out in search of his own homestead claim. The territory was filling up quickly, but, to Niels' advantage, homesteading was a challenging undertaking that some immigrants were not cut out for. Farming on land that had been turned and planted for several generations in Denmark was entirely different work than breaking soil for the first time in history. As new homesteaders fanned out from their bases in Harlan, Iowa and Omaha, Nebraska, others headed back home or found work in local business or industry. Not everyone possessed the patience, persistence, and perseverance required to prove up a homestead claim.
Although a homestead claim was free for the taking, there would be expenses that Niels had to prepare for before he could venture out from Harlan. He worked for the railroad, laying track around Omaha, so others could travel further west in search of just the right place. At that time in the history of the railroad, track heading north only went as far as Sioux City, Iowa. To get into the heart of Dakota Territory required a sturdy pair of legs or a team of oxen and wagon. Horses were not plentiful, and they probably were not of much use to the homesteader anyway. Homesteaders learned that the previously unplowed prairie was so densely rooted from centuries-old prairie grasses that horses weren’t strong enough for the task. Many of the new immigrants couldn’t afford to outfit themselves for the journey north, so Niels still had time to get ready. He worked as a hired hand in the spring of 1870 for a wealthy merchant, Mr. Thorne, in the Council Bluffs area. He took care of the family’s elegant carriage and horse, as well as serving as houseman and errand boy. Charley later explained, “Nothing that would help Niels get closer to the goal of owning his own homestead was beneath his pride.”

In the fall of 1871, Niels decided he was ready to seek out a homestead in the good farmland he had heard about in the Dakota Territory, north of Sioux City. He returned to Harlan to tell the Hansens about his plans and to propose to Karen before setting off with his friend Jens Peter Uttrup. In Sioux City, they bought supplies, including an axe and shovel, as well as a .45 caliber pistol and a breech-loading shotgun for protection and hunting. Of their onward journey, Charley recounts:

Leaving Sioux City on foot with their pack of provisions, Niels and Jens headed for Vermillion, Dakota Territory, which is about 50 miles Northwest of Sioux City. Vermillion was the location of the United States land office for that portion of the Territory. Reaching there in a couple of days, they inquired about the best opportunities for unclaimed land. After considering options, they decided to walk almost due north to the Jim River to look for a site, but it seems that after going some distance they misjudged their direction and walked northeast. How they could have navigated through the Territory with primitive and incomplete maps escapes
this writer anyway. There were no settlers along this route of whom to inquire as to their whereabouts, so they kept on walking. The weather was nice, fall like. Sleeping on a blanket under the high blue canopy beset with twinkling stars that seemed so close that a person could almost reach up and pick one. They were certain they had made the right decision, even if their direction was a little off. Maybe God was guiding them to the place He wanted them to claim.

After about three days of steady walking they could begin to see, far off in the distance, what looked like trees. Getting closer, they could see it was a river bordered with trees and soon a sod or log house came into sight. They hustled up to one and inquired as to where they were and about the river. They were told it was the Big Sioux River and that some little distance further up there was a town called Sioux Falls. It had a general store and there were a few houses there, besides the military post. They felt much relieved and set out for this town. Upon reaching Sioux Falls they found it humming with activity. Niels and Jens stayed around the town for a day or two further inquiring on homestead sites. While there, they talked to a fellow who offered to sell them his rights to a 160-acre tract which the river cut through and which included the waterfalls for $500. This was the site of the Queen Bee Flour Mill then, and now is the site of the Northern States Light and Power plant in Sioux Falls. Niels told this fellow he wouldn't give him anything for those rocks and water. Niels proved to be an innovative, creative, and quite successful farmer, but he was not a businessman. The land he passed up turned out to be worth millions of dollars, but his sights were set on bigger rewards.

Wishing the man good fortune in disposing of his land, they strapped their packs on their backs and started north once again. There is a steep hill just north of the city of Sioux Falls. When they reached the top, the view that lay before them as they looked northward across the many acres of beautiful virgin soil bordered on the west by a green ribbon of big trees along the Big Sioux River, was inspiring, and
they felt assured that somewhere up there they would find their hoped-for site.

They could see quite a number of log and sod houses up and across this valley so, following a wagon trail on northward, they walked on, stopping often to inquire as to any favorable sites. The settlers in this neighborhood were mostly Norwegians. As Niels and Jens moved north inquiring at each place, they were told the same story, which was that all nearby land was taken by a brother, sister, or a friend. They kept on walking north with high hopes and, when shortly beyond the last settler, a day's journey from Sioux Falls, they reached a rocky dells where most likely they crossed the river and followed it along the west side until coming to where a creek of running spring water was flowing from the west into the river.

Here, along the river, was a great many large trees, which they valued much for logs and fuel. Here also was nice, gentle rolling prairies for cultivation, with good pasture land along the river. These two young homesteaders decided that this was to be their chosen site and established their claims side by side. They immediately started making a sod and log house on the dividing line, presumably then lawful to hold a claim. Niels chose the north half, and Jens the south.

Homesteading a claim required that a person build a suitable living place either of sod, logs, or sawn lumber, and furnish it with at least a place for cooking, a stool, and a table. Such a rudimentary beginning was how Niels started his new life in his own home, in and on his own land. There were two other stipulations for the homesteader. He had to go to the land office to file his claim, and, although there was no cost for the land, he had to pay a filing fee of about $14. That was a handsome sum for those days. The other requirement was that the homestead had to be occupied for five years in order to "prove-up" the claim. That would be the most challenging stipulation for many of the early homesteaders.
Niels chose his claim because of the abundance of trees along the river that could be used for fuel and a dwelling. In spite of the abundance of trees, Grandma Norgaard didn’t live in a mill-sawn, lumber home until they had been married ten years. After she accidentally started a fire that burned down their first home, the twelve-by-fourteen-foot shanty of logs and sod, Niels constructed a dugout in the bank overlooking the river. It might have had a nice view of the river but raising a growing family in a dugout was a challenge, to say the least. Still, Karen was proud of having given birth to twelve children without the benefit of a doctor or hospital. When she began having children in 1873 there weren’t any doctors or hospitals around. In fact, there weren’t too many other white women around, so the few who were wound up as nurses, midwives, pharmacists, etc. to their and their neighbors’ families. Karen claimed that she was up on the third day after giving birth, cooking meals on the fourth, and doing laundry on the fifth. That might not be much different from today, but remember, in the 1800s there was no pre-natal or post-natal care, specialists of any kind, or sterile instruments and rooms. Those were formidable pioneers.
As if it wasn't challenging enough just to be out homesteading on the prairie, Dakota and Montana were still contested territories when Niels claimed his homestead in 1871, so armed conflicts such as Red Cloud's War flared up from time to time. A number of uprisings in the late 1860s and early 1870s worried homesteaders, who were far from forts and settlements. Niels and his neighbors had been laboring for five years to carve out homes and cities in the prairie when news of the defeat of General Crook's army by the Lakota war leader Crazy Horse and his warriors at the Battle on the Rosebud River in June 1876 reached the homesteaders. Tensions were likely further exacerbated when news of an even greater defeat at the Battle of Little Bighorn reverberated across the plains. As a new arrival to the area, Niels may not initially have been aware of the tensions between the US Army and the displaced Lakota people, but he soon became aware of the precariousness of his situation. Charley describes his father's first encounter with his Native American neighbors while building his house on the homestead:

He [Niels] was down by the river, just north of where the creek empties into the river, cutting down trees and trimming the logs for the house when he had his first real scare and experience with a hostile group of Indians. As he was cutting away at a tree, he suddenly heard wild shouts and screams from the south, across the river. Looking in that direction he could see coming towards him about 10 to 12 big, naked Indians. The leader having a feathered toupee on his head and swinging a tomahawk over his head. Father hurriedly picked up his loaded shotgun lying nearby, which, fortunately, he had brought along on the chance of getting a duck or goose for their evening meal.

He remained standing where he was until the leader had crossed over to his side of the river and was rapidly approaching, looking very savagely at father. When they had approached quite close to him and didn't look like they were going to stop, he raised his gun and fired a shot over their heads. This shocked the murderous looking big fellow and his band so that they all stopped and stood still only a few feet from father. They seemed to have a surprised look
on their faces and were undecided as to what further to do. This probably being their first experience with white man’s thunder stick. Father reached into his pocket and brought out his chew of tobacco and offered it to the big Chief who muttered something not understandable to father, but seemingly happy he took the whole plug of tobacco, and then they all turned and stalked away.

Although he needed the land to support his family, Niels’ calm actions suggest that he may have felt compassion with the plight of the Plains Indians from whom it had been taken. During this same period, his brother-in-law Eli Jensen was enduring oppressive conditions on his farm in the Solsted area of southern Jutland, which had been annexed by Prussia after Denmark’s defeat in the war of 1864. When he eventually emigrated to join his parents and brother-in-law in Dakota Territory, Eli lost his farm to German settlers moving into the area, giving him the unique experience of being both the vanquished and the victor, to whom go the spoils. He was vanquished in a land dominated by German influence. He subsequently became victor of a land that had previously been dominated by Native American Indians who had freely roamed the lands for untold generations. It does seem ironic.

Unlike many Danish immigrants who sought out communities of like-minded countrymen, Niels stayed just long enough in the Harlan area to repay his sponsor and save enough money to start his own homestead in a place of his choosing. Yet as soon as Niels and Karen were settled on their homestead, they began helping other Danes make their way to America. Niels sponsored several young men by either providing them with passage, a place to live while they established their own claim, or both. Mrs. Tinus Andersen (maiden name Ane Katrine Olesen) recalled how Niels helped her family get established on property adjacent to the Norgaard claim in the early 1870s. In an interview published in a Dell Rapids newspaper in the early 1940s, she shared her story of those early days:

Mrs. Andersen came here when there was no Dell Rapids. She was seven years old when her parents [Jens and Ane Christensen (Naesby) Olesen] left their old home in Denmark for this country to take up a homestead along the Big Sioux river. Niels Norgaard met them in Worthington with
his covered wagon because that was as far as the train went and he drove them and their belongings to their new home.

Her remark about Niels picking them up may seem obscure and not worthy of note by today’s standards, but as you will see later, a round-trip to Worthington, Minnesota from Moody County in 1874, when the Olesen family immigrated, could take a week. There were no trails, bridges, or road signs along the way either. Rivers had to be forded, which could mean unloading and loading the wagon and carrying some items across obstacles by hand. It was no small task to “pick someone up” at the train station. Her story continues:

Immediately they built a one-room frame house on the land ... and they lived in these crowded quarters for a long time. There were no roll-away beds in those days but boxes were used for the children’s beds and they were shoved under the parental bed during the day. Life was very primitive and Mrs. Andersen recalls the severe hardships, the privations, and the struggles of the pioneers. They had to contend with blizzards in the winters and with locusts and sometimes prairie fires in the summer. The grass grew so tall, over one’s head, ideal for hide and seek games, but when it became parched by the hot winds and caught fire not only the homes, but the lives of the settlers were threatened. Once they had to wade out into the river to escape the flames. The nearest trading center for a long time was Worthington and sometimes it was impossible to make the trip for supplies. During one whole winter, Mrs. Andersen recalls, her family had one cup of sugar which a kind neighbor had given them from her meager hoard.

Not all the pioneers were tried and true and occasionally a villain stirred up a little excitement in the settlement. Once, Mrs. Andersen witnessed the kidnapping of her sister. She saw a stranger who was driving a wagon with a pair of mules stop the little girl as she was taking lunch to her brothers who were herding cattle, and take her up on the wagon, apparently to give her a short ride. But when the little sister did not return she described the incident to her parents and her father rode horseback in the direction the
stranger had taken but did not overtake him until he had reached the outskirts of the present Sioux Falls. He rescued his daughter and the kidnapper went peacefully on his way.

Today, the kidnapper would likely have been arrested, beaten beyond recognition, or maybe killed by an angry parent. However, Jens Olesen was a Baptist pastor who believed that kindness and love, even for one’s enemies, was more important. After all, no physical harm had been done.

In settling the Dakota Territory, my great-grandparents faced all manner of challenges, including extreme weather. They experienced their first blizzard in the fall of 1872. Busy with building a home and breaking up the ground for crops, Niels and Karen hadn’t had a chance to get to the post office in Sioux City, 120 miles away, for a long time. Charley reports that Niels decided to walk there in early November, before winter set in. The weather was pleasantly crisp and sunny after a light snowfall when he set out, but in the afternoon of the second day,

just as he was nearing the rugged hills somewhere north of where Elk Point, South Dakota now is, he began to hear what sounded like a far-away rumble, so he turned around and looked. To the north the skies were black and it looked like a terrible prairie fire, but, knowing there was snow on the ground, that didn’t seem possible. He started walking as rapidly as he could. Getting the lay of the rolling prairie ahead, there was not a house to be seen anywhere. In what seemed only a few moments he was caught in a raging blizzard. The wind against his back seemed to come with unmerciful force and the snow swirling around his face almost blinded him at times. It was hard for him to stay on his feet with the wind buffeting him so. The temperature was dropping rapidly. Holding onto himself and calmly studying directions, he determined to continue moving with the wind at his back, perhaps much faster than before with the terrible wind driving him from behind. Ice began to form like a crust over his face, the whirling snow thawing and freezing, causing him to fear that his eyes would freeze shut. He had to hold his hands over his face, nose, and mouth all the
time so he could breathe; the wind being so fierce it would choke him otherwise. He often felt like giving up and laying down, but something told him to keep going.

After what seemed like an almost hopeless struggle, he stumbled over something and fell. Feeling around in the snow for what he had stumbled over, he found it to be a furrow of turned sod. Hoping it to be a fire break around someone’s house, he started to follow the furrow to the left, this being east and easier going according to the wind, which was coming from the northwest. But, after going only a short distance, out from seeming nowhere, he heard a voice urging him to ‘go the other way.’ So he turned around and started into the storm.

The storm was raging so fierce it was almost impossible to face it and get ahead. Sometimes he had to crawl on his hands and knees. So, perhaps discouraged and tired, he turned around facing east with his back to the wind for rest and to let the wind drive him back east. Again, that same voice shouted for him to go the other way. Stopping and listening he could hear only the whistling wind, so now he decided this time to do his best facing it, so on and on he worked against this terrible freezing blizzard, often on his hands and knees, constantly thinking of his dear wife back on the homestead and hoping she was safely inside their little house with their two good friends.

On he struggled, until it seemed almost the last bit of his strength was gone, when all at once he sensed that he was near something, and, luckily, he was, for he soon came against the wall of a sod house. With renewed strength, and the comfort of knowing he may have found a safe haven, he got to his feet and started feeling his way around the house for a door. Finding it, he stumbled inside and closed the door. He was greeted by two screaming women, who had been frightened by his sudden entrance, and a big dog jumped on him, but did not bite him. Peeling the ice from his face as best he could and getting his eyes open so he could see, he tried to tell these frightened women not to
be afraid, but they could not understand him although he could speak English quite well then. They were French folks and could not understand English or Dane. They soon calmed down and it began to dawn on Father that perhaps their men were out in the storm and the women feared they may be lost just as he was.

The Frenchmen returned soon afterwards, each leading two head of cattle, which was all that they had been able to rescue of their large herd. After taking refuge with the French families for one day, Niels continued on to Sioux City for the mail, passing dead cattle all the way.

The Norgaards experienced many other three-day blizzards, including one a few months later that buried their hut up to the top of the stovepipe; they were living with the Uttrups while Karen was pregnant with her first child. The men dug their way out from the inside, while a Danish neighbor, Gammel Christian Sorensen, dug from the top until they cleared a path out. The next step was digging out the barn, clearing a hole through two feet of snow to lower hay and melted snow down to the stock until they could dig a hole large enough to lead them out to the river. On another occasion, Niels helped an Indian dig out his wife and child from a snow cave he had buried them in for shelter the day before; fortunately, they were found safe and warm when their cave was finally unearthed.

Another common danger was prairie fires, which destroyed their newly built shanty on the brink of a knoll just south of the Riverview Cemetery where their baby daughter Caroline lay buried. They were able to rescue most of their belongings but had to live in the barn until they were able to build a new shanty. On another occasion, Karen, pregnant with her daughter Anna, had to rescue the cattle grazing along the river bottom. On her way home, with the cattle running ahead of her, she had to duck under the surface of the river to save herself from the flames. The grasshopper plagues of the late 1870s were just as devastating, as the grasshoppers consumed their harvest-ready wheat, as was a massive hailstorm just before the harvest of 1893 and a drought in 1894. Facing starvation, many of Niels and Karen’s neighbors were forced to move away, leaving their hard-built homes behind.
Fortunately for the settlers, other years produced bountiful harvests and many settlers were able to prosper through their own initiative and effort, which was not the case for many of their friends and relatives back in Denmark, where it was difficult to rise above the status of tenant farmer. When Niels died in 1920, his estate was valued at $114,000, the equivalent of more than $1.5 million today. He came to this country with nothing more than pocket change, a dream, and the ambition to succeed. With the government’s gift of free land, he and the others succeeded beyond their dreams, but it wasn’t an easy row to hoe. He and Karen built a fine home, acquired seven hundred acres of prime land for raising an abundant harvest, raised nine children to adulthood, supported friends and relatives in their quest to come to America, donated part of their land to be the site of the Scandinavian (now Sioux Valley) Baptist Church in 1888, and dedicated another part as a final resting place for those who helped settle the area and the dear little ones sadly lost. Niels and Karen were generous beyond fault. They recognized that all the material things they had obtained came from God, and it was to Him that they should give thanks. Both the church and the cemetery have stories connected to them that are meaningful to the descendants of Moody County pioneers. The church is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places. That is quite an honor for a little country church, and a fitting tribute to the people who raised it up out of the prairie.

Many years after Niels’ death, an article by Mrs. James Nesby in the Sioux Falls newspaper, Daily Argus Reader honored Karen on the occasion of her ninety-fourth birthday on September 27, 1946. Mrs. Nesby reports that Karen “has grown old graciously and moves about with a briskness and determination that belie her years. She is still able to perform her light household tasks and enjoys doing so. Hers is no dimming vision, since she can thread a needle and read without the aid of glasses.” For the generations that had no memory of the homesteading era, Mrs. Nesby explains:

She [Karen] has lived a rugged life. She was the second white woman in the vicinity where she came as a bride to her husband’s homestead. Her first home was a log shack that always required chinking to keep out the cold. When it burned down it was replaced by a half sod house on the
side of the hill with only one door and two windows. But she loved her home and the prairie, especially along the river where trees and tall grasses grew. She never complains about the hardships and privations of her early life and to this day has no patience with physical ailments. ... She was a real pioneer. Within her memory are the beginnings of a community and its growth for 74 years. She experienced the dangers of the early days, the blizzards which snowed homes under, encounters with Indians, sometimes formidable, and encounters with outlaws. From the prairie soil on which she homesteaded has sprung some of the most productive farmland in the country. Of her children, seven are living [three died in childhood and nine lived to adulthood]. She has 33 grandchildren, 42 great-grandchildren, and 5 great-great-grandchildren – altogether 90 descendants.

Karen lived almost three more years after this tribute, passing on July 10, 1949. Her obituary described her as the last of the early pioneers,
as well as the last of the charter members of the Dell Rapids Baptist Church, where she and Niels had moved in 1911. At her funeral service, it was said of her that “all her life she was a cheerful person and the faith and happy outlook that guided her during the pioneer days remained with her as long as she lived.”
In October 2018, I published a book about Chris Madsen with the title *Et liv på kanten. En biografisk fortælling om Chris Madsen’s utrolige liv* (A life on the edge. A biography about the incredible life of Chris Madsen). The second edition, which I cite in this article, was published in 2019. This book grew out of two separate projects: one aimed at publishing texts that can encourage boys and men to read more books (again), and another focused on Danish emigration to the US in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Apart from my own workplace, the University of Aarhus, the partners in the latter project are University College Lillebælt, the Danish Village Museum (Den fynske Landsby) and the Museum of Danish America in Iowa. We hope to make the exciting enigma of Chris Madsen’s life better known, so it can be studied and discussed by many more Danes and Americans. The themes of his life are still highly relevant, e.g., the importance of education, avoiding poverty, building character, developing grit, integration of immigrants, and enhancing social mobility.
(Andersen 2019, 11-15). However, every time Chris Madsen’s name is brought up, a basic question always arises: who was he really? Hero or villain? Johan Windmuller’s article “A Question of Motive: The Chris Madsen Story Revisited,” which appeared in The Bridge in 2007, sums up the predominant answer: “Although Madsen did accomplish a lot in his life, some of which could be described as heroic and adventurous, the truth remains that most of Madsen’s exploits were nothing but wishful thinking and creative storytelling” (Windmuller 2007, 59).

Windmuller’s article has many details right, but since he wrote it, we have discovered that to some extent Madsen’s exploits were after all more fact than fiction. Together with both Danish and American colleagues, I have found new sources pointing to a different, more complex and somewhat more positive answer to the question of the true personality and identity of Chris Madsen. In this article, I will try to illustrate this. In his biography Trigger Marshal (1958), Homer Croy claims that Chris Madsen should be considered one of the greatest Wild West heroes, given his many years in government service and the number of his public accomplishments. Madsen had his bad moments and dark sides, and he crossed the line of the law several times during his long life, but so did Wyatt Earp and Wild Bill Hickok. So why didn’t Madsen, even before Nancy Samuelson (1998) and Ernst (2003) published their negative accounts, ever get the same attention or acquire the same status as Earp, Hickok, and other Western heroes?

There are several possible explanations for this discrepancy. First of all, Madsen came from the bottom of Danish society; his family were poor farm laborers and when he arrived in the US in 1876, Chris Madsen had no family, no friends, no relatives, no contacts and no money to support him in his new country. He was all on his own—he had to learn and earn everything from scratch all by himself. As an ex-convict, deported to the US by the Danish prison authorities, he saw no other choice than to enlist in the US Cavalry, which at the time had recruitment offices in New York, where Chris Madsen arrived on a cold January day in 1876. The US army gave him no instruction and no basic military training—instead he was sent directly to the war on the western frontier. Yet somehow, Chris Madsen managed. He survived, he learned everything the hard way. He gradually grew to meet the challenges. He was empathic and earned the friendship of his fel-
low soldiers, the appreciation of his superiors and the respect of his enemies, and thus he slowly became a better version of himself. His story is one of never giving up, never ceasing to learn, always looking for new solutions in the midst of disappointments, and building friendships all through life. During his fifteen years in the military, he eventually worked his way upwards, as high as you can get in the military ranks without having an officer's education. Upon leaving the army, he became a deputy US Marshal for an even longer period.

Another explanation for Chris Madsen's lack of fame could be his language: throughout his sixty-seven years in the US, he spoke English with a very thick Danish accent. Still, thanks to the good basic education he had received in his childhood and youth in Denmark, he quickly picked up English upon his arrival to the US. Thus, he was able to understand and read English after just a few months in America. However, as mentioned before, all through his many years in America his oral English was never convincing. In a radio recording of Chris Madsen from the 1930s his dialect is still, after around six decades in the US, very distinctly Danish. He loved writing, but Danish remained his favored language, even decades after his arrival in the US. He wrote his autobiography in 1920-21, forty-five years after he first set foot on American soil, in Danish – and kept his diaries, poems, etc. in Danish for decades after immigrating to the US.

A third explanation for his lack of status as a western hero could be his looks. Unlike Earp, Buffalo Bill, and Hickok, who had more classical, masculine, tall good looks, Madsen was rather short, stout and a bit overweight. He had large hands, big feet, and staring eyes, so he wasn’t exactly the handsome Hollywood dreamboat.

Finally, Madsen’s formative childhood and youth years in Denmark were full of troubles and trauma. Besides coming from the unskilled farm labor bottom of Danish society, he grew up at a time when his old fatherland was collapsing, and several tragedies stuck to him throughout his life. The Danish defeat in the German-Danish war of 1864 was devastating: Denmark lost almost half of its territory and population to Germany, the large Danish army of conscripts was badly defeated, you could say humiliated, and thousands of the soldiers were killed, crippled, wounded, and/or imprisoned by the enemy. It created a national depression. Major commercial and cultural
centers and cities like Haderslev, Sønderborg, Flensburg, and Slesvig became German, and the loss of them was problematic for both the Danish economy and identity. The introduction of constitutional democracy in 1849 was partly reversed due to the 1864 defeat. The rich land owners and the aristocracy, whose power had been limited with the new democratic constitution, used the moment of defeat in 1864 to seize power again, introducing a kind of martial law. It created a tense political situation that gave rise to groups of armed peasants, social democrats, and unionization movements, the latter being forbidden at the time with labor leaders persecuted and jailed.

The country was in a state of decay (a bit like the situation in the American South after the Civil War 1861-65), and Madsen lived through it all. Strikes and other types of unrest thus followed – and a huge part of the entire Danish population immigrated to the US after the 1864 defeat and the following turmoil. Many veterans of the 1864 war joined the emigration tide and, like Madsen, enrolled in the US military. Several of them died in the Indian wars; there were three Danes among the fallen at Little Bighorn. Chris Madsen thus grew up in an environment of unrest, instability, poverty, unemployment, national break down, union strikes, rising crime rates, political turmoil and radicalization. He became part of it all and eventually ended in prison but reduced his sentence by accepting forced emigration to the US. Emigration indeed changed the negative course of his life – his life in the US was a remarkable story of successful integration and a good example of the social mobility that the US could offer immigrants at the time.

Still, there were a few incidents during his many years in America when Chris Madsen reverted to his old habits. According to Samuelson, court records show that he was convicted of federal larceny in 1881. Samuelson says that the records are not clear about what that exactly entailed, but it had the consequence that Madsen served five months, from June 6 to November 6, 1881, in the Wyoming Territorial Prison (Samuelson 1998, 15).

Around Christmas 1875, Chris Madsen immigrated to the US, arriving in New York harbor two weeks later. 1876 thus became the transformative year in his life. It would forever change him for the better, adding “American” to “Danish.” However, before we look closer
at that decisive year in Madsen’s life, let us go back to the beginning, to the quiet little village of Ørsted on the western end of the Danish island Fyn (usually called “Funen” in English) in the year 1851.

A Quiet Childhood on the Island of Fyn

Christen Madsen was born February 25, 1851 in a family of farm workers in the village of Ørsted. His parents, Mads and Maren Madsen, were both around forty years old at the time of his birth, making them relatively old parents by the standard of the time. He was their first and only child together, but Maren already had four children, Kirsten, Karen, Niels, and Jørgen, from an earlier marriage (her former husband having died of disease) (Ernst 2003, 33; Andersen, 2019, 23-4). Thus, Christen grew up as the youngest in a family of seven.
Christen Madsen’s parents were poor, unskilled farm hands but not entirely on the bottom rung of society. They did live in a little rented house that they could consider their own, at least as long as they could work. The house was called “Rørmosehuset” (the bog hay house) and, besides being the home of the Madsen family, it hosted the local post office. Therefore, in addition to working at local farms, Madsen’s parents also were postal workers, running the post office as well as delivering mail to local residents.
As soon as Chris Madsen started to go to school at the age of seven, he also assisted his parents in their work: doing chores in the house and garden, laboring at the big farms in the area, and delivering mail. Chris Madsen delivered mail to addresses throughout the local area. At the wealthy end, these included impressive manor houses, inhabited by rich aristocrats, while at the other, poor seasonal farm workers, including gypsies and illegal immigrants from Eastern Europe, lived in shacks, sheds, outhouses, barns and wagons. In between these extremes, the local area mainly consisted of farmers, craftsmen, teachers, millers, clerks, teamsters and business people living in small houses in the village or close to the large manor houses. But Chris grew up very much aware of the huge differences, inequalities, and divisions within nineteenth-century northern European society—a fact that was also aggressively addressed by new political movements of the time, such as union and social democratic organizations (Andersen 2019, 47-53).

Young Chris was both attracted to and appalled by the luxurious life style of the upper classes. He dreamed about living like that, but at the same time, he distanced himself from the posh and extravagant culture of the aristocracy. He was constantly aware of the fact that his family barely survived and existed at the brink of extreme poverty. The post office gave them a roof, beds, a kitchen, a fireplace, a vegetable garden, and a place in the hierarchy just above those at the bottom. However, Chris knew very well that if one of his relatively old parents should one day become ill and no longer be able to work, the entire family could fall into the abyss immediately and could be forced to leave the post office house and suddenly find themselves on the street.

In 1814, Denmark had introduced universal and compulsory basic school education for all children from the age of seven to fourteen, finishing with graduation and confirmation in the Danish Lutheran state church (Folkekirken) at the end of seventh grade. Therefore, as a boy Chris Madsen went to school in the local village school for seven years. At school, Chris was a smart and polite student who earned good grades. The vicar at the local church, who taught Chris theology in seventh grade, praised him and offered him a temporary job as a helping hand at the vicar’s farm and at the church after graduation. Chris accepted this offer and consequently worked the whole summer
of 1865 for the vicar and his wife. That summer he applied for the fall term at the new local agriculture college *(Folkehøjskole)* in Kauslunde, which had recently been founded by three veterans of the 1864 war.

During Chris’ last school years and summer job at the vicar’s, the dramatic events before, during, and after the war of 1864 between Denmark and Prussia took place right on his doorstep. Chris Madsen was only thirteen years old then, and, contrary to what he later claimed, he did not participate in the actual battles, but he probably worked in the military camps situated around his home in the spring of 1864. Chris Madsen could also for a brief period have been a drummer boy at the front. Boys his age did participate in this capacity – and some simply ran away from school to join. The western part of Funen, where the Madsen home was located, was where the Danish army regrouped, rested, and mustered new recruits, close to the battlefields of southern Jutland but protected by the straits between Funen and Jutland. Denmark still ruled the seas of the area back then, her navy being stronger than that of Germany. A German-Austrian fleet was defeated in the violent sea battle of Helgoland in the spring of 1864, and the Danes won in other small naval battles in that war for control of the islands along the German-Danish North Sea coastline (Andersen 2019, 31-46).

Chris’ two older brothers, Niels and Jørgen, were old enough for regular military service. They were drafted to serve in the war, as were almost all the older boys and younger men Chris Madsen had grown up with and knew in the area. Denmark had introduced compulsory national service with the introduction of the new democratic constitution of 1849 and large Danish units of both cavalry, infantry, artillery and navy were stationed in the neighborhood of Ørsted, close to the important coastal towns and harbors of Assens, Strib and Middelfart before, during, and after the war. Assens was also the Danish army headquarters during the summer of 1864. Niels was a soldier in the Danish Fourth Cavalry Division and a member of the special force called Aaroe’s Commando Regiment after its commander, Lieutenant Bernd Aaroe. This regiment engaged in a few spectacular and daring, albeit rather ineffective, cavalry raids on the German forces. On a smaller scale, this unit can be compared to the Confederate cavalry unit under General Bedford Forrest in the American Civil War. Niels probably came home during leave as his unit was stationed in Assens,
just six miles from the Madsen home in Ørsted. The Aaroe commando unit is especially interesting, not just because Chris Madsen’s brother was part of it, but also because the false identity that Chris Madsen would adopt during his conman years, Lieutenant Carl Daniel Hoff­man, is based on a real person with that name from that unit. No doubt Chris Madsen heard many stories about the daring activities of Carl Daniel Hoffmann from his brother when he was at home during and after the war (Andersen 2019, 31-46).

Bad Luck, Sickness, and Despair in Copenhagen

After graduating from the agricultural college at Kauslunde, Chris Madsen returned to his home in Ørsted for a year or so. He worked at neighboring farms and manor houses as well as assisting his parents with the postal services, just as before. At the same time, though, he started to apply for more attractive jobs that were better suited to his new educational level. Just like many young people today, Chris wanted to move closer to a bigger city, preferably the capital Copen­hagen, by far the largest city in the country. Consequently, he applied
to agricultural work places, large manor houses, aristocratic estates, etc. close to Copenhagen.

Copenhagen labor team from the time when Chris Madsen moved to the city. Used with permission from the Royal Danish Library.

Chris Madsen and a classmate from Kauslunde Agricultural School around 1866. Used with permission from Vends Herreds Udgiverselskab (Vends Country Publishers)
In the spring of 1868, he got a positive response from the famous Eremitage Estate, known for providing hunting and dining services for the royal family, situated just a few miles north of Copenhagen, offering him a temporary job as a coachman. Although he was overeducated for the position, it was exactly the kind of workplace he had dreamed of, which allowed him to live and work close to the upper classes and close to the capital area (Ernst 2003, 40-45).

In the summer of 1868, Madsen went to Copenhagen, rented a room in the city, and in every way enjoyed his new life in the capital, close to high society and the royals. Unfortunately, his luck and happiness only lasted a few months. In late fall 1868 Madsen became sick. We do not know what disease he had—probably a severe flu—but it sent him to bed for weeks. As his position was just a temporary one, he was fired after just a few days' absence. There was no public welfare system to support a young unfortunate worker in those days—no work, no pay. Fortunately, Madsen had saved some money, so he could stay in his Copenhagen room over the winter. As his condition improved, he started looking for work, but he would not take just an-
ything— he still wanted something similar to what he had started with in Copenhagen. No dirty, low paid factory work for Chris Madsen. He had his fine education and wanted an appropriate position.

When the first signs of spring appeared early in 1869, Chris Madsen had recovered completely; unfortunately, he had also used up all his savings, and still had not found an acceptable job. Therefore, he was unable to pay the monthly rent for his room. The property owner had no mercy for this farm boy from the province, and he threw Madsen out right away. Suddenly he was alone in the street with no job, no money, nowhere to sleep, and nothing to eat. A shocking experience— something the eighteen-year-old boy from Funen never thought could happen to him. Yesterday he was close to realizing his dreams of a fine job and the good life in the better parts of Copenhagen, today he was in the gutter, marginalized, poor, hungry, and helpless. What a social decline! But what could he actually do? He did not really know— he was bewildered and bitter, sorry for himself and afraid. How should he get something to eat? Where should he sleep the coming night? Would he be arrested for staying overnight in the street? There were no obvious answers, but Chris Madsen soon realized that he had to hurry home to his parents and family in Ørsted.

There was one problem though: he had no money for the train and ferry needed to bring him back to his island, and without any property, he could not get a loan in a bank. He had heard, though, about something called a “pawnshop,” where you could apparently get a loan “on your bare face.” He went to the nearest local pawnshop, where he found a whole bunch of people waiting to get a loan, lining up on the pavement. What he saw there, though, was appalling: in the line, there were beggars, hoboes, cripples, gypsies, drunks, immigrants, etc. What a pile of misery in one place. He lined up with all this lowlife, a shocking experience for young Chris Madsen, who had never imagined there could be so much grief and poverty in his beloved Copenhagen. The Copenhagen pawnshops back then were indeed traps, dangerous places for poor, unemployed, sick, and homeless people to go. They were more than just normal pawnshops, they were also loan shark offices, and poor people could easily get up to their ears in debt there. A Danish newspaper from that year, 1869, reports, “What really can destroy poor individuals from the working class are
these new pawnshops,” going on to note that the ridiculously high pawnshop interest rates could reach 60-70 percent annually. Besides, the loan sharks in the shops had their own “methods” to make sure they got their money and interest back (Ernst 2003, 47).

Now that Madsen had some money, he could start the journey home. He walked to the Copenhagen central railway station, bought his ticket, and got on the train. He probably enjoyed the ride through Copenhagen and the rolling farmlands of the island of Zealand outside the city. What an experience – what a great technological time to be alive! His optimism and hopes for the future may have resembled those he had the year before, when he took the trip in the opposite direction. After a couple of hours’ ride, he reached the ferry town of Korsør at the western end of Zealand. As Madsen stepped out on the platform and walked towards the ferry harbor, he may very well, having an ear for music, have hummed or sung one of the most beloved Danish songs of the time, “Velkommen lærkelil” (“Welcome, Little Lark”), composed in 1868 by Christian Richardt, the vicar at the local church in Ørsted: “Velkommen lærkelil, jeg ved ej strengespil, så sød og rent og jublende så vide, som disse tonedrag de glade klokkeslag, der ringer våren ind ved vintertide” (Welcome little lark, no string music is so sweet and jubilant as your happy bells, greeting spring after winter) (Andersen 2019, 53).

A Fateful Decision at the Ferry Inn

Chris Madsen’s joyful mood was replaced by irritation and worry at the harbor, where he was told that the expected ferry departure was delayed until next day. Having used almost all of his (borrowed) money for the train and ferry tickets, he had virtually nothing left, just enough to for the ferry inn. Going to that inn turned out to be a fateful decision for Chris Madsen, which would change his life forever. At the inn Madsen met a con man, who introduced him to his “business.” The con man showed him an elegantly written document describing the misfortunes of a sergeant during and after the Danish-German war of 1864, signed by several prominent people, such as doctors, vicars, counts, and lawyers. All the signatures recommended the sergeant as worthy of a small donation to support him in his plan to join the French Foreign Legion, hoping that he this way could help France
win its impending war with Germany and thus avenge and give satisfaction to Denmark for its losses in 1864.

Chris read it all thoroughly and was impressed. The con man told him that many rich and influential people, after being presented with this document, gave him a small—some even a larger—amount of money. Chris thought this sounded very tempting. Maybe he should try it himself for a short period? If he could “earn” some money this way, he could pay back his loans and interest from the pawnshop in Copenhagen, and then return to more honest work afterwards. Chris probably felt it was somehow harmless to try it for a while, since he would not really be robbing or threatening anybody: he would simply peacefully knock on the doors of rich people and present his document. This would not harm anyone, and if the rich people he addressed gave him a few pennies, it would not matter to them. In addition, they could simply just turn him down, and he would walk away peacefully. Chris Madsen had always had a lively imagination, which he retained throughout his life. He loved to listen to, read, tell, and even write good stories. Chris had probably always been fond of the exciting, though also terrifying, stories his brothers had told about the Danish-German war. As mentioned earlier, one character in particular seems to have caught his interest: the Danish lieutenant Carl Daniel Hoffmann from Aaroe’s Commando Regiment. Hoffmann seems to have been Madsen’s hero: a true patriot, a good comrade, a competent soldier, and a real daredevil. Madsen may have dreamed about being like

A calligraphic document produced by Chris Madsen, pretending he was Lieutenant Carl Daniel Hoffmann. Used with permission from Leif Ernst
him—and soon he would walk around the country pretending to be Hoffmann, begging for money for an unfortunate patriot and veteran (Andersen 2019, 62-63).

A very dangerous idea had now taken root in Madsen’s eighteen-year-old mind, and over the coming years he would continue to develop his new identity as—and story about—Lieutenant Carl Daniel Hoffmann, walking around the country begging for money. A year later, in 1870, when the war between France and Germany actually finally broke out, he adjusted his document accordingly, adding a forged statement and signature from cavalry colonel Trepka, dated November 3, 1870, that testified:

Lieutenant Carl Daniel Hoffmann is a highly decorated officer from the war in 1864, and he has continued his service in the Danish armed forces since then. I consider him one of the best and most competent lieutenants in the cavalry. He is momentarily relieved from his duties in the Danish army so that he can volunteer for the French side in the ongoing war between France and Germany.

Trepka finishes by recommending that the reader give Hoffmann a small donation for his travel to France (Ernst 2003, 119). As quite a number of Danish veterans of the 1864 war, among them Captain Wilhelm Dinesen, the father of the future Danish author Karen Blixen, did in fact travel to France to volunteer for the French army in its 1870 war with Germany, the plea was credible.

Thus began Chris Madsen’s four-year period as a con man, which ended with his arrest, conviction, and a multi-year prison sentence in 1874, which he avoided by agreeing to be deported to the US in late 1875. The Carl Daniel Hoffmann fraud initially brought Chris moments of exuberance and happiness, but he kept struggling with his conscience about it. He would periodically drop the con business and return to honest work, but whenever he got sacked or lacked money he would take the swindle up again. The court sent Chris Madsen to the new prison, Vridsløselille, where he endured harsh conditions, lousy food, and forced labor. He grabbed the chance to get out of it when the prison authorities offered a reduced sentence in exchange for accepting transportation to the US (Andersen 2019, 86).
Chris Madsen Arrives in New York, January 1876

Chris Madsen left Denmark on December 28, 1875. He had accepted the offer of substantial reduced imprisonment on condition that he sign a contract agreeing never to return to Denmark (Ernst 2003, 189). While aboard ship across the Atlantic, Chris apparently decided to quit the con business for good, and to try to cover up his Danish con man period upon his arrival to the US. Actually, he had little choice in the matter—deportees like Chris were instructed by prison authorities to lie about crimes committed in the old country in order to avoid being sent back. Consequently, he presented himself to the US authorities as a mixture of his own identity and his fictional alter-ego, Carl Daniel Hoffmann. He arrived in New York on a bitterly cold winter day, January 17, 1876. He passed the port authority interview, but he immediately faced another serious challenge: he had absolutely no one to contact in America, no friends or relatives, and, worst of all, almost no money. He desperately needed to find a job quickly; without work, he risked being deported back to Denmark—and imprisoned there again. Madsen later wrote, “It was in the middle of winter and a great many unemployed men walked up and down the streets to look for jobs. I had neither friends nor relatives, and the little money I had left would not last long, so I was desperate to find a job quickly” (Madsen 1921, 8).

He decided to try his luck with the US military, which, as his biographer Croy explains, was a fortunate choice:

Chris didn’t know it, but he had come at exactly the right time and to the right place. The great Indian campaigns were on, and they were not doing well. So greatly did the US Army need recruits, that it was signing them up in New York City. Sergeants walked the streets; when they saw a young man who might develop into a fine Indian fighter, they would go up to him and tell him about the glories of Indian fighting. (Croy 1958, 3)

When Chris encountered a recruitment sergeant on the street in New York, he may have asked the sergeant in English as best he could, as Croy imagines on the basis of interviews conducted with Madsen’s son Reno: “Where is eet peoples sign oop to join the war against the
Indians?” Once he understood the question, the sergeant would have smiled and said, “You come with me,” and marched him to a nearby US Army recruitment office. After being interviewed by an officer, for whom he would have repeated his story from the port authority interview, a doctor would have examined him and may have asked, “Did you know, when you came in, that we are now enrolling men to join the […] cavalry [out west]?” (Croy 1958, 6). To this exciting news, Chris may have answered something like, “No, sir, I did not know it. I have a goat piece of luck, is it not so?,” to which the doctor could have responded, “I think we want you. Due to your military background in Europe, you will not have to be trained over here. We are enrolling you now for the cavalry, and we can start you out West at once” (Croy 1958, 7). Chris Madsen’s plan had worked; his story was accepted, and he was enlisted in the US Army, just as he had hoped. After a few more days in New York, Chris found himself on a train, heading west to the battlefields of the northern plains.

A New Life as a Soldier on the Western Frontier

After leaving New York in late January 1876 by train, Chris Madsen reached his first Western destination at Fort Hays in Kansas some days later, where he joined the Fifth Cavalry Regiment (Madsen, 1921, 19). The Fifth Cavalry Regiment would be Madsen’s home for the next fifteen years. The regiment consisted of 1,200-2,000 soldiers, and Madsen was in Troop A, which had about 100-150 cavalrymen. The Fifth was heavily involved in the ongoing war against the Sioux and Cheyenne tribes of the northern plains. Although unscathed by the defeat that Custer’s infamous Seventh Cavalry suffered on June 25 that year, the hardships Chris would go through with the Fifth Cavalry Regiment the coming half year were considerable, similar to what many other US soldiers at the time experienced on the western frontier (Finerty 1955, 280-302; Samuelson 1998, 17-18). Over the coming months many of the men in the Fifth Cavalry would either die, be wounded, get sick, starve, go crazy, be discharged due to incompetence, or desert the regiment, but not Madsen. It is a mystery how he managed the campaign hardships so well. One explanation, besides his grit, intelligence, and social skills, could be that Chris preferred all the challenges and problems of the campaign to the depressing
prison life in Vridsløselille penitentiary. He was ready to ride any distance, fight any enemy, eat any food, and suffer any wounds, hardships and diseases to avoid being sent back to that prison (Andersen 2019, 150-164).

In any case, the regiment's month-long stay at Fort Hays was important in getting Chris accustomed to the chores and routines of the cavalry in fairly peaceful and safe surroundings, far away from the battlefields further north. Chris also experienced and got used to extreme weather conditions at Fort Hays. His life had changed drastically over just a few weeks. In December, he was still serving a long prison sentence in Vridsløselille penitentiary in Copenhagen; at the turn of the year, he sailed across the Atlantic Ocean, in mid-January he walked the streets of New York, and now by February he was a soldier on the western frontier, on the lonesome prairie, in this remote fort in a strange land with bitterly cold weather. The army he had joined was multicultural: many of the privates, like Chris, were newly arrived immigrants from Europe, primarily Germany, Ireland, Poland, Switzerland - and Denmark. According to Utley (1973) about half of the recruits in the US military at this point were foreign-born. There were more Irish than any other nationality, over 20 percent. In some instances, Danish and German immigrants, who a few years before had been bitter opponents on the battlefields of the Jutland peninsula in northern Europe, now served in the same American military units, facing a mutual enemy in their new, shared fatherland. It was similar to what American soldiers who had originally fought on opposing sides in the Civil War also experienced out west.

Many of the immigrant soldiers, like Chris, had been tempted to join the army by the lure of quick citizenship and a fixed, basic, secure - however small - monthly income over a five-year contract (Agnew 2008, 95). This was exactly what Chris Madsen had planned for—for him, earning thirteen dollars every month for five years was far better than prison, where he had received no pay at all. The pay was low, that was true, but it was honest and respectable work with future perspectives; if his service was satisfactory, he could sign up for another five-year contract, plus he was entitled to a small pension fund, which contributed one dollar to the soldier's pension account for each month in service. In addition, he had hopes of promotion and gradual
pay and pension increases over the years, which Madsen thought was fantastic (Madsen 1921, 13).

However, for most young American men at the time, an army career was not attractive. A few years earlier, Army wages had been reduced from sixteen to thirteen dollars a month. In addition, the quality of equipment, food, weaponry, uniforms and quarter standards was quite low due to the massive cuts after the Civil War. With regard to uniforms, Agnew explains, “In an attempt to save money in the lean economic times following the [Civil] war, Congress insisted that the army use as much of the [Civil War] stockpile as possible. Unfortunately, due to hasty wartime construction, much of the stock was shoddy and of varying grades of color. Furthermore, it had often been stored under poor conditions, which led to deterioration—mildew and moths ruined most of the uniforms” (Agnew 2008, 97). The situation was the same with regard to boots, hats, belts, saddles, guns, etc.; the outdated and deteriorated stockpiles from the Civil War had to be used on the western frontier, regardless of suitability (98-101). In practice this led to a situation where many soldiers, enlisted men as well as officers, “wore whatever they liked” and tried to get better equipment of their own (101). Even General George Crook, under whom Madsen’s regiment served, wore whatever he liked during the 1876 campaign. Captain Charles King, serving in the Fifth Cavalry with Madsen, observed, “General Crook was in a rough hunting rig, and in all his staff and line there was not one complete suit of uniform. Left to our fancy in the matter […] we were attired in deerskin, buckskin, flannels and corduroy; in the Fifth Cavalry you could not have told officer from private” (Finerty 1955, 249).

After some months in Kansas, Chris Madsen and the Fifth were sent further north to Fort D. A. Russell, closer to the battlefields. Chris Madsen felt excitement in the air: “There was to be a battle […]. We would cover ourselves with glory. We would twist Sitting Bull’s tail. We would make him paw dirt” (dialogue based on Croy 1958, 8; Madsen 1921,11-16). At Fort D. A. Russell in the spring of 1876, Chris Madsen caught a glimpse of the most impressive, fairy tale-like person he had ever seen in his life. Croy imagines the incident happening in this way:
There came swinging toward him the most gorgeous human being Chris had ever seen. He wore black velvet trousers with a lacework of gold strings, a belt with enough silver ornaments to fill a store window, a hat that looked like something used by the freshman class in a high-school play, and hair to his shoulders. This extraordinary gentleman marched on by, his chin in the air, speaking to no one.

... Chris edged over to one of the men and said:

"Who was that?"

"That was Buffalo Bill."

"What does he do?" asked the puzzled Chris.

"He's an actor, but now he is going to be our scout," answered the fellow soldier.

(Croy 1958, 8-9)

Chris Madsen would soon learn much more about Buffalo Bill, as they would share center stage in a disputed skirmish that has gone into history as a kind of turning point in the campaign of 1876.

The Skirmish at War Bonnet Creek

Around the same time Chris Madsen first caught a glimpse of Buffalo Bill at Fort D. A. Russell, the 1876 campaign experienced two major setbacks, namely at the Battle of Rosebud on June 17, and, the week after, the devastating defeat at Little Bighorn on June 25. Crook’s forces, which had suffered the setback at Rosebud, were now to receive reinforcements and try, once again to find the Native American tribes, defeat them and force them back onto their reservations. Madsen’s regiment was among the reinforcements. On their way north to join Crook’s forces, now called the “Yellowstone Column,” the Fifth Cavalry Regiment under General Wesley Merritt made a stopover at Fort Laramie. A large group of Cheyenne hostiles had been observed in the area, and the cavalry regiment was ordered to attack in order to prevent them from joining the main bands of Sioux and Cheyenne on the warpath further north.

The stop delayed Crook’s campaign, and the general later regretted that he waited for General Merritt and his Fifth Cavalry. Crook
Buffalo Bill in his characteristic outfit. Photographer Joseph Gessford. Used with permission from the Denver Public Library. Western History Collection Z-3604.
was already far behind schedule due to the ill-fated battles of Rosebud and Little Bighorn in June. Finerty reports, “Major T. H. Stanton […] brought information to Merritt on Saturday, July 15th, that eight hundred warriors fully armed and equipped would leave [the area] early Sunday morning for the purpose of joining the hostiles in the Big Horn region” (Finerty 1955, 223). In the early morning on Monday, July 17, 1876, the regiment was ready to confront the hostiles close to Fort Laramie. Chris Madsen, Buffalo Bill, and five other soldiers were ordered to ride ahead of the regiment to scout for the enemy. It was in the middle of summer, blistering hot and extremely dry. The scouts wanted to get as far ahead as possible before noon, where sun and heat would be the worst. After a couple of hours, they reached a flat hill by a creek called “War Bonnet Creek” (Finerty 1955, 219-36).

Sources disagree on what happened next. According to Madsen (1921) and Croy (1958), Chris was at the center of events. Croy, citing Madsen, describes the encounter as follows:

Standing on that flat hill in the morning July 17, Chris, Buffalo Bill and the other five scouts did spot a large group of enemies on horseback. They looked like being a war party. Buffalo Bill, who was in charge of the small unit of scouts, ordered a couple of them to ride back to the main 5th Cavalry column, being just a few miles behind, and inform the commander, General Merritt about the observation. Meanwhile Chris, Bill and the other three scouts continued to approach the enemy, cautiously. (Croy 1958, 10; Madsen 1921, 25-27)

Suddenly, however, an Indian brave jumped out from a bush quite close to Buffalo Bill, who was a bit ahead of Chris and the other scouts. The Indian, whose name was Yellow Hand, carried a rifle and fired a couple of shots at Bill at short range, but did not hit him. Bill fired back immediately, and Chris could see that Yellow Hand was hit in the leg. The bullet went right through the leg and into the horse that fell down, throwing Yellow Hand off. Nevertheless, in spite of all that, Yellow Hand managed to get back on his feet, shooting once again at Buffalo Bill, this time hitting his opponent’s horse, so that Bill also fell off as his horse hit the ground. They exchanged a few more shots and this time Bill wounded Yellow Hand mortally.
What happened next shocked Chris, as he reported in his memoirs. As Yellow Hand fell to the ground, fatally wounded, Buffalo Bill ran hollering towards him, scalping the dying Indian, and waving the scalp in the air afterwards, shouting proudly, "The first scalp for Custer" (Croy 1958, 12; Madsen 1921, 27-28). Chris had heard about the Indian practice of scalping enemies but had never imagined that a white man could act so savagely. Chris therefore ran towards Bill and confronted him with his outrage. Bill acknowledged that his action was extreme but justified it by what he had seen on Yellow Hand's horse: a bloody and torn seventh Cavalry flag, surely from the slaughter at Little Big Horn the month before, and a scalp of long brown woman's hair, that he believed must have belonged to an innocent settler. When spotting all this during the fight, Bill had lost his temper and done something he normally would not have done (Croy 1958, 12).

Once the main band of Indians had heard the shots, they approached rapidly while Chris and Bill were arguing. Meanwhile, the two scouts who had been sent back had alarmed the regiment that now also came closer to the scene of the skirmish. Bill, Chris, and their fellow scouts now discovered columns of soldiers and warriors on horseback preparing for battle. At a distance, the two main columns now began exchanging fire with each other, but after a little time, the Indians suddenly withdrew. Apparently, they did not want...
to fight any more that day—instead they retreated further back into Nebraska.

According to Samuelson (1998), most of this account is just another example of Madsen and Croy mythologizing Madsen’s life. She could not find any evidence of Madsen having participated in the drama at War Bonnet Creek. However, newly discovered sources indicate that Madsen did actually participate in that skirmish.³

**Crook’s “Starvation March”**

After the skirmish at War Bonnet Creek, Madsen and Buffalo Bill, along with other units of the Fifth Cavalry, were ordered to leave Fort Laramie quickly and join the “Yellowstone Expedition” of General Crook (Finerty 1955, 236). After joining the Yellowstone Expedition, Chris Madsen experienced a very different, almost opposite mood to the exuberance he had felt at Fort D. A. Russell some weeks earlier: “The 5th of August we then set out on a campaign, that hardship-, starvation- and weather-wise became unique in the history of the Indian wars,” he writes (Madsen 1921, 16).

The expedition quickly ran into problems: the hostile camps could not be located, and the huge column encountered extreme weather conditions: first, a heatwave with a blistering drought that paralyzed the troopers; when it gave way to severe storms, heavy rain and mud flows slowed down their advance. During the drought Madsen experienced something frightening, a kind of natural disaster he had never seen before back home in Denmark: an aggressive bush and forest fire. He later described the “march along the river, at the foot hills,” as “pure true torture. The thick forests on the hills were burning [...] and the extreme amounts of heat and heavy smoke it generated was devastating for soldiers and horses alike” (Madsen 1921, 16).

Madsen blamed the Indians for the fires that he thought they had ignited on purpose, complaining, “The Indians had burned all grazing areas, and one by one our horses went down. But our enemy knew very well where lush grazing and fresh water could be found for their own horses” (Madsen 1921, 16). Madsen mentions that the column still, in spite of everything, hoped they could lure the Indians into an open battle, where the soldiers would benefit from their better weaponry, but they did not have any luck with that. Instead small bands
of Indians started sneaking into the camps at dusk, night, and dawn, firing a few shots, perhaps wounding one or two soldiers. Although these tactics did not damage the strength of the force as a whole, it frustrated the soldiers and contributed to the rising feeling of desperation and hopelessness in the Yellowstone Column. Madsen explains, “The Indians seldom met us in open battle. But in small groups, they would sneak up on us during nights and fire some shots. They normally didn’t hit anyone, but it was frustrating to be shot at without...
being able to fire back” (Madsen 1921, 16). Sometimes a lone picket was killed, though, while diseases combined with malnutrition and outright starvation finished other soldiers off: “Every morning, before we left camp, we heard 3 volleys and a tattoo as a final farewell to those comrades who had died during the night” (Madsen 1921, 16). Madsen felt that the campaign continued to deteriorate as it dragged on and on without any accomplishments or victories in sight, reporting of the situation at the end of August 1876, “We were down to two biscuits and a little meat from our own horses that we had to slaughter to survive” (Madsen 1921, 16).

However, at this dark moment in the campaign, some of Chris Madsen’s strengths and virtues turned out to be invaluable. He had already proved himself an excellent sharpshooter, both when hunting and in combat, and now more than ever these competencies mattered. So far, the officers had been reluctant to let Chris and other marksmen use their talents too openly for hunting, as they feared the shooting would reveal their position to the enemy. However, to all the enlisted men it was apparent that the Indians already knew exactly where the column was. Madsen and his comrades clearly felt that the enemy followed every move they made, so the hunting restrictions made no sense to them. Gradually, as the starvation situation continued to deteriorate, Madsen, by his own account, went hunting more and more openly:

One day, when camping in some hills, I sneaked out of our camp to hunt. After some time, I spotted a group of partridges and shot at them right away, hitting several. However, I dared not bring them back to the camp openly—I knew that some of the officers were still fiercely opposing all hunting. Instead, I hid the birds under some bushes, and walked back. When returning to camp I found out that our captain had become very sick. As he was already very weakened by the campaign hardships, it was obvious that he could not recover having only the severely reduced rations. The captain was quite a coxcomb and a bit of a crackpot, but actually a very nice fellow, fair and just to us as long as we worked hard and did our duty. I thought it would be good for him to get some of the fresh bird meat
but dared not suggest it directly to him. Instead I told it to our lieutenant, whom I was acquainted with. He immediately approved of my suggestion, thanked me and ordered us both to rush out of camp and pick up the birds to get the cooking going. When done, our captain really loved the "feast" we got for dinner that evening. After that episode, I got a permanent permission to go hunting whenever possible and was officially appointed regimental huntsman. (Madsen, 1921, 17)

The Battle of Slim Buttes

Whether or not Madsen's hunting was as heroic an act as he claimed, the game that he and other hunters could provide the sick, exhausted, and starving soldiers was only a drop in the ocean. Madsen believed the whole campaign to be in jeopardy. Crook had to do something fast, which he did, sending 16 muleskinners, 61 mules, and 150 cavalrymen on the best horses available south to the Black Hills to get fresh provisions. Madsen claimed he was chosen to be a part of this expedition. With Captain Anson Mills in command, the expeditionary force left the main column on September 7, 1876 and headed south for the Black Hills. However, the next day, September 8, Mills' men by chance discovered something the whole Yellowstone Column had been looking for in vain over the last four to five weeks: a large enemy camp of hostile Sioux Indians. The camp was situated in a kind of ravine at Slim Buttes, and Mills' scouts reported that the camp consisted of around 37 tipis, 400 horses, and 260 Indians, of whom fewer than a third were warriors. Upon hearing this, Mills thought that a surprise attack was the right thing to do in this situation and started planning it right away. He chose to ignore his orders to rush down to the Black Hills, relying instead on the possibility of finding dried meat in the Slim Buttes camp (Donovan 2008, 333; Finerty 1955, 280-303).

On the morning of September 9, Mills' 150 cavalrymen attacked the camp at Slim Buttes. It indeed came as a surprise to the Indians, but some warriors were quick to fight back while others, mainly women and children, fled to safety and to alarm their kin in other nearby camps. Mills' force gained a quick victory by being able to
capture or chase away the larger part of the Sioux ponies, dealing a devastating blow to the Indians. Mills sent back a couple of scouts to inform Crook about the ongoing attack and ask for reinforcements as Mills rightly feared an upcoming Indian counterattack. In spite of the fact that Mills’ force outnumbered the remaining warriors at Slim Buttes, however, he gradually lost the momentum of the battle due to fierce resistance, especially from a number of Sioux entrenched in a ravine above the camp, from where they shot down a number of soldiers.

Mills then ordered a halt in the attack, while a group of sharpshooters took position to fire back at the group of Indians in the ravine. Madsen was allegedly one of these expert riflemen. He reports:

Along a creek running through Slim Buttes there were some steep slopes. In a cave high up these slopes, a group of warriors had hid, and from there they shot down several of our men. At first, we could not see where they were hiding, but when we finally located them, our attack was halted while ten of our best sharpshooters were ordered to climb up the opposite hill. I was part of this group, and when we reached the top of the hill, we fired around 15 rounds each at the enemy in the cave. We then stopped for a while so our Indian scouts could approach the ravine and try to negotiate a truce or surrender with the enemy there. (Madsen 1921, 18)

The sharpshooting almost eliminated the Sioux in the ravine. Once everyone had been hit, they all surrendered, limping or crawling out of the cave. Now the soldiers could move on, capturing the rest of the horses, the provisions, the loot and ammunition at the Slim Buttes camp. The soldiers burned down the tipis and feasted on the captured dried meat.

But the Battle of Slim Buttes was far from over; in fact, it had only just begun. Reinforcements were on their way on both sides. The news of a successful surprise attack at Slim Buttes created euphoria among the troops in the main column farther north. It was the first good news they had received since the campaign started more than a month before. Their despair and exhaustion disappeared, and Crook...
I Frans Ørsted Andersen

immediately ordered the troops to move south to join Mills. Madsen writes that the first reinforcements from the main column up north reached the expeditionary force at Slim Buttes already around noon. Every time a group of reinforcements, riding or marching, entered the Slim Buttes area, the soldiers there would meet them with hoorahs, clapping and hollering. More fires were lit and everyone joined in a feast of dried meat. However, the officers tried to stop the party and ordered the soldiers to prepare defensive positions instead—they knew from their Indian scouts that the counterattack was on its way. And indeed, it was. When around seven hundred warriors counterattacked at Slim Buttes later that day, Chris Madsen and more than one thousand soldiers were well entrenched and ready to fight back. The Sioux were met with roaring and precise volleys, and no matter what they did, they could not come close to the fortified lines of soldiers in the hills. They suffered a clear defeat.

However, the hardships for Madsen and other soldiers in Crook’s force were not over. The campaign would continue for many more days. The Indians had lost the day but they would come back and fight on, no longer with large-scale attacks, but using guerilla tactics. For Chris Madsen personally the worst hardships of the campaign were yet to come—he would almost get killed in a number of ambushes while hunting on September 12. His hunting partner, private Cyrus B. Milner, was killed and scalped, with his throat cut ear-to-ear and his breast gashed (Madsen 1921, 38). However, on the night of September 9, 1876, Chris Madsen and all the other soldiers at Slim Buttes celebrated the victory they had won that day.

The campaign had finally had some success, accomplishing something the soldiers could be proud of. Moreover, Chris Madsen for once had some time and energy to reflect on his new life in America. Eight months had passed since he had arrived in New York, and everything had changed in that period. He was doing honest work and had proved to be excellent at it; he had become part of a new forward-moving nation that, unlike his old country, was prosperous and successful. In spite of all the hardships he had reasons to feel good about the new life course he had begun. His plans had worked, he had done well as a soldier in the US—he had made friends with other enlisted men, won appreciation from his superiors, earned a promotion (to
sharpshooter and regimental huntsman), and had been appointed to special duties. He had made it—so far (Madsen 1921, 38-39). So, for the first time during his eight months in the US, he participated in a kind of party, as the Yellowstone Column celebrated their victory with dried meat, drinks, laughing, and singing at the campfires under the starlit autumn sky. An article in the Chicago Tribune reported on September 18, 1867, “Night is here, and 1,000 camp-fires light a scene never to be forgotten. The soldiers last night, ragged, cold, weak, starved and well-nigh desperate, are feasting upon meat and fruits received from a savage enemy.... Merry songs are sung, and everywhere goes up the cry, Crook is right after all.” Chris Madsen enjoyed that night—and rightly so because already the next day reality with all the well-known hardships and frustrations returned.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this article I asked the question, “Who was Chris Madsen really?” He has previously been described as either a hero or a villain. While the many sources of his long life point to a very complex answer, I think he was more hero than villain. Chris Madsen started life as a normal Danish country boy, growing up in a poor, hardworking family at the bottom of a very class-divided society being torn apart by a devastating war and social unrest. Yet he did well at school and continued to get a good education at an agricultural folk high school. Like so many other young people then and now, he wanted to try his luck in the big city, and he managed to find good jobs in Copenhagen and almost made it there. However, a series of unfortunate events suddenly hit him: he got sick and hospitalized; he then lost his job and his apartment and ended up in the street with serious debt. He found an easy but wrong way out by conning the Danish elites. Rightly, he was imprisoned for this behavior and served his time. However, he tried to get the best out of his prison time, where he studied, wrote and learned from clever but jailed union people, whose organizations back then were outlawed.

When Chris Madsen was released after one year, it appeared that he had decided to start a new, more honest life in America to make up for his few criminal years in Denmark. He arrived in New York in early 1876, a decisive year in America’s history. It would turn out to be
a decisive and formative year for Chris Madsen too. He would soon be out West, at center stage of major events, transforming him into a mature grown man, qualified and motivated for meeting the challenging hardships of the Old West. Together with both Danish and American colleagues I will continue to dig into the amazingly large number of sources, well known, lesser known or until now, unknown, to further unfold the exciting and enigmatic life of this truly interesting Danish American character.

Works Cited


Endnotes

1 Ernst presented some of these poems in the 2003 biography.
2 Warren Watson, from the Museum of Danish America in Elk Horn, Iowa, and I have found sources confirming this, which we will publish about soon.
3 As mentioned before, in the ongoing research I am conducting in cooperation with Warren Watson, we have found sources indicating that Madsen did actually participate in that skirmish. We are planning to publish more about that in the future.
4 Madsen had probably learned to shoot as a boy, assisting his father and brothers when they went hunting. The area where he grew up, the western part of Funen was, and is still, one of the best hunting grounds in Denmark.
At his death in 1914, Jacob A. Riis was one of the US's best-known and most admired citizens, who had been able to effect more social change than most of his peers. President Theodore Roosevelt had earlier declared Riis to be “the most useful citizen of New York,” and now called him “the ideal American citizen.”¹ In one of many obituaries of Riis we read:

Denmark gave him to us, and if we gave Denmark millions in return, we could not pay her for what Riis did for us and for what Riis inspired us to do. He landed in New York with only $40 in his pockets, but his service for humanity has left that city an endowment of blessing, practical and spiritual, that all the wealth of Mr. Carnegie and Mr. Rockefeller could not excel.²

Riis' efforts were shown in progress through his book *How the Other Half Lives* from 1890, which helped to herald the Progressive Era, the period of reform that followed two decades of rampant, uncontrolled capitalism. Historian Hasia R. Diner describes the book as one of only a handful that led to a fundamental transformation of public opinion and change of policy in the area in question.³

The contributions of Jacob A. Riis have been largely forgotten by the general public, though his works are still part of the eighth-grade curriculum in New York state. Yet over the past fifteen years there has been a growing interest in Riis, with several big exhibitions in the US and Denmark, while a touring exhibition about him is currently on its way around twenty-six American states. His name nowadays is mainly linked to the stark photographs he took of the New York slums from 1887 through the following decade. On the international level, and especially in the US, he is still regarded as a pioneer of documentary photography, and he is at last receiving long-overdue
appreciation in Denmark, thanks to books, articles, and now a whole museum devoted to his life and influence. June 2019 saw the opening and subsequent success of the Jacob A. Riis Museum in his hometown of Ribe, a part of the Museum of Southwest Jutland.

Bandits’ Roost, at Mulberry Street 59½, is considered one of Jacob A. Riis’ most iconic pictures and has been reproduced countless times in books and articles. The photo was taken in October-November 1887 together with three amateur photographers, using a magnesium flash. Photo courtesy of the Museum of the City of New York.

This article focuses on Jacob A. Riis’ role as a Danish American and the question of transnationalism. Is it possible to be loyal to two countries? One of Riis’ closest friends, Theodore Roosevelt, who later became president, took a decisive stance on the matter. In his 1894
Roosevelt explicitly states that you can only love one flag—a standpoint he held throughout his life. Yet while Riis and Roosevelt seemed to have agreed on almost everything else and cherished their admiration for each other’s achievements, we shall see that they differed in their view of loyalty “to the flag.” But first, let us look more closely at the enormous transformation that American society underwent around the turn of the last century, as a result of immigration, industrialization, and urbanization.

Riis’ Humble Background

On Pentecost Sunday, June 5, 1870, the steamship Iowa arrived in New York. After a day in quarantine, it docked at Castle Garden in southwest Manhattan, where 540 hopeful immigrants disembarked. Among them was the twenty-one-year-old Jacob A. Riis, a poor carpenter’s apprentice who had left behind the medieval small town of Ribe. His overpowering but unrequited love for Elisabeth Giørtz, three years his junior and daughter of the town’s richest man, motivated him to seek a better, more prosperous life in the US. If it had only been a question of work, he could have found a job in Esbjerg, thirty kilometers north of Ribe, where a port was being constructed for Danish exports—or he could have returned to the thriving building industry in Copenhagen, where he had trained as a carpenter. But he needed to get even farther away. Since Elisabeth had rejected his proposal of marriage, he had to prove that he was worthy of her before he could return to try again. For Riis, the US was the land of opportunity in every sense.

However, he first had to go through the wringer! After a promising start with several temporary jobs in the northeastern states, Riis returned to New York. Unable to find work, he soon sank into disillusionment, despair, and the pangs of hunger. Worst of all came the news from home that Elisabeth was to marry a Danish hero from the 1864 war with Prussia. Only chance occurrences prevented Riis from taking his own life, but after he managed to land a job in the newspaper business, he never looked back. One adventure followed another, each of which Riis faced with equal parts indomitable courage, enormous work-energy, a will to create a better life for others—and good fortune.
Three decades after his arrival on American shores, Riis had become one of America’s most famous and respected men, and a close friend of President Theodore Roosevelt. Above all, and against the odds, he had married Elisabeth and brought her to New York. In 1901 they celebrated their silver wedding anniversary with the nation looking on, as they continued to enjoy life in middle-class Richmond Hill in Queens.

Massive Immigration and Housing Woes

Until 1880 the US received a steady flow of Irish, German, Scandinavian, British, and other immigrants, primarily Protestants, from northern Europe. Yet while this influx continued, it was soon dwarfed by two other waves of immigration. The first, lasting from approximately 1880 to 1914, was made up of no fewer than four million Italians, the vast majority from southern Italy, with almost a million from Sicily alone. They were uneducated, often illiterate, and escaping from famine. They bunched together in Italian neighborhoods, where they had no need to learn English; indeed, many of them dreamed of returning to Bella Italia. Both Chicago and New York acquired a “Little Italy,” the latter being on the Lower East Side and soon also in Harlem. To a high degree it was these poverty-stricken Italians whom Riis met and portrayed in so many photographs.

The second major immigrant wave consisted of eastern European Jews, who were being increasingly persecuted in wide-ranging pogroms. In this explosive emigration 2.1 million Jews, a third of all those living in eastern Europe, relocated in the period 1881-1914. The vast majority came to the US, three-quarters of whom began their new life in New York. Many of these Jewish immigrants dreamed of owning their own small businesses, and a good number of them were employed in the textile industry. Like the Italians, they tended to cluster together in the same urban quarter, in New York on the Lower East Side. Here they gradually created a strong Yiddish culture, with their own newspapers, theatres, and powerful social fabric. The massive immigration into the Lower East Side meant that by the end of the nineteenth century, the area constituted the most densely populated space in the world.
Table 1. Population in New York, Top 10 nationalities, 1860 and 1910

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>203,740</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>484,191</td>
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<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>119,984</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>340,770</td>
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<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>27,082</td>
<td>Germany</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
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<td>France</td>
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<td>190,246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>3,899</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>78,483</td>
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<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>1,771</td>
<td>Hungary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
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<td>Sweden</td>
<td>34,952</td>
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<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>1,464</td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>33,586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Indies</td>
<td>1,202</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>27,180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born outside USA</td>
<td>383,717</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,944,357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>813,669</td>
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<td>4,766,883</td>
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Source: Anbinder, City of Dreams, 188 and 444.

The vast majority of these recent immigrants lived in tenement blocks, which for the most part offered only miserable, cramped living conditions. Congress had passed the first Tenement Law already in 1867, but, like most of the social legislation of subsequent decades, it was totally inadequate to the task. The steadily increasing housing problems inspired many proposals for reform. A few philanthropists even built model tenements in an attempt to show that five percent interest on any rent could create a satisfactory compromise between the owners’ wish for a profitable business and the tenants’ need for decent housing. The idea met with very little success, however, since owners in general could otherwise demand an interest rate two to three times higher. Moreover, most of New York’s rented housing was owned by small businessmen and, little by little, also by immigrants, who had no wish to forgo their newly won opportunity to make a profit.

The small and often wretched apartments were not only homes; they were often also workplaces, so-called sweatshops, where the
whole family and several more employees were involved. At the time New York was the world center of the clothing industry. From an early age, children had to work in a home industry or factory. Poverty was endemic, and crime was widespread, so many a homeless person had to struggle along on scraps. A tenth of the New York population was so poor that they were buried in Potter’s Field, the cemetery for “the unknown and the poor” on Hart Island in the East River.

As a newspaper man, Riis wrote countless hard-hitting articles about child labor, wretched housing, hunger, poor water supply, and widespread corruption among politicians, civil servants, the police and so on. Beginning in the 1880s and 1890s other social reformers began to raise their voices, and among progressive politicians and public servants there was a realization that something had to be done. But it was the voice of Jacob Riis that proved to be the loudest, in large part because he was the first to link the power of his words to photographic evidence from his camera.

To gather this evidence Riis exploited the new possibility of taking photographs in dark conditions by using a flash. From 1887 he went into the dark apartments, the murky bars, the over-populated night quarters, and the various streets and workplaces on the Lower East Side. Whether the photos were taken by day or by night, they provided graphic proof of the raw nature of life lived in and around the densely packed tenement blocks. Riis then put together a slide lecture using a laterna magica and wrote a series of articles that were published in the New York Tribune, for whom he was a crime reporter. In 1890 he expanded and collected these articles in How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York. The book was a great publishing success and opened the eyes of the white middle class to how “the other half” lived.

Although many other measures had been taken to combat urban housing issues before How the Other Half Lives appeared, the book heralded a symbolic transition into a new period in American history. Social development initiatives were still primarily driven by philanthropists, pastors, and other social reformers, but from around the turn of the century the approach changed character. It began to be driven to a much greater degree by “scientific philanthropy,” that is, by people who documented the actual living conditions on a solid
statistical or scientific basis and then proposed solutions not just to the individual problems but to the general welfare as seen in an overview of urban development. The progressive movement laid the basis for regulations and a fledgling welfare state as it was already emerging in northern Europe in the same period.

Jacob A. Riis’ breakthrough book, How the Other Half Lives, is still considered one of the most important books to bring about social change. Published in 1890 it heralded The Progressive Era, a period of reform that redressed the worst consequences of industrialization and urbanization. No previous book had contained so many photographs either, 17 in all. The book is still in print in various editions.
Progressives acknowledged that the market could not solve every problem and declared that a certain amount of regulation was necessary to mitigate the effects of the imperfect market. Riis was responsible for one of the era’s major reform victories when, in 1897, he orchestrated the demolition of the notorious slum blocks around Mulberry Bend on the Lower East Side; these were replaced by a large green area (now Columbus Park), where children could play. Riis’ socially conservative approach helped to clear much of the slum “cancer” that had prevented the creation of a safe and secure family life, especially for children.

**Immigration, assimilation and national identity**

The story of Jacob A. Riis and his fascinating life naturally focuses on social poverty, reform, and documentary photography, but Riis’ times and achievements also engage with other major questions, such as: should there be any limits on immigration? Should immigrants be allowed to retain their local culture instead of being expected to assimilate and become unhyphenated Americans? Can people feel a sense of loyalty to more than one country?

Until 1860 the US was primarily a land of farmers, artisans, and businessmen. Over the course of a few decades, intense industrialization, urbanization, and immigration created a quite different country. By this time there was no longer a frontier, since the whole country was now involved in the national economy. Nor was there a need for so many new farmers to cultivate the soil, especially when market prices were so low, so urban populations increased. The changing demographics of the new immigrants changed the ethnic and religious makeup of the country. While formerly the vast majority of immigrants had been white Protestants, they now included millions of Roman Catholics from southern Europe, Jews from eastern Europe, and many non-Christian Chinese and Japanese citizens, in addition to the freed slaves moving north from the southern states. Anxiety over these changes led to the rise of nativism, which focused on promoting the interests of native-born inhabitants (though not American Indians) against those of newer immigrants. From the 1890s through the 1920s, nativism and the immigrant question were part and parcel of practically every major social and economic issue in US politics.
In large cities, ongoing immigration not only presented an economic challenge in the face of rising unemployment; it also represented a much bigger threat, in the eyes of nativists, in that the "original" American culture (i.e., the culture of the Anglo-Saxon Germanic Christian immigrants that had preceded these massive new immigration waves) seemed to be at risk of being eroded as these allegedly ignorant, illiterate, and often unclean foreigners poured in and wreaked havoc on social order. Many of them neither could not, nor would not, speak English, and the cities experienced growing social disorder with a rise in slum dwellings, sickness and poverty, crime, alcoholism, and prostitution. In some cities anti-Italian riots broke out. Strong anti-Chinese sentiment on the West Coast led Congress to pass the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, which forced railroad companies to import a large number of Mexican workers, who were not perceived as a racial threat at that time. Widespread anti-Catholic sentiment targeted the many Italian, Polish, and Irish immigrants. Likewise, anti-Semitism across class lines and geography led many people to believe that Jewish financiers were exploiting the wealth-producing classes.13

Some among the white Protestant majority population feared for the racial purity of the American people and questioned the country's ability to absorb and assimilate so many immigrants from Europe and Asia. Race and whiteness became markers of the different ethnic groups' degree of being "real" Americans. Native-born Americans of Anglo-Saxon "old stock" positioned themselves at the top, while new immigrants such as southern Italians and eastern European Jews were at the bottom.14 Scandinavian Americans—so-called because nativist writers rarely differentiated between Swedes, Danes and Norwegians—were generally considered to be almost on par with "old stock" Americans. Their Protestant background and educational level were, of course, assets. It definitely also counted that they were "found to be the fairest among the so-called white races."15

At the same time, many people shared the concern that the large number of illiterate immigrants would not follow American values or respect American law and justice.16 To use an expression borrowed from social Darwinism, they were depicted as "beaten men from beaten races, representing the worst failures in the struggle for existence."17 Even the New York Times complained about "the physical, moral, and
mental wrecks" arriving from Europe, and argued that most Americans believed they could do without immigrants from Russia and Italy. An 1892 article claimed that such people had “a great resistance to being assimilated and Americanized,” and concluded that “an influx of such a quality and quantity is a national nuisance.” In general the press carried articles of a more or less racist nature aimed, for example, at Russian Jews with their “rat’s eyes” and mafia-infected Italians with their penchant for personal vengeance.

In 1891 Congress passed an immigration law transferring control of the processing of immigrants from local to federal authorities. In New York, which was the port of entry for a large number of foreigners, immigration control was transferred from Battery Park on the southernmost tip of Manhattan (where Riis had disembarked in 1870) to the newly built facilities on Ellis Island. From 1892-1954 no fewer than twelve million European immigrants entered the US via Ellis Island. If immigrants passed the island’s health examination (only 2 percent failed in the above-mentioned period), they moved on to the immigration inspectors, who also assessed whether they might pose a burden to society or be too weak for the workforce. In 1909 President Theodore Roosevelt was replaced by another Republican, William Howard Taft, who tightened immigration controls. The new director of Ellis Island promised to keep out as many “undesirables” as possible. He was to ensure that “unintelligent” immigrants with “low vitality” were excluded, and he personally introduced a demand that immigrants should be in possession of at least twenty-five US dollars. Even so, the annual number of immigrants admitted ranged between eight and nine hundred thousand. They were helped by a wide variety of relief organizations with a background in the various nationalities, including a Danish aid society. The largest of these was the Jewish organization, which helped the many eastern European Jews, who were those who came to grief most often, not least because of their poor physical condition.

Many prosperous, established Americans regarded the enormous influx of southern and eastern Europeans as a danger to American life as they knew it. This belief resulted in the founding of anti-immigrant lobbyist groups such as the Immigration Restriction League in 1893, which contributed to the passage of the Immigration Act of
1917; this legislation denied entrance to the country to people who could not read. The same applied to proven anarchists, the mentally ill, homosexuals, contract workers (excluding Mexicans), and others too numerous to mention. The act also prevented most Asians from entering the US. In 1921 the Emergency Quota Act fixed the number of immigrants every year and assigned quotas on the basis of nationality according to their representation in the 1910 census, a system that affected southern and eastern Europeans in particular. The National Origins Act of 1924 tightened these restrictions further and made them permanent (they remained in effect until being repealed in 1965).
Riis’ life and attitudes are a useful lens through which to examine the question of national identity. When Roosevelt in 1914 called him “the ideal American citizen,” he meant that Riis – despite being an immigrant – was a good American citizen who was completely integrated and who gave all for his new fatherland. What did Riis think of these nativist currents? He clearly supported giving the persecuted and able-bodied the opportunity to enter the country he loved so much. He believed that there was room for them and that they were a potential asset, if they were willing to work hard. At the same time, Riis was a powerful champion of swift integration, which meant, in his view, that immigrants should learn English and adopt American values as quickly as possible. For this reason, he had a problem with the Chinese, who kept to themselves and seemed to simply refuse to integrate. He also found it difficult to understand why Italians and Jews crowded together in their own “little nations” and “little quarters” in various parts of the city.

Patriotism and Americanism

From the mid-1890s onwards, Riis and Roosevelt were close friends and allies in the reform movement. Their mutual admiration led Riis to write a major biography of Roosevelt which could find no fault in its subject. They appeared to agree on everything, and indeed thought alike on many issues. Both were strong patriots, regarding American influence and interventions in Central America and the Pacific as a natural safeguarding of US interests. Both believed in the intrinsic value of hard work and its rewards. This involved a much greater degree of liberty than was available in Europe and offered better opportunities to climb the social ladder. However, on the question of social identity there were clear differences in their attitudes. In a nutshell, they differed on the symbolic question of whether immigrants should love only one flag or whether they could just as well love two.

Patriotism means love of fatherland, defined as the land with which one most identifies with or is loyal towards. It comes from a feeling of national identity and a sense of unity with certain specific values. Nationalism, on the other hand, is more of a political ideology, in which the ideal is a merging of language, culture, and the formation
of a state. It often includes the demand to reclaim areas which at some point in history belonged under the state. For many, nationalism is inherently hostile towards foreigners, and is synonymous with national chauvinism; in contrast, others regard it as a bulwark against a lack of culture and history and the watering-down of national interests. The immigration waves from 1880-1914 made the question of what America was, and what it meant to be an American, increasingly urgent. One of those who contributed most to the debate was Theodore Roosevelt. In 1894 the thirty-six-year-old up-and-coming politician wrote an article about what it meant to be a “true American.” He demanded full assimilation and was a strong opponent of “hyphenated Americans” (such as German Americans, Irish Americans, etc.), declaring, “we want only Americans.” He continued:

Americanism is a question of spirit, conviction, and purpose, not of creed or birthplace... A Scandinavian, a German, or an Irishman who has really become an American has the right to stand on exactly the same footing as any native-born citizen in the land and is just as much entitled to the friendship and support, social and political, of his neighbors.23

Roosevelt was open to immigration but believed that immigrants needed to learn the English language as quickly as possible and work hard to contribute to the development of their new land. They should forget all about the land they had left behind and instead transform themselves into one common people, the American people. He cautioned:

Where immigrants, or the sons of immigrants, do not heartily and in good faith throw in their lot with us, but cling to the speech, the customs, the ways of life, and the habits of thought of the Old World which they have left, they thereby harm both themselves and us. If they remain alien elements, unassimilated, and with interests separate from ours, they are mere obstructions to the current of our national life, and, moreover, can get no good from it themselves.... So, from his own standpoint, it is beyond all ques-
tion the wise thing for the immigrant to become thoroughly Americanized. Moreover, from our standpoint, we have a right to demand it. We freely extend the hand of welcome and of good-fellowship to every man, no matter what his creed or birthplace, who comes here honestly intent on becoming a good United States citizen like the rest of us. 24

The Making of an American

November 1901 saw the publication of Jacob A. Riis’ autobiography, *The Making of An American*. Of the sixteen books he published, it proved to be his next best seller after *How the Other Half Lives*. By the standards of the day, it was handsomely produced, with 16 chapters, 443 pages, and 84 illustrations, all contributing to Riis’ reputation and fame. The book ends with a chapter entitled “The American Made,” which reads as a pledge of faith to the American flag and society, while also emphasizing Riis’ enduring connection to Denmark. It is thus testimony to the dilemma that so many immigrants experience, as their identity travels with them to the new land. Riis argues that national identity is not necessarily a permanently fixed point but can develop and contain a twofold loyalty. His readers could also take Riis as an example of all the hardships poor immigrants must face before they met with success. The indirect message of the book is therefore that for the energetic and enterprising immigrant the US was indeed “the land of opportunity.”

By its very title, *The Making of an American* signified that the author wished to tell his audience that now he was an American. Moreover, his journey had been much like that of any other American immigrant. He was proud of being an American and was working tirelessly to show it, but he had not thrown the old world overboard. When King Christian IX had asked how the Danes were doing in America, Riis answered, “I told him they were good citizens, better for not forgetting their motherland.” 25 *The Making of an American* nevertheless closes with a paean to America and the American flag, in which Riis speaks in almost biblical terms about a final transformation. The background was his return to Denmark in 1899 to visit his mother and travel round Denmark. During the trip he became

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seriously ill with malaria and spent several weeks in a little house in a fishing hamlet along the Sound on Denmark's eastern coast. Suddenly, through the window, he saw a sight that became the book's powerful conclusion:

There sailed past, close inshore, a ship flying at the top the flag of freedom, blown out on the breeze till every star in it shone bright and clear. That moment I knew. Gone were illness, discouragement, and gloom! Forgotten weakness and suffering, the cautions of doctor and nurse. I sat up in bed and shouted, laughed and cried by turn, waving my handkerchief to the flag out there. They thought I had lost my head, but I told them no, thank God! I had found it, and my heart too, at last. I knew then that it was my flag: that my children's home was mine, indeed: that I also had become an American in truth. And I thanked God, and, like unto the man sick of the palsy, arose from my bed and went home, healed.”

Riis is spreading the butter thick here. The very sight of the Stars and Stripes has a Christ-like healing effect on him and simultaneously confirms that he is now a full-blooded American.

From the corrections in his manuscript, we can see how meticulous Riis was with this final formulation. He clearly had his American reading public in mind, not least Vice President Theodore Roosevelt, to whom he sent the paragraph and its various revisions, knowing precisely what his friend wanted to read. In the above-mentioned article on Americanism and in numerous later speeches, Roosevelt in turn was absolutely single-minded: "The immigrant must revere only our flag; not only must it come first, but no other flag should even come second." Riis' employment of the American flag at the close of his autobiography is therefore a conscious answer to Roosevelt's imperative.

However, he would not deny that he too was a hyphenated American, that he had a twofold national identity and a twofold loyalty. The whole book is one long testimony to this, for instance at the moment in 1870 when, inflamed with patriotism, he considered volunteering for the French army in order to fight the Germans, to whom the Danes
had lost a bloody war in 1864. Riis recalls, “I remembered the defeat, the humiliation of the flag I loved – aye! and love yet, for there is no flag like the flag of my fathers, save only that of my children and of my manhood.”²⁹ He underlined this further with the central sentence: “Happy he who has a flag to love; twice blест be he who has two.”³⁰

Somewhat provocatively he includes in the final chapter of his autobiography a photograph of a group of children from the slums in Cherry Street on the Lower East Side. They are visiting his beautiful home in Richmond Hill, and behind all the children and adults in the back garden is a string, stretched between the house and a tree, on which the Danish flag, Dannebrog, is waving!³¹ Roosevelt was of course well aware that Riis was a hyphenated American. Most conspicuous of all to this effect was the royal Danish order of chivalry that Riis wore on a visit to President Roosevelt’s White House on the King of Denmark’s birthday, although Roosevelt had previously written that new Americans should stop marking the birthdays of monarchs and emperors and should instead celebrate George Washington and the Fourth of July rather than St. Patrick’s Day.³² Riis also wrote openheartedly: “I am afraid that thirty years in the land of my children’s birth have left me as much a Dane as ever.”³³

In this connection Riis used the analogy of asking what man would throw his old mother out to make room for his wife. He used the same analogy a couple of years later, when a reader wanted to know to which side he would owe his allegiance if the US and Denmark went to war with one another. He replied, “I should always fight for the flag to which I owed my allegiance,” but continued: “It would break my heart to see my mother and my wife fight.”³⁴ Riis was not the only one to use that analogy. The German American general, Secretary of the Interior, editor, and reformer, Carl Schurz (1829-1906) was a strong proponent for seeing the old and new identities as an asset and as complementary to each other, explaining, “I love Germany as my mother. America is my bride.”³⁵

Roosevelt accepted Riis’ twofold loyalty, because he both needed Riis and greatly appreciated him, while at the same time recognizing that on so many points the “Danish American” was helping to develop American society. They were in total agreement on all political and ideological matters, and their views on race, religion, family, mascu-
linity, nature and so on were identical. It would doubtless have been otherwise if Riis had been a Russian, an Italian, or a Chinese with a twofold allegiance, since those ethnicities were considered to be at the lower end of the racial and ethnic hierarchy. Roosevelt did not hesitate to call Riis "the most useful citizen in the land." In his introduction to the 1914 edition of the autobiography, published shortly after Riis' death, Roosevelt writes, "If I were asked to name a fellow-man who came nearest to being the ideal American citizen, I should name Jacob Riis." It is worth noting, however, that Roosevelt did not call Riis "the ideal American," but "the ideal American citizen." The two men had a great and mutual admiration for each other, and Roosevelt could not do otherwise than accept Riis' transnationalism and twofold national loyalty, even though Riis never met Roosevelt's standard of "true Americanism" and full assimilation.

In addition to writing books, Riis also toured the US for several months of the year with his lantern slide lectures. Both his readers and his audiences may have got the impression that he shared the xenophobic view of immigrants by the dominant group whose origins were Anglo-Saxon or northern European. His was a strong voice for requiring full integration. In his first books he strongly disapproved of the clannishness of the Italians, the Irish, the eastern European Jews, and the Chinese. He had a strong tendency to present the various immigrant population groups as stereotypes: lazy Italians, dirty Polish Jews, drunken Irish, etc. However, Riis never supported any limitation on immigration, or subscribed to the tenets of nativism. Fundamentally, he welcomed all those who were in need and/or willing to contribute to the development of American society. As time passed, Riis also acquired a deeper insight into the homeland values that each of the population groups brought with them and realized that their retention might actually be an asset to the United States.

In the last ten or so years of his life, Riis became increasingly nostalgic, and spent more and more time telling his American audience about Danish and Nordic history. In 1909 he published The Old Town, which dealt with life in his hometown of Ribe. The following year came Hero Tales from the Far North with chapters on Nordic heroes such as Tordenskjold, Hans Egede, Gustav Vasa, Christian IV, and others. In addition, he wrote several magazine articles on topics from Danish
history. These were in no way historical studies, but rather served a propagandistic purpose. *Hero Tales from the Far North* tried to show the American public that immigrants carried a proud history with them and had much to contribute to their new land. However, Riis supported this argument with stories not from unknown Eastern Europe, the conflict-riven Balkans, or poor Southern Italy, but from heroic Scandinavia. Around the turn of the nineteenth century quite a few Scandinavian American writers pointed to the Viking settlement in the year 1000 on Newfoundland to stress the kinship between Scandinavians and the English people. Historian Jørn Brøndal explains, "According to this thought, the Norsemen, Anglo-Saxons, and Germans were all members of the proud Teutonic race; masculine morality was a barbarian virtue; vigor was a result." As a concept, "Nordic" was at a premium—Scandinavians were known as solid, energetic, Protestant members of society. Hence, Riis could dare to make a point of bringing home the value of the old culture to his readers already in the book’s preface: “The immigrant America wants and needs is he who brings the best of his old home to the new, not he who threw it overboard on his voyage.”

His own life bears witness as to how fluid national identity is as a concept. The home he shared with Elisabeth and their children on Beech Street in Richmond Hill was furnished very much in Danish style, and they celebrated a “Danish” Christmas from start to finish. Little by little, however, their conversation switched from Danish to English, and their letters to Denmark followed suit. Already in 1884 Jacob A. Riis became an American citizen, equipped with an American passport. He was immensely proud of his new country and regarded Denmark as being in many ways a land lagging behind the US, bound as it was by convention. Nonetheless, it was the proudest moment of his life when, in 1900, King Christian IX made him a Knight of the Order of the Dannebrog. In an effusive speech of thanks Riis said, “No greater honor could befall me, nor any greater happiness, for thirty years’ citizenship of the Union has not managed to reduce my loyal affection for my old royal house.” It should be stressed that his admiration was for the king and the royal family, not for Denmark as a whole. He was proud of his small-town background, as we can read in his rosy *The Old Town*, where people lived a very traditional life,
took care of each other, and had a close relation to the open nature.\textsuperscript{42} The country as a whole, however, he found rather provincial and lacking American dynamism and possibilities for personal freedom and striving.

Neither was Riis’ promotion of Danish and Nordic history connected to an affiliation with formal Danish American or Scandinavian American associations and personalities. His only involvement in a Danish organization came about when he was a young immigrant. He had been one of the founders of the still existing Danish church in Brooklyn, but when the family moved out to Richmond Hill he became a member of the Episcopal Church of the Resurrection. This was part of his social ascent, as the Episcopal Church generally attracted members of the Anglo-Saxon urban middle and upper classes. He was also not a strong supporter of the idea of an annual meeting of Danish Americans at Rebild Park in Denmark.\textsuperscript{43}

Both in his personal life and as a social reformer he had first of all an individualistic and family-oriented approach. He disliked the so-called scientific philanthropy with its broad sociological approach.\textsuperscript{44} He saw the suffering of children, women, men, and families, and he spent a lot of money on charity when he met worthy needy persons. Among them were young Danish immigrants if he found them to be hard workers who would contribute to American society. If he did not get that impression, he could be rather rude and tell them to travel back to Denmark immediately.\textsuperscript{45} He had successfully fought his own way up the social ladder and believed that others should do the same. As the perhaps most well-known Dane/Scandinavian of his era, fully integrated and highly acknowledged, he did not need a Danish network. His eyes were directed towards social improvements and influential Americans.

**Conclusion**

After the First World War, society demanded new answers to the great social challenges ahead, and Jacob A. Riis passed into history. Not until the early 1970s did an interest in Riis receive a boost with the publication of several biographies, not least Alexander Alland’s *Jacob A. Riis. Photographer and Citizen* (1973). It is above all Alland we can thank for the preservation of over four hundred of Riis’ photographs,
now kept in the Museum of the City of New York. The new interest in Riis in the 1970s, and again in the last fifteen years or so, is also due to his relevance for contemporary discussions about poor social housing, homelessness, slum buildings, and city planning.

In the twenty-first century Riis is truly being rediscovered, not least thanks to the new museum in Ribe. He is acknowledged as one of the pioneers of photojournalism, while his achievements as a social reformer continue to provide inspiration and critical analysis. A steady stream of books and articles, noted in the bibliography below, bear witness to his influence. Up close, we can also see his limitations—both of the times and in his character. Simultaneously we are fascinated by how this one man met failure and defeat with courage and enterprise. When the chance came, he seized it, and rode with it. His energy and will-power were directed towards a better society, and they demonstrably moved the world in a better direction.

Endnotes

1 Theodore Roosevelt, “Jacob Riis,“ The Outlook, June 1914, 284.
2 Baltimore Sun, May 29, 1914.
3 Hasia R. Diner, ed. Jacob Riis: How the Other Half Lives: Authoritative Text. Contexts. Criticism (New York: Norton, 2009), vii. The first socially reformative book Diner mentions is Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin from 1852, which gave rise to the anti-slavery movement in the northern states. Another major work is Upton Sinclair's The Jungle from 1906, which depicts the inhuman working conditions for immigrant workers in the slaughterhouse industry in Chicago. The other books are Rachel Carson's The Silent Spring (1962), Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique (1963), and Ralph Nader's Unsafe at Any Speed (1965), which gave impetus to the environmental, women's, and consumer movements, respectively. Like the other above-named books these accounts helped to change American law, politics, and practice.
5 Anbinder, 314.
8 Ibid., 34-39.

Tom Buk-Swienty’s The Other Half (Norton, 2008) is recommended as a well-written biography of Riis.


The English translation of Tom Buk-Swienty’s Danish biography of Riis from 2005 is The Ideal American. The quotation is from Roosevelt, but, as noted earlier, if one were to follow Roosevelt’s idea of being a true American, the title should be “The ideal American citizen.”

38 Lewis F. Fried, Makers of the City (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), 25.


40 Jacob A. Riis, Hero Tales from the Far North (New York: Macmillan, 1910).

41 Royal Danish College of Arms (Ordenskapitlet). Letter of October 15, 1900.

42 Fried, 21.

43 Aarhus Amtsbladende, July 14, 1908. The idea was realized in 1912 with the first Rebild Fourth of July festival, which attracted almost 10,000 participants.

44 Lane, “Jacob A. Riis and Scientific Philanthropy.”

45 Tom Buk-Swienty, Den ideelle amerikaner (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2005), 256, 434.

**Bibliography**


Jacob A. Riis: The Ideal American Citizen | Flemming Just


Roosevelt, Theodore. “Jacob Riis.” *The Outlook,* June 1914, 284.


In the park just below Marselisborg Castle in Aarhus—the Queen’s preferred summer residence—stands the official Danish monument for Danes killed in World War I. It is a beautiful and solemn monument, placed in a scenic setting in the park that stretches from the small castle down to the Bay of Aarhus, with a view of Mols and Helgenæs in the distance. But wasn’t Denmark neutral in that war, you may ask? Why, then, a monument for the fallen in a war that the country did not participate in? It is a rather complicated story, which this article outlines by showing the connection between the approximately thirty thousand Danes and Danish Americans fighting in the American Army and Navy during World War I and the old country and its monument to the casualties in the war.

The connection between the monument and Danish Americans is obvious, though it has been more or less forgotten since the interwar era—at least until a few years ago, in 2011, when the descendant of one of the fallen Danish Americans commemorated on the Marselisborg Monument contacted the Aarhus city council about the erroneous text on the plaque at the entrance of the monument, on which the Allied war effort had somehow been completely obscured by the tragic duty required of Danish Schleswigers. The English text on the plaque originally read: “Memorial commemorating 4,140 Schleswigers of Danish allegiance who lost their lives during the First World War, 1914-1918, when they had to serve in the German army. They fought for a cause that was not theirs.” It was then changed to: “Memorial commemorating 4,140 soldiers who lost their lives during the First World War, 1914-1918. Mostly Schleswigers of Danish allegiance who were forced to serve in the German army. Danish emigrants who fought against
Germany are also included.” If not exactly more elegantly formulated, at least now it is fairly correct.¹

Marselisborg Mindepark, the official name of the park, was initially intended to be a memorial site for Danes who had done something exceptional abroad, and thus especially for Danish Americans, who make up by far the largest group of Danish emigrants. The idea of creating a memorial park in Aarhus grew out of the first Danish American celebration of American Independence Day in 1909, which was held in Jutland’s capital because of the Danish National Exposition of 1909. As part of this event, 1,128 Danish Americans met with thousands of Danes in Aarhus, celebrating the Fourth of July together, an annual tradition that has taken place at the Rebild National Park in northern Jutland since 1912.²

The idea of erecting a monument to the Danes who lost their lives during World War I was fostered by a bereaved father from the Aarhus suburb Aabyhøj, the veterinarian Knud Nielsen-Sorring (1868-1942), whose only son, Hans, was killed during the Meuse-Ar-
gonne offensive on October 15, 1918. Initially, the committee working for a monument, led by Nielsen-Sorring, wanted to place an obelisk at Rebild National Park, which had been purchased by Danish Americans in 1911 and given to Danish state. This plan, however, had to be abandoned because of countryside preservation clauses. The committee then looked towards Aarhus, and here, the city council accepted the idea. But, due to lack of funding, the original idea of an obelisk was abandoned, and Nielsen-Sorring’s committee was disbanded in September 1923.

The following year, a new committee for a memorial park at Marselisborg was formed, and a national competition for the design of the monument was arranged with the first round in April 1925 and the second in May 1926—followed by legal proceedings by two of the losing artists in 1927 and 1928. Finally, in August 1928, sculptor Axel Poulsen and architect Axel Ekberg’s monument was announced as the winner of the competition. Their monument consists of a large circular wall featuring four reliefs with symbolic representations of the war—Departure, Battle, Armistice, and Return—; a central inscription “1914-1918“; and, under a wreath, a poem by former Prime Minister J. C. Christensen that focuses on the eternal remembrance of these young men by their Mother Denmark, a figure that is also found on the first and fourth reliefs, where she sends her sons off to war and welcomes them back home again, mourning the death of one of them. Hence, the reliefs articulate a war motif to honor the Danish war effort on both sides. The last and maybe most important element of the monument are the 4,140 names of fallen Danes carved in the monument’s wall, among these Hans Nielsen-Sorring’s, at the top rim of the wall under the letter N.

The memorial park was inaugurated on July 5, 1925, by King Christian X, the day after many Danish Americans had celebrated Fourth of July at Rebild and were therefore able to take part in the ceremony in Aarhus. The focus then was still on Danish Americans, but it had recently been decided that it should also be the site of the monument for Danes who had sacrificed their lives in the recent war. On the day of the inauguration, a conservative member of parliament, Count Bent Holstein, published an article in the local newspaper Aarhus Stiftstidende, with the title “Vel mødt i Aarhus, Dansk Amerikanere!”
in which he welcomes the Danish Americans to Aarhus. He explains that “whether they [the Danish soldiers] fought and fell in one or the other army, it was with the name of South Jutland burned into their hearts.” Furthermore, he stated that the Danish Americans had come to Denmark “not as hyphenated Americans, but as real citizens of the United States.” Holstein’s interpretation of the role of South Jutland as a motive for the Danish soldiers is debatable, but his focus on the Danish Americans as true American citizens is probably the obvious explanation for why their role in the war effort vanished from the collective Danish memory and historiography.

To cut the very long story about the monument short, it took nine years before it was unveiled on July 1, 1934—because of the lawsuits, a national and international fundraising campaign also among Danes in the US, etc.—and during this period of time, opinions on what should be commemorated shifted completely from the more inclusive memory of Danes fighting in the Allied armies to a more exclusive focus on Danish Schleswigers. About six thousand veterans and relatives of the fallen from South Jutland were specially invited to the ceremony, where they were given the opportunity to find the names of their loved ones on the monument wall before it was opened to the public, right after King Christian X had laid down a wreath. The king gave the opening speech, and other speakers and attendees included Prime Minister Stauning and ministers of the government, the mayor and bishop of Aarhus, and other dignitaries, together with about fifty thousand members of the public. There were also Danish Americans present, but focus was no longer on them or the Danish war dead in the Allied armies.

**Danish Americans in the US Army and Navy**

The first time I read about the thirty thousand Danes who fought in the US Army and Navy during World War I, I was researching for my PhD about the impact of this war on Danish culture and literature. I happened to come across a petition meant to be circulated among the Danish American soldiers in the trenches, urging President Wilson to work for the restoration of Schleswig to Denmark, based on the principle of self-determination. The headline of the short petition is “To the President of the United States,” and the short text, in Danish, English
and French, followed by some empty pages with lines to fill out with the soldiers' names, regiments and signatures, is primarily a listing of historical reasons for giving "South Jutland," as the area is called here with an intended Danish name, to Denmark. The area had been Danish for a thousand years until Germany annexed it after the 1864 war. The petition begins with a polite "Sir," and then spells out what the writers want (in slightly faulty English):

We, the undersigned Danes and Danish Americans who are fighting at the front for the justice and peace and for the fate of the small nations, address ourselves most respectfully to the President of the United States wishing that entire South Jutland at the definitive peace should be reunited with her old fatherland she had been joined with for 1000 years.\(^4\)

The petition concludes with this appeal:

We are now more than 30,000 natives of Denmark at the front who in this battle stake their life in order to show that Germany's unjustice towards Denmark and South Jutland had not been forgotten and we gladly sacrifice our life to set free entire South Jutland and regain her for Denmark. We who fight are the free intercessors for South Jutland's historic right, we can and shall appeal to our right without this anxious regard which the fear for Germany has caused in certain circles in Denmark.

Although it is available in the Danish Royal Library, I have not been able to find any trace of this petition in the Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library nor in other American or Danish archives, which might be explained by the simple fact that the petition was issued in November 1918 and thus probably overtaken by the cause of events at the front with the Armistice on November 11. Nevertheless, it is interesting for at least two reasons: first, it states as a fact that there were more than thirty thousand Danes fighting at the front; second, it connects the war effort of these men and their reason for fighting with the pending peace negotiations and the cause of righting the wrongs of the Danish loss in the 1864 war.\(^5\)
This number of Danes fighting for Uncle Sam as doughboys, as infantrymen in particular were known, seemed suspicious to me, as it balanced rather perfectly the number of Danes forced to fight for Germany—somewhere between twenty-six and thirty thousand, depending on how you calculate it—with Danes on the other side of the front lines. The number of Danes and Danish Americans in the US Army and Navy seems, however, to be fairly correct, if you assume that about 10 percent of the roughly three hundred thousand Danish immigrants and their descendants in the US volunteered or were called up. This number was also used by the Danish American pastor and historian Peter Sørensen Vig (1854-1929) in an article printed in the Danish American newspapers Nordlyset in New York on July 25, 1918, and Bien in San Francisco on August 2, 1918, but dated by Vig as July 8. Here, he claims that there were presently thirty thousand men of Danish descent in the US Army and Navy (in Nordlyset, the headline even states that they are men born in Denmark). Another Danish American historian, Thomas Peter Christensen, suggests twenty-five thousand in his A History of the Danes in Iowa (1924). Christensen’s numbers are, however, rather odd: he estimates that five percent of nearly five hundred thousand Danes in the United States participated, which results in the twenty-five thousand figure, but most other immigration historians mention around three hundred thousand Danes residing in the US at the time. But somewhere between these numbers seems to be a qualified assumption, naturally depending on who you define as Danish (Danish citizens, Danish-born but naturalized US citizens, or second-generation Danes born in the US, etc.).

During the age of total war and mass armies involving millions of soldiers, thirty thousand Danes is but a mere drop in the ocean. When the US entered the war, nearly three years after it started in late July 1914, the country faced an enormous challenge of raising an army. In order to be able to raise a powerful army, even non-citizens had to be called up. The traditional reluctance against a standing army meant that, on April 6, 1917, the US Army could only muster 127,151 soldiers and the National Guard 181,620—not impressive numbers in the scope of the brutal modern war of mass slaughter. Before the war ended, however, these numbers had increased to 4.1 million in the Army and 600,000 in the Navy. Furthermore, the US faced the chal-
lenge of forming an Army and Navy of many different nationalities, not least because of the enormous influx of east and southern Europeans during the age of mass immigration from the 1880s to 1914.

World War I in Danish and American Historiography and Collective Memory

Turning our attention back to Denmark, why has the participation of an equal number of Danes on the winning side been obscured altogether in Denmark by the tragic duty of the Danish Schleswigers in the German ranks? Of the two, the Danish Americans' service would have been by far the most heroic and glorious war effort by proxy, so to speak, for the small neutral country to make its own. For one thing, World War I soon became a forgotten war in Denmark among the general public and historians alike, except for in the southern part of Jutland where the losses in the war are commemorated by monuments in every parish churchyard, letters and diaries from the soldiers have continually been published, and historians have been writing about the topic ever since the armistice. Second, the Danish Americans probably principally fought for their new country, and thus became even more American through the war effort. A third explanation is the role of the Danish Schleswigers, who were becoming an integral part of the Danish society during the interwar years, and in the process becoming the only Danish narrative about the war, it seems, as the history of the monument in Aarhus indicates. Finally, the much more direct experiences of the next war and the German occupation 1940-45 have completely overshadowed those of the First World War.

Still, even in neutral Denmark interest in the war was enormous while it was being fought. Danish newspapers printed all kinds of articles about the conflict, among these many soldiers' letters from Danish-speaking North Schleswigers in the German army, who were regarded as eyewitnesses to the tragic, brutal, and yet exciting foreign world of the trenches. Harald Nielsen published a series of soldiers' letters from the fronts, of which *Sønderjyske Soldaterbreve* (1915) became a regular bestseller with sixteen print runs. Nielsen also published two volumes of *Danske Soldaterbreve* (1917 and 1918) from Danes fighting in the Allied armies, albeit none of them from Americans; the same applies to J. Ravn-Jonsen's *Danske Frivillige i Verden*.
One of the most popular Danish novels of the time, Erich Erichsen's *Den tavse Dansker. En Bog om dem, der gjorde deres Pligt* (1916), which reached twenty-seven print runs and was published the following year in English as *Forced to Fight: The Tale of a Schleswig Dane,* was based on soldiers' letters and tells the tragic story of the unwilling soldiers "forced to fight for the Huns," as the first words in the English translation declare. 10

A Danish book about America and the war was already published during the war; journalist, founder and former editor of the tabloid *B. T.* Henry Hellssen's *Amerika rejser en Hær* (*America Raises an Army*) was published in late October 1918—the author's short preface dates it to August 1918—and thus does not deal with the end of the war when the American forces were seriously involved in the fighting or with stories from the front. The book consists of interesting, though not quite reliable, stories about modern America, "the society of superlatives," as he labels it in the preface, or, to be honest, mostly snobbish gossip about American millionaires. Aside from being one of the leading Danish war correspondents, Hellssen had an interest in theater and worked as a chorus boy at a New York theater when he lived there in 1917-18. The first chapter of the book—eponymously titled—is almost the only part of it that deals with the war in any detail, especially the drafting of the many young men on the basis of the Selective Service Law, among them Danes and other Scandinavians. 11

Interest in war in Danish historiography has followed the general pattern of focusing on the 1864 war and the German occupation during World War II, even though there has been a lasting interest in World War I in Sønderjylland, and a growing interest for this war among Danish historians during the last couple of decades. 12 Nevertheless, in 2014, the centenary of the beginning of World War I was largely overshadowed by the 150th anniversary of the war in 1864, which was commemorated with a much-debated, expensive TV series by Ole Bornedal. In 2020, the centenary of the plebiscites in Schleswig in February and March 1920, King Christian X's ride across the 1864 border on June 10, and the official unification of the northern part of Schleswig with Denmark on June 15, 1920 were marked with a host of celebrations—or rather should have been: most of these arrange-
ments were cancelled or postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic of 2020.

The artist Joakim Skovgaard’s famous illustration for one of the many referendum posters from 1920. Mother Denmark welcomes her “stolen daughter” safely back on the bridge across the Kongeå, which formed large parts of the border between Germany and Denmark after 1864. The Danish flag, Dannebrog, now flies on both sides of the river, in front of a typical Danish farm and windmill in the background. Skovgaard uses the first stanza and the final line of Henrik Pontoppidan’s poem ‘Sønderjylland’ (1918) as text on the poster: “It sounds like a fairy tale, a legend from ancient times: A stolen daughter, deeply mourned, has come back safely! Hail thee, apple of our Mother’s eye, in the dawn of the new times!” Another part of the poem connects the war effort of the Danish Schleswigers with the reunion: “You were chained and mocked by wild boy.”

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Similarly, the Danish American war experience seems to have been neglected by Danish American historians as well: P. S. Vig’s *Danske i Kamp i og for Amerika fra ca. 1640 til 1865* obviously does not deal with this war, due to the years of the title and since it was published in 1917—Vig’s preface is dated June 1917. Still, the very last page of the book actually does deal with the war that the US had entered a couple of months before. Here, a veteran from the 1864 war, Rasmus Hansen, sends his son Alfred off to war, which makes Vig conclude that the Danes are a people eager to fight for what they think is right. This is also his starting point in the book, before tracing this bellicose side of the Danish national character through American history—and after mentioning in the preface that one of his sons, Bennett C. Vig (1897-1962), who helped him write the book, had now, under the influence of the Danish warriors of old, joined the colors. Aside from Vig’s book, the abovementioned book by Thomas Peter Christensen and his *Dansk-Amerikansk Historie* (1927) only mention the war in passing. More recently, *The Bridge* published “a commemorative war-themed special issue” in 2014, which dealt with the Civil War (Anders Bo Rasmussen), the 1864 war (Julie K. Allen), and World War I through a selection of Georg Brandes’s many articles about the war from his book *Verdenskrigen* (1916), which was translated into English and published in the US in 1917—in May 1917, however, when the US had just entered the war, so his book does not treat the American involvement in it. One welcome exception to this trend is John Mark Nielsen’s article, “1918: The End of the ‘War to End All Wars,’” about his grandfather’s experiences in the war, which appeared in *The Bridge* in 2018.

Finally, Danish immigration literature does not deal with the Danish Americans and the war in any detail either: Kristian Hvidt’s dissertation *Flugten til Amerika* (1971) is limited to 1914, Erik Helmer Pedersen’s *Drømmen om Amerika* (1985) only has a few pages about World War I, and the same applies to Ole Sønnichsen’s *Rejsen til Amerika* (2013 and 2015). In Danish literature about World War I, the Danish involvement on the Allied side has received scant attention: Claus Bundgård Christensen and Martin Bo Nørregård’s *Verdenskrigens danske billeder 1914-1918* (2012) contains nine pages about Danes in the Allied armies, which, compared to other Danish books, is actually impressive, and hence, Kristian Bruhn’s short article “Danskere i allieret
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tjeneste under Første Verdenskrig” (Siden Saxo, no. 4, 2014) is the most serious attempt to make an overview of the Danish effort in the Allied armies. Bruhn estimates that there were a total of 4,035 Danes fighting in the Allied armies, of which 1,957 were in the US Army (not counting those who did not get to the front). Of the Danish men in the other Allied armies, 291 died, and while 274 of those in the American Army died. Bruhn’s number of Danes in the US Army is obviously too low, but on the other hand, the thirty thousand men at the front in the petition mentioned above must be far too high, judging from the number of men who never left training camps or died en route to Europe.

**Who were the Danish Doughboys?**

When President Wilson declared war on Germany, the Danes in America supported the war effort—at least judging from the reaction in the Danish American newspapers. “Endelig!” (At last!), exclaimed the central headline on the front page of *Bien* that very day, April 6, 1917. Even though headlines and editorials of other Danish American newspapers were less rapt and unrestrained, all the articles I have read supported the serious step taken by the government. When the various Liberty Loan and War Saving Stamps campaigns were launched, the newspapers printed full page ads, often linking the war effort at the front and at home with Schleswig and the war of 1864—this even goes for the socialist Chicago paper *Revyen*. Furthermore, Danish Americans also supported the war effort with Fourth of July parades, as well as organizing associations and societies in support of the war, the largest one being the Jacob A. Riis League of Patriotic Service, and through smaller initiatives like knitting socks and sweaters for the soldiers at the front (“Do your bit! Knit! Knit! Knit!” as a headline on the frontpage of *Nordlyset*, November 29, 1917, encouraged readers).

But how did the young Danish and Danish American men react to being called up? How did they describe their experiences in the Army and Navy? What did they fight for? These are some of the questions I am looking for answers to in letters, diaries, and other similar sources from the soldiers. Looking for names and individual stories among some thirty thousand participants is, however, rather like looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack. And how can one string the individual stories together into any sort of general and objective history
about the Danish American war experience? Obviously, it does not make sense to speak about a war experience in the singular.

The material I have been examining to shed light on this forgotten chapter of Danish and Danish American history includes: 1) letters and other personal and military documents in Danish and American archives; and 2) Danish American newspapers and magazines, which printed a multitude of letters from training camps and eventually from “over there.” Some of the newspapers are digitized and available online, others are available at Statens Avissamling (the National Newspaper Archive) in Aarhus or at Udvandrerarkivet (the Danish Emigrant Archive) in Aalborg. In addition to the holdings of the Danish Emigrant Archive, the most important Danish archival sources I have used are those from Rigsarkivet (the Danish National Archives) about Marselisborgmonumentet and the so-called “C.F. Schiöppfes Samling, Danske, som Officerer i fremmed Krigstjeneste (D.S.O.-I.F.K.),” a huge collection of material about Danish officers in foreign service. In the US, I have accessed files from the National Archives, which were unfortunately grossly damaged by a fire in 1973, and Danish American archives in the Midwest. From all these sources, I have collected names—e.g. by looking for typical Danish -sen names, when the documents do not explicitly mention Denmark—and personal documents, especially letters from the rank and file, to be able to examine the war experiences of normal men. The names, though, were often changed by the immigrant himself or in error when being written down, for instance, by the registrar at the local board registering men eligible for military service under the Selective Service System, on boarding lists when embarking the troop ships for Europe, etc., just to mention another methodological and practical problem. In the following, I will give some examples of Danish doughboys I have found in these different sources.

As a good example of the typical Danish (and Norwegian) names, and most likely the Danish family with the most sons serving Uncle Sam during the war, Peder Christensen and his wife have to be mentioned. They lived in Racine, Wisconsin, but originally came from Tommerby near Brønderslev in northern Jutland, where their seven sons were all born. Their names are Joseph, Carl, Anskov, Valdemar, Otto, Henry, and Johannes, and they all wore the uniform though only
two of them were in the field, the Danish American Christmas magazine *Misteltenen* of 1920 reports. But to find more information about, for instance, Carl Christensen is difficult: a search for a typical name like his in the military sources at Ancestry.com, using the keywords “World War I” and born in Denmark, results in 2,094 hits. Even if you find the right person, these files mostly do not reveal much about the person aside from their dates of registration and possibly dates of leaving and returning to the US.

Another angle could be to find famous or high-ranking Danish Americans fighting in the war. The ones I have found in this category include Captain Parley Brigham Christensen (1877-1918), Co. I, 325th Infantry, 82nd Division, from Ephraim, Utah, who was killed in action at Saint-Juvin, Champagne-Ardenne, France, October 11, 1918. Prior to this, he had fought in the Spanish-American War in the Philippines in 1898-99. His father, the painter Carl Christian Anthon Christensen (1831-1912), emigrated from Denmark to the US in 1857 after joining the Mormon church, and settled in Salt Lake City, Utah. Captain Christensen’s remains were returned to the US in 1921 at the request of his wife and reburied in the Salt Lake City Cemetery.

Major Axel Rasmussen (1879-1918) from Sherwood, Oregon, but born near Odense, Denmark, also seems to have been a regular hero—or, perhaps, simply an adventurer. He served in the US Cavalry as a bugler in the Spanish-American War and fought in Cuba and later in the Philippines; during the Mexican Revolution in 1910-11 he fought for Madero; and during World War I, he joined the American Legion of the Canadian Army in September 1915 and fought in France with the Ninety-Seventh Battalion before being transferred to the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) in October 1917. In a long, rather sentimental article in *Misteltenen* in 1918, he is described as a giant and chivalrous soldier, “[a] man of about 40 years old, standing six feet six inches tall, of magnificent physique, handsome and big-brained,” whom his men will miss very much, as their letters say. Here it is also stated that he could not wait until the United States entered the war but went to Canada to join up there, “saying that he could strike a blow for old Denmark while fighting under the British flag.” *Misteltenen* quotes from a letter in English to his brother, who lived with their parents in Portland, Oregon, written April 28, 1918:
What I am going to do after the war, I don’t know. There is mighty little use of planning so far ahead under present circumstances, and I have been exceedingly lucky so far. Nearly all of the oldtimers in the 97th battalion that were transferred to other outfits in France are out of the game for good—killed or wounded; some sick and others, sad to say, among the missing.

Rasmussen then tells about the times he was wounded, the last time in March 1918, when he was gassed, which was the worst of them all. “I am not over that yet,” he says, and continues about the war: “It is beginning to tell on me—I mean I am getting considerably older,” he admits.19 He was killed in action six days later in the trenches at Amiens, France, May 4, 1918, and posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross with the following citation: “For extraordinary heroism in action while serving with 28th Infantry Regiment, 1st Division, A.E.F., at Rocquencourt, France, 4 May 1918. Major Rasmussen proceeded to his post of command in spite of heavy bombardment in order to save important papers and while thus engaged was killed by shell fire.”20

Lieutenant Niels Drstrup, who was born in 1876 in Saltum, Vendsyssel, Denmark, and emigrated to the US in 1896, died in 1957 and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery. Drstrup served with the Third Nebraska Regiment in the Spanish-American War, and enlisted as a seaman in the Navy in 1900. In April 1914, he took part in the occupation of Veracruz, Mexico, serving on the USS Utah, for which he received the Medal of
Honor and the following citation from the Secretary of the Navy: “For several hours he was in charge of an advanced barricade under heavy fire, during the afternoon of April 24, 1914, and not only displayed utmost ability as a leader of men, but by his marked composure and courage, he exerted a great steadying influence on the men under him.” During World War I he served on the USS Columbia, doing convoy duty from New York to England, and after the war, he served as captain of a minesweeper, the USS Grebe, in the North Sea, sweeping the mine barrage placed by the US Navy between Scotland and Norway, for which he won the Navy Cross.21

Sosthenes Behn (1882-1957), who was born on St. Thomas in the Danish West Indies to a Danish father and French mother, joined the US Army in June 1917, served with the Signal Corps in France from July 1917 to February 1919, first as a captain and later receiving the rank of lieutenant colonel. He commanded the 322nd Field Signal Battalion during the battles at Château-Thierry, Saint-Mihiel, and the Argonne in 1918 and was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal, among other medals, for his meritorious service during the war.22 His brother Hernand Behn (1880-1933) served as lieutenant in the United States Naval Reserve Force from April 1918 to February 1919. The brothers went on to found the successful company International Telephone & Telegraph (ITT) in 1920.23

Another curious story is the long-distance runner, lithographer, socialist, and conscientious objector Rudy Constantin Hansen (1888-1977), born in Copenhagen to the suffragist Lycinka Hansen. Rudy immigrated to the US in 1910 to avoid conscription in Denmark. During the war, he volunteered for the US Army and was promoted to lieutenant for bravery. Maybe he changed his mind about military service because he could obtain American citizenship this way—when he signed his petition for naturalization at Camp Meigs, Washington, DC, on June 6, 1918, he referred to the Naturalization Act of May 9, 1918 and obtained his American citizenship six days later, on June 12. On his registration card from the first round, however, dated June 5, 1917, aside from stating that he lives in Chicago and works as a commercial artist, he claimed exemption because his mother and a child were dependent on him.24
Finally, there are at least two high-ranking Danish military doctors who should be mentioned. The first is Ejnar Hansen (1869-1938), who was born in Horsens, Denmark and immigrated to New York in 1896 after doing his military service as a doctor in the Danish Army. In September 1917, he joined the US Army as a captain and was in charge of a military hospital at Camp MacArthur in Waco, Texas. After the war, he was promoted to major. His father had fought in the 1864 war at Dybbøl as a volunteer, which might have influenced Hansen’s approach to the war. The second is Knud Hartnack (1874-1940), who was born in Kolding and immigrated to the US in 1897, working as a journalist and editor of Nordlyset and Chicago Posten before resuming his study of medicine. In June 1917, he joined ranks as an army surgeon and served initially at Camp Dodge as a first lieutenant. In March 1918 he was promoted to captain and served at the front in the Elsace region with the Eighty-Eighth Division from August 1918 until August 1919. In 1934, he was discharged as a lieutenant colonel and moved back to Denmark.25

The “Danishness” of the two doctors is indisputable, whereas the national identity of some of the other soldiers I have been examining is less straightforward. In the Schiöpffes collection, Americans taking part in World War I are often American citizens, according to the files, so here they also had considerations about who to include. As Rudy Hansen’s case shows, you could gain citizenship by serving in the military, and thus, you might be a Danish citizen when joining up and become American in the process, while others later returned to Denmark and regained their Danish citizenship. I have not come across letters or other personal material from most of the men mentioned in this section of the article, and they are primarily included as examples of the variety of “Danes” fighting for the US. The next section will give some examples from the actual letters.

Danish American Stories from the Great War

How did Danish American soldiers experience their new life in the ranks? What did they write home about? Unsurprisingly, their letters deal with typical topics found in millions of other letters from this war. Initially, a high-spiritedness is dominant, possibly as a means of supporting the war effort and, not least for the hyphenated Ameri-
cans, a way of showing their loyalty to their new country—and this is the case in private letters as well as the ones printed in the newspapers. They write about things like the excellent and plentiful food, tobacco, etc., provided by Uncle Sam and the jolly life in the ranks. In personal letters not meant for the newspaper readers, however, a lack of understanding and critique of military customs as seen through the eyes of the citizen soldiers soon emerge. As time passed, serious topics like the Spanish flu and the effects of being gassed at the front are often discussed in the letters.

Unfortunately, the personal letters I have found so far in the archives only deal with camp life and life at the front lines after the Armistice, so the examples below from the front are all from different Danish American newspapers. The Danish Emigrant Archive in Aalborg holds some letters and other material from or relating to Danes who took part in the war. Some of the documents on this topic are not particularly interesting, unfortunately. A bricklayer named Kristen Bundgaard, born May 7, 1884 in Lyngby south of Aalborg, emigrated in 1906 to Racine, Wisconsin. His name is spelled Christen on the registration certificate that attests that he “has submitted himself to registration and has [...] been duly registered this 12th day of Sept. 1918”; the same folder contains the form notifying him that he has been selected for immediate military service, beginning on November 12, 1918. His war must have been over before he even got into the uniform. He later became an American citizen, but, already in March 1923, he moved back to Denmark permanently, it seems according to other documents in his files, and in 1948, he regained his Danish citizenship.26

The Danish Immigrant Archives at Grand View University in Des Moines and the Emigrant Archive in Aalborg hold some interesting collections of letters to and from the Lutheran pastor, teacher, and author Kristian Østergaard (1855-1931) and his wife Kristine in Tyler, Minnesota. Five of their sons joined the Army or Navy during the war, but only two of them verifiably served in Europe. Hjalmar Østergaard (1887-1972), who was born in Denmark, though a naturalized US citizen, became a first lieutenant in the US Army and served with the Headquarters Company of the Thirty-Ninth Infantry in France from the end of October 1918 to July 30, 1919, when he debarked from Brest.
aboard the *Leviathan*, arriving in Hoboken on August 6. His brother Harold Østergaard (1893-1972), Company D, 116th Supply Train, enlisted in May 1917 and left Brest April 8, 1919, with the First Replacement Depot as sergeant first class—the files do not say when he arrived in France. Another brother, Erling Østergaard (1897-1980), was at the same camp as his youngest brother, Vermund (1900-1970), who served in the Navy, but it has not been possible to find other information about Erling’s service. The couple’s fourth son, Frede Østergaard (1894-1918), died at Camp Leavenworth on October 25, 1918, presumably from the Spanish flu.

Kristian Østergaard writes to his daughter Gudrun, May 10, 1917, that he and his wife did not approve of their sons’ decisions to enlist, but they had to accept it:

> Well, then two of your brothers want to join the Army, but it is not according to their parents’ wishes. We cannot sacrifice our children. But when they want to sacrifice themselves in the fight against tyranny, they are allowed to do so. And while we cannot refrain from being sad about the prospect of having them sent to the sickening slaughter, we must welcome their courage and spirit of self-sacrifice. 27

Another letter from Kristian talks about the death of his son and collecting his casket at the camp, but without further critique of the sons’ decision to join the armed forces.

The largest collection of letters—about seventy in total—is from Vermund, writing from Fort Bliss in Texas, Camp Perry in Ohio, and, primarily, Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he attended the Naval Radio School, which was located at Harvard during the war. Quite ironically, he barely made it to sea, at least not as far as Europe, but maybe that is simply the fate of a sailor from the Midwest. His letters, most of which are to his mother, contain typical topics for soldiers’ letters: small complaints about the difficulties of getting adjusted to military and camp life, lost clothes, lost letters, a lack of money etc., but not much about war aims or his personal reasons for fighting—Schleswig is not at all a topic here. An exception is a rather matter-of-fact description of a photo session with his comrades in their blue uniforms and flat hats, spelling out “AMERICA’S ANSWER” (probably
one of the famous mass formations with soldiers forming patriotic messages) in a letter from Camp Perry dated July 6, 1918. When he writes about the pride of parents with sons serving Uncle Sam, he admonishes, “Mother, don’t be so modest, the flag with the five stars is to honor us boys, but even more for you and dad.” On July 11, 1918, he expresses pride that he and his four brothers are part of the war effort (“for min egen part, naar jeg tænker over det kan jeg ikke være andet end glad og stolt over at jeg og de andre fire er med i ’et’”).

Vermund stayed at the Naval Radio School in Cambridge until spring 1919, from where he often writes to his mother about being torn between his longing for home and a longing to finally go to sea and see the war and the world. In one letter he says that it might be because of “old Viking blood” (December 28, 1918). Later, he writes that if he is lucky, he might celebrate his nineteenth birthday on his way to France to pick up a load of soldiers (March 12, 1919). His high spirits do not last long, though; in the next, short letter, he is in the hospital with the flu, which he already has had once before in August 1918, and he stays in hospital for the next five weeks or so. Hence, no journey to France. On June 18, 1919, he writes to his mother from a US receiving ship in Camp Hingham, Massachusetts: “There is still no prospect of getting either back or forth. Can’t go to sea and can’t go home and my life here is not gay. I am alright in a way, but it is so dreary.” The last letters are mostly about waiting to be discharged and going back to civilian life, which happened sometime in August 1919, it seems.

On June 28, 1919, Vermund writes to his mother about his hopes that they all can meet during the summer and compete in telling lies about achievements that never happened (“Jeg tænker nok vi kan mødes i Sommer engang alsesammen saa at vi kan lyve om kap om bedrifter der aldrig blev udrettet.”) In the last letter in the collection, dated July 22, 1919, he complains to his mother that he nearly thought they had forgotten him—he feels that he writes twice as often as they do, and they only have two military persons to write to (he uses the rather odd phrasing “militære personer,” maybe as a way of addressing the fact that they had not been at the front in Europe). “But the war is over, and people already start forgetting. It is not myself that I think about, but the soldiers who come here from France don’t get the
same welcome anymore." There are rumors about soldiers at nearby Camp Devens having asked permission to wear civilian clothes when they are off duty because people have forgotten about the war and don’t want to be reminded about it, he writes.

Already July 8, 1918, however, in a letter to one of his sisters—it does not say whom, but from a later letter it seems to be Sigrid—he complains a bit about the monotony of camp life: “We sometimes get a bit discouraged and downhearted here in camp. The routine work and military restrictions sometimes tend to make us forget what we really are here fore [sic].” He was taking a wireless course at the camp, but, he complains, “it’s also slow. I have at least four months of training left and I want to go to sea before things are over with.” This letter, signed “Brother V., Co C, 7th Reg., Camp Perry,” is written in English, so it seems that even an educated and highly Danish-minded family like the Østergaards were adapting to English in the younger generation, which might be an obvious explanation for the disappearance of the Danish doughboys from Danish and Danish American history.

The letters of another Danish-speaking soldier, Joseph Hansen (1896-1962), Company D, Seventh Motor Supply Train, from Rowan, Iowa, tell a different story. He was a natural-born American, according to his draft registration card of June 5, 1917, and he writes in English to his family, so he is possibly not the most relevant person to include here. But, unlike Vermund Østergaard, he actually went to France, after initial training at Camp MacArthur in Waco, Texas, and he explicitly refers to himself as Danish, so he must qualify as such. In a long letter about life at Camp MacArthur he writes on June 1, 1918: “A lot of the officers here have the southern accent, and it’s kinda fun to hear them talk. There is one Dane in this squad beside myself, and one in each of the tents on either side. There is also one here from Ringsted by the name of Carl Mortensen.” Besides writing about Danes and camp life, he occasionally asks about crops and livestock at home, comparing it to what he sees in Texas, which is an ever-present theme in letters from country people in the ranks—also among the Danish Schleswigers. In this eleven-page letter, he even mentions the enemy, and in a fairly stereotypical way: “The Huns are trying to do their worst before we get too many Americans over there.” This is not typical for the private letters I have come across, whereas it almost
seemed compulsory to write things like that in the ones printed in
newspapers.
Later, Corporal Joe Hansen made it to France, seemingly after the
Armistice, where he drove a Packard truck and worked hard at clean­
ing up ammunition and such from the battlefields in the area between
Toul and Metz, about fifty kilometers from Verdun, as he writes to his
brother on January 5, 1919. The first letter from “over there” is dated
November 18, noting that now that the hostilities have ceased, they
are working harder than ever. He stays in France at least until April
15, 1919, which is the date of the last letter in the packet.

Danish Soldiers’ Letters from “Over There” in the Newspapers

As mentioned above, some of the Danish American newspapers
printed whole series of letters from the front. Bien—along with Den
danske Pioneer—the only re­
main ing Danish newspa­
papers in the US—contains
the best example, with a
series called “Danske Sold­
derbreve fra ‘Over There’”
(Danish soldiers’ letters
from ‘Over There’), that
was printed between June
21 and November 8, 1918
in twelve parts with at least
twenty letters, all except the
last part printed on the front
page.32

“The list of honor” from the
front page of Bien, August
30, 1918, with a photo of
Alfred Nielsen, the son of
Mr. C. Nielsen, the author,
who was the first Dane
from San Francisco to be
wounded, according to the
text.
Taking a different approach, Revyen in Chicago printed letters from Harald Nielsen’s *Sonderjyske Soldaterbreve* on the front pages even before the US entered the war and continued well into the spring of 1918. Already in October 1917, *Nordlyset* encouraged enlisted men among its readers to send descriptions of their experiences, after which the newspaper frequently printed short letters from different training camps, for instance from Corporal Georg Jordahn, Company L., 124th Infantry, who was training at Camp Wheeler, Georgia. He starts out by saying that he has missed *Nordlyset* a lot since he left the palms at Palm Beach. He reports that they are treated well and working hard to become able “to send Kaiser Bill and his hordes to H.” 33

In the same issue, the abovementioned Dr. Ejnar Hansen, serving as a captain with the Medical Reserve Corps, writes from his base hospital in Camp McArthur that there soon will be 1,280,000 men training in the thirty-two camps across the country, and that the men in his camp mostly come from Wisconsin and Michigan. He notes that one comes across people called Jensen, Petersen, and Sørensen all the time, not to forget Hansen. He has, however, not come across anybody called Opffer yet, the article says, referring to the editor, who had three sons in the army. The food is all right, though rather drab, Hansen notes, and they go to bed at eight in the evening, which seems to be the most shocking thing for the Danish doctor: “Life is the same from one day to the next, measured and uniform like the movement of the pendulum of my old grandfather clock.” 34

The majority of the letters are from the last phase of the war, when the doughboys started reaching the front in large numbers, as Bien’s series indicated. In the first part of the series, on June 21, 1918, Adolf F. Lassen writes to his mother in San Francisco from “somewhere in France, May 12” about delayed letters and letters being censored (therefore he uses a typewriter to make it easier for the censor), the weather (much like Seattle’s), and about their journey over there—which involved fourteen days at sea, four days at a rest camp in France and then four days on a train—as an explanation for delayed letters or him not writing. He is typing a report to Washington, and complains, at the end of the letter, about his mother saying that she will put a sign on her door stating that she has a son fighting at the front—so far, he
fights with the pen, not the sword, he says, jokingly, so he does not approve of her idea.

The front page of Nordlyset, October 17, 1918 features a collection of “Breve fra vore Soldater” (Letters from our soldiers), as the headline runs. Among these, a short letter from the editor’s son, Emil Opffer Jr. (1896-1988), a merchant seaman, journalist, and editor, who was serving as a private in Battery A, Fifty-Third Artillery. He writes to his friends at home in New York that it has been a long time since he has received any mail, but that is probably because they move so much about. He is doing fine and, despite what he has read about having horrible nightmares at the front, he dreams about dances and feasts: feasts when he has been starving, dances when he is dead tired. As a final propagandistic salvo, he praises the Salvation Army for their work in France, although the artillerists rarely see them because they are always with the infantry in the trenches. Emil Opffer Jr. was born in Nyborg, Denmark, like his brother, Ivan, but they were raised, among other places, in Mexico and New York, where the family lived from 1905. Emil served overseas from August 25, 1917, to March 11, 1919, and was honorably discharged June 4, 1920. He later had an affair with the poet Hart Crane (1899-1932), who moved in with Opffer and his father in Brooklyn in 1924 and wrote his famous poem about the Brooklyn Bridge there.

Emil’s brother, Private Ivan Opffer (1897-1980), was a painter and illustrator famous for his caricatures and portraits of writers, e.g. James Joyce, and other notable figures. During the war, he was with the American Army Camouflage Corps and served in France and Germany from September 25, 1918, until September 4, 1919. Letters from him were occasionally printed in his father’s paper, for example the short “Over Sky!,” a pun on the usual “Over There” headline, which appeared May 22, 1919, sent from Coblenz, Germany. Here, he describes a flight with Lieutenant Roger from the Ninth Aero Squadron, which took part in the Third Army’s occupation of the Rhineland. He also wrote about more serious topics, for instance about being sick with the Spanish flu. In this article, “Døden om Bord” (Death on board), which appeared on the front page on October 9, 1919, he describes his dramatic journey across the Atlantic, sick with the flu even before boarding the steamer, and, using the racist language of the time.
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that I will not quote, he says that African American soldiers were particularly likely to die from the disease.

The October 17 issue of Nordlyset, quoted from above, also contains letters about more serious topics, for instance one from J. Smedegaard, who writes from his hospital bed:

Dear friends, I am in hospital in Southern France after I got wounded in the battle at the River Vesle, when we had captured Chateau Thierry. Some wounded comrades lay in no-man’s-land, writhing in agony, and I wanted to help bring them back, but on the way, I got wounded myself. The German soldiers look very cowed, and as soon as we get near them, they throw down their rifles and put their hands up. Our boys are always in the mood to charge. Two of my brothers are at the front. One of them is a pilot. Greetings to all the friends in the US.37

This slightly messy letter is interesting, though rather predictable, for its brief description of his willingness to risk his own life to save his comrades, as well as the stamina and high spirits of the Americans vs. the despondency of their enemies. Smedegaard was born in 1875 in the village Sejerslev on the island Mors in the north of Jutland, and immigrated to the US in 1889, when he was fourteen years old. Another letter, from Kay L. Mogensen (1891-1933), was also written from a hospital bed, at Whipple Barracks, Prescott, Arizona, on October 8, 1918—he had been gassed at Château Thierry and sent back to the US after spending three weeks in a hospital in France. The short and powerful headline “Gasset” (Gassed) was often used, especially in Nordlyset.

The front page of Nordlyset from May 9, 1918 features a story from Albert Jensen, 165th Infantry, whose letter to a friend had previously been printed in Bronx Home News and was presumably then translated from English to Danish—I will not try to translate it back again. But to paraphrase Jensen, he starts out thanking his friend for the articles he has sent—it is good to know that you are not forgotten, he writes, even though he is four thousand miles away from his dear old New York. Then, after expressing his hope that the war will soon be won and peace restored, he describes his experiences in combat, alternat-
ing between an initial characterization of the situation over there as a complete hell and cheerful, propagandistic descriptions of hand-to-hand fighting with the Germans, throwing grenades at them (you have to be careful that you don't have glue on your fingers and keep it too long—then no doctor in the world can help you, not even Ejnar Hansen!). The effects of the gas attack, however, are not pleasant—afflicted soldiers suffer infernal torment, despite being taken well care of at one of the Johns Hopkins Hospitals. After Albert Jensen's letter, there is a short notice about another Dane, Eugen Petersen, who also had been gassed. The notice mentions that Petersen's father, a former firefighter from Copenhagen, has three stars in his flag, i.e., three sons fighting for the US.

Private Sigurd Moll, San Francisco, in a letter from “somewhere in France” in August 1918, briefly tells about the way the English and French welcomed him and his comrades, a typical spirit-boosting topic, though here with an interesting addition. In France, the calamities of the war were much more evident than in England, Moll writes, concluding with a rhetorical exclamation: “I wonder if people in the US fully understand how lucky they are that the war is not being fought over there!” You find similar formulations in many letters from the Danes in the German army, when they compare the devastated areas to their native Schleswig, expressing the hope that the war never will come to the north and actually sometimes using this as a reason for fighting: to avoid that the war would come to their native place.

The bimonthly magazine *Ungdom* (Youth), published by Dansk Sammensluttet Ungdom or D.S.U. (Association of Danish Youth) in Cedar Falls, Iowa, also contains a lot of letters from soldiers. Most of them, like letters in other magazines and newspapers, are short descriptions of episodes—dramatic, trivial, humoristic, etc.—from the soldier's time in the army. One letter, however, is significantly longer—four and a half pages—and is written in English unlike the other letters in the magazine: “A Letter From The Battle Line” is attributed to Søren Dahl, Company B, 341 Machine Gun Battalion, American Post Office 761, US Army, originally from Omaha, Nebraska. The letter was written in France on November 8, 1918, but was only received by the editors on January 23, 1919, the introduction to it explains, and was therefore printed in the February 1, 1919 issue. *Ungdom* did not cease
publishing letters from the front after the armistice was declared, and the same goes for many other Danish American publications.

In 

there was a temporary lull in interest in the war or rather in the publication of soldiers’ letters after the “Danske Soldaterbreve fra ‘Over There’” series ended on November 8. No letters are printed in January, but on February 14, 1919, the topic is taken up again, with a different headline. Here, three letters are printed under the joint headline “Efter Vaabenstilstanden” (After the Armistice); the first is from Berendt Randlow from Oakland, California, who writes from Aubun, north of Verdun, to his father. He volunteered at the age of eighteen and was sent to France in June 1918, where he had been at the front since September with Battery B., Army Park Artillery. The second letter is from Sergeant Sven Klitgaard, who writes to his mother back home in Alameda, Ca., from Föhsen in Germany [Föhren, north of Trier], while the third is the beginning of a series of descriptions of Joseph Axen’s experiences during the war with the title “Min Rejse til Fronten” (My Journey to the Front), which is continued in the next four issues of the paper.

On the front page of the issue for March 24, 1919, Private Christian B. Mellsen, Company A, 315th Machine Gun Battalion, Eightieth Division, tells about his experiences at the front in France. “Mellem Bomber og Granater” (Between Bombs and Grenades) is the headline, and, as it suggests, it is a rather dramatic story. Mellsen starts out by stating a difference between before and after the Armistice: then, there were strict limits to what you could write about the conditions in France and the journey over there, whereas now, the soldiers have been granted more freedom in that regard. He uses this relative freedom to describe what he has experienced in a long letter to the members of “Freja,” Branch Number 6 of the organization Dania, written “two hundred kilometers east of Paris, January 19, 1919” — maybe paradoxically showing the limits to what you could write. He writes that he hasn’t heard from them since last time he wrote, in the middle of October, nor received any letters since he arrived in France. But then, during wartime, letters get lost, he states, cutting short this possible critique of his friends.

After he left Salinas, California, Mellsen was a recruit in Camp Kearny north of San Diego for a mere fifteen days, then he was de-
tached to the 143rd Machine Gun Battalion, Fortieth Division, and soon on the way to France. His battalion left New York on August 8, 1918, aboard the Mentor as part of a convoy of twelve steamers loaded with soldiers and guarded by a battleship and a destroyer that was joined by about twenty-five English destroyers when they approached the danger zone near the British Isles. After twelve days at sea, they arrived in Liverpool, went south by train and rested for a couple of days in a camp, before they crossed the Channel at night for Le Havre, France. From there, they travelled by cattle truck to southern France, where they started training for the battlefield—not for long, though, since a hundred men soon were picked out to fill up the ranks after recent losses in the Eightieth Division at the front. On October 10, they were issued gasmasks, steel helmets, pistols, and ammunition. He and his comrades were all thrilled by the aspect of soon seeing the actual battlefields, he writes, “but we just didn’t know what we were letting ourselves in for.” This is not the last example in his letter of a rather critical approach to the war, which, for obvious reasons, would not have been tolerated before the Armistice. This candor actually makes the letters printed in the immediate aftermath of the war somewhat more interesting than the stereotypically patriotic ones written and printed while the war still raged.

Late the same day, October 10, they said goodbye to the rest of the company and travelled north, again three days by cattle truck, to Nix Vill [Nixéville-Blercourt, most likely] three miles west of Verdun, where they were assigned to the 315th Machine Gun Battalion of the Eightieth Division. About a week later, they were sent up to a forest ten miles behind the line of fire, where they stayed for some ten days, awaiting orders, and experienced nightly bombings by enemy planes. In the early afternoon on October 30, they marched up to the front, arriving at their positions at 2:00 a.m., when they were ordered to dig themselves in. After an hour, the enemy started shelling them, and then follows a hair-raising description of the fighting. Private Melssen returned to Hoboken, New Jersey, from France on May 30, 1919.

Joseph Axen (1898-1940), who served in an anti-aircraft company, writes about the war in a much more stereotypical way, even after the fighting was over. He writes that he tries to shoot down the barbarous Fritz without mercy, after seeing German planes attack a Red Cross
field hospital and kill wounded men and nurses there. In the fourth part of “Min Rejse til Fronten,” Axen writes about the damaged and looted churches, castles, and towns they recaptured from the fleeing Germans, and ends with the rhetorical question, “Can we feel pity for that kind of barbarian after the war?” Nevertheless, it must have been a story that appealed to the editor’s and the readers’ understanding of the conflict, even after the Armistice, since it was published on the front page of not just one but five issues of the newspaper.

As opposed to the mundane news of some of the soldiers mentioned here, other Danish soldiers’ war experiences were much more dramatic. I already mentioned Private Hans Nielsen-Sorring (1894-1918), Company M, Seventh Infantry, Eightieth Division, who was killed in action during the Meuse-Argonne offensive at the village Cunel on October 15, 1918. Alfred Madson (1889-1918), originally Madsen and also called Madison in the newspapers, from Sheffield, Illinois, 332nd Infantry, Thirty-Third Division, was killed during the same battle, which is not that surprising since this was the bloodiest and longest battle the AEF took part in during World War I—two-thirds of all American deaths occurred in the last three months of the war. He was wounded on October 9, 1918, rescued from the battlefield by his future brother-in-law, Alfred C. Larsen, also of Sheffield, Illinois, only to be fatally hit by a bullet in the head while Larsen carried him back to safety. He had been in France since the end of May 1918, and on the front line for over three months. Alfred Larsen survived the war and returned to Sheffield to marry Madson’s sister, Eva. As the fifth Sheffield boy killed in France, Madson’s remains were laid to rest in the Sheffield cemetery in September 1921, an article in the Sheffield Times reports: “The flag-draped casket was conveyed to the home and cemetery with impressive military ceremonies,” including an honor guard, all under the charge of the American Legion.

Ole Frandsen Andersen (1894-1918), or Ole Frands Andersen, as his draft registration card says, was another Dane killed during the last stages of the war. He immigrated to the US in 1910 with his brother Hans, where he joined his uncles at Weeping Water, Nebraska, and later went to live in South Dakota. He joined the US Army and was killed in France during the Meuse-Argonne offensive on November 1, 1918. His body was later moved back to Denmark and buried at Lille
Heddinge Churchyard, near Rødvig where he was born. Every year on Armistice Day, an honor guard from De Danske Forsvarsbrødre at Stevns and HVK Stevns commemorates his memory.⁴³

Even on the very last day of the war, despite the Germans having signed the terms of the Armistice already at 5:10 a.m. on November 11, fighting continued until the historic and symmetrical moment of the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month was reached. It has been estimated that the fighting on the last morning of the war resulted in nearly 11,000 casualties, of which 2,738 died.⁴⁴ At least one of these was Danish: Private Kristian Jensen (1892-1918) from Scranton in Greene County, Iowa, born in Borup, Denmark, who fought in Company C, 316th Infantry Regiment, Seventy-Ninth Infantry Division, was killed in action on November 11, and is buried at the

Private Kristian Jensen.
Photo courtesy of the State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines.
enormous Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery in France. Already in 1921, his brother, Peter Jensen of Newell, Iowa, informed the authorities that he did not want his brother’s remains brought back to the US. His short file at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) also includes a letter to his mother Ane Marie Jensen back in Denmark in 1929, offering a pilgrimage to his grave in France. It does not say if she accepted this offer. His name is included on the monument wall at Marselisborg.

Also included on the Marselisborg Monument is Private Arent A. Bruhn (1895-1918), Company D, 127th Infantry, Thirty-Second Division, who was born in Elk Horn, Iowa, but lived in Enumclaw, Washington. He too was killed in action during the Meuse-Argonne offensive on October 19, 1918, and buried at Bois de Bantheville, where he was killed—“Struck by shell. Death instantaneous,” as the brutal language of military bureaucracy reported—and later reburied at the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery in 1925. At this point, his family did not want his remains moved back to the US, which they must have requested earlier on, before his grave was located in 1925. Maybe they had somehow accepted their loss or did not want to reopen the wound—to be able to identify his son, his father, Otto Bruhn, was instructed by the Quartermaster General, in a letter dated December 31, 1923, “to secure from your local dentist a chart showing all treatment performed for this soldier prior to his entry into the Service.” For a grieving parent, I imagine this would be a very disturbing thing to do. Instead, Bruhn was reburied at the beautiful cemetery in France and his mother, Mrs. Margrethe Bruhn, went on a pilgrimage—as part of the War Department’s program “Pilgrimage, War Mothers and Widows”—to visit his grave there in May-June 1930, as his rather long file at NARA reports.

Remembering Hans Nielsen-Sorring in Denmark

The National Archives in St. Louis also contain a fairly lengthy burial case file on Hans Lindberg Nielsen-Sorring, which mostly contains correspondence between his father Knud and the American military authorities, requesting information about the fate of his son and later arranging for his remains to be moved back to Denmark. Knud Nielsen-Sorring had suffered from heart problems since childhood
and had had a nervous breakdown in 1917; since this happened before Hans joined the Army in May 1918, the breakdown was more likely due to his being overworked than worries about his son. However, the death of his only son, and the initial uncertainty as to what had happened to him, must have made things even worse for Knud. Still, he worked untiringly first to find out what had happened to Hans, then to have his remains moved back to Denmark, and along with this, to erect a Danish monument for the war dead, as mentioned in the introduction.

When the family was finally informed about his death, they inserted a short notice in the local Aarhus papers saying that today, April 16, 1919, they had been notified by the American Ministry of War that their beloved son and brother, Hans, was killed in action at the front in France, on November 5, at the age of twenty-four. The date given by the authorities was not correct, however, which complicated Knud Nielsen-Sorring’s attempts to find out more. In January 1920, he requested that his son’s remains be brought to Denmark, if possible, otherwise “that his body remains in the soil of France.” In November 1921, the authorities approved his wish and his son’s remains were reburied on April 15, 1922 at Dollerup Church, the church belonging to the village Sor­ring between Aarhus and Silke­borg, where his mother and two brothers, who had died as infants, were already buried.

In the article “Den faldne Soldat” (The fallen soldier) in Aarhus Amtstidende, on April 19, 1922, N. A. writes about Hans Nielsen-Sorring (1894-1918). Killed in action October 15, 1918. The caption to his portrait in Aarhus Stiftstidende on April 17, 1919, says, “He died for his new country.”
Nielsen-Sorring’s burial a week prior. He starts out by describing the grief of the bereaved father and says that he had had an epitaph by sculptor Ølsgaard put up in the church the year before in memory of his son. A great number of mourners attended the funeral, following the dead soldier’s casket to the grave. The casket was draped in the American flag, while the church was decorated with Danish flags, as a marker of the two nationalities involved. The vicar, Mr. Knudsen, spoke of the three phases in the young man’s life, of which the third, his time as a voluntary soldier in the US Army, was highly interesting, as it, in the vicar’s interpretation, connected his service with a fight for Denmark:

When America got involved in the war, the young man felt himself confronted with a very serious choice: “Stay, where you are, in favorable conditions, or volunteer and fight for the cause that is not America’s, not France’s nor England’s alone, but also the cause of your own small native country.” He chose to volunteer.50

At the graveside, a teacher named Asbæk thanked the fallen soldier for not forgetting his native country, but willingly sacrificing himself to guard it, when he thought it was in peril. And then, he connected the Danish American war effort with the Danes fighting in the German ranks to the interests of Denmark even more explicitly than the vicar:

We should be grateful that so many young Danes both in America and South Jutland did their duty and fought in honor of the Danish nation; for they have contributed to the war ending with such a good result for us, and we have the right to hope that Denmark will last as long as the Danish youth rate the dictates of duty highly and willingly go where ever their conscience commands, even when it is a matter of life and death. Let us pay tribute to Hans Nielsen Sorring’s memory.51

Hence, the reunion of North Schleswig and Denmark was due to the Danes fighting on both sides, in this man’s view, which is quite similar to the story told on the reliefs of the Marselisborg Monument.
But what did Hans Nielsen-Sorring think about these matters? Why did he join up, why did he fight? Unfortunately, I have not come across letters from him among the many letters in the Danish American newspapers or in the archives, and other information about him is scarce, so it is only possible to guess at his motives. In America, he lived in Racine, was single, and worked for the Racine Rubber Company as a "Tire Maker," according to his registration card of June 5, 1917. He enlisted in the Army on May 26, 1918—in Chicago, a letter of August 11, 1919, in his NARA file says—and embarked for Europe from Brooklyn aboard the Navasa, July 22. He was still a Danish citizen when he registered in 1917 but had declared his intention of becoming a US citizen. His name appears twice in Racine County in the World War (1920), but only with the inaccurate death date, November 5, 1918, that his family was given initially, and the information that he had lived at 523 College Avenue, had been a private in the US Army's 161 Depot Brigade, had trained at Camp Grant in Illinois, and that other service and dates were not available.

After the war, his father desperately tried to get information of his son's fate in the war and wrote in a letter that the family had not heard from him since he left for France. In a short letter to the War Dept. in Washington D.C., dated December 22, 1919, Nielsen-Sorring says that he has "received information that in that company were only 2 Danes, and that the other man was a very close friend of my son." He hopes that they will either forward his letter to this man or give him the name and address of this other Dane. He never succeeded in finding this man, and, like the brief formulation above of a man being killed instantly, this is something that you often find in these letters: relatives hoping to find the person that heard their loved ones' last words, or who saw what happened to them. If such a witness can be found, he invariably tells the bereaved that death was instantaneous, their son didn't suffer. Despite the scarcity of news that his father's hard work resulted in, at least Hans Nielsen-Sorring found a final resting place in the village where he had been born and from which his father had taken his name. 

To conclude, this article represents only the initial, tentative steps for a book about the Danish doughboys and sailors fighting for Uncle Sam during World War I, the story about an almost completely forgot-
ten group of soldiers and their motives for fighting. It has been positive to discover that there is a lot of material available at the archives, when you start digging into the haystacks. It is less positive, though, that hardly anything has been written about this group, unlike for instance about Danes fighting in the Civil War, so a lot of basic research still needs to be done. Likewise, it is a problem that I have not found any substantial material from the soldiers “over there” in the archives and so far have had to rely on letters and interviews from the newspapers. So, if you have material of this sort in the attic or store-room—letters, photos, diaries from any of the Danish doughboys—please contact me!53

Endnotes

1 Unfortunately, Aarhus Kommune, which maintains the park and monument, apparently does not file information about details like the plaque text. Furthermore, the text still does not include men from the Danish Navy, volunteers in the German Army like the author and actor Stellan Rye, who was killed in action at Ypres, November 14, 1914, or the only woman among the many men: the nurse Johanne Marie Ohrt, who died in 1915 from dysentery at the field hospital on the Eastern Front of which she was in charge. For the history of the monument, see Poul Harris, Århus i friluftskunst og mindesmærker (Aarhus: Fonden til Bevarelse af Friluftskunst og Mindesmærker i Århus, 1983); Inge Adriansen, Erindringssteder i Danmark (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanums Forlag, 2010); and my article "Changing Narratives of War: The World War I Monument in Aarhus," in Michael Böss, ed., Conflicted Pasts and National Identities: Narratives of War and Conflict (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2014), 138-50. Lars Erik Bryld, associate professor in the Department of Clinical Medicine, University of Copenhagen, has compiled a pdf with the names on the monument, available at https://www.bryld.dk/hent-filer/.

2 For the story behind Rebild National Park, see Henrik Bugge Mortensen, Rebild Bakker. Dansk-Amerikanske forbindelser (Skørping: Forlaget Rebild, 2012), in Danish and English.

3 Bent Holstein, “Vel mødt i Aarhus, Dansk Amerikanerne!,” Aarhus Stiftstidende, July 5, 1925.

4 Til Hr. Præsidenten for Amerikas forenede Stater (To the President of the United States of America), Aalborg, 1918, digitized at the Royal Library, https://www.kb.dk/.

5 Another petition from the Danish American Schleswigers, not the soldiers though, did have an important impact: President Wilson found time to answer the spokesperson, the Reverend K. C. Bodholdt, on November 12, 1918, that their appeal for justice would not go unheeded. See Max Henius:
A Biography, published by Max Henius Memoir Committee, Chicago, 1936, 90-94.

6 See Ole Sønnichsen, Rejsen til Amerika—Drømmen om et nyt liv og Jagten på lykken (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2017), 7. This number does not include Danish speakers from Schleswig, for whom no exact number is available. In the encyclopedia Sønderjylland A – Å (Aabenraa: Historisk Samfund for Sønderjylland, 2011), Leif Hansen Nielsen suggests that up to 45,000 people from North Schleswig emigrated between 1860-1910, most of them to the US (395).

7 Vig's article can be found online in Bien here: https://box2.nmtvault.com/DanishIM/jsp/RcWebImageViewer.jsp?doc_id=8d575c30-3cdb-4525-9e99-50d8866ec8af/iae1hdim0/20121204/00001009. Unfortunately, the scanning is not perfect.


11 The first chapter, “Amerika rejser en Hær,” was published May 30, 1918, in Berlingske Tidende, evening edition, and later, June 26, 1918, on the front page of the Esbjerg newspaper Vestkysten.


13 For more information on this poster or the plebiscite, see the article “Sønderjylland” at the Henrik Pontoppidan society’s official site, accessed July 7, 2020, http://www.henrikpontoppidan.dk/text/kilder/digte/eventyr.html.

14 Bennett C. Vig did not register until the next year, June 5, 1918, and there are no other traces of his military service at Ancestry.com.

15 I am grateful for travel grants from the DAHS and Autorkontoen in Denmark, which enabled me to do research at archives in the Midwest in October 2019.

16 Misteltenen. Julemagasin for Danske i Amerika, Omaha, Nebraska, 1920, 30. See picture of the brothers there or in Walter L. Haight, Racine County in the World War, Racine, Wisconsin, W.L. Haight and F.P. Haight, 1920, 593.


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21 Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen, C. F. Schiøppfes Samling, H. nr. 628. See also “Drustrup, Neils” at https://homeofheroes.com/distinguished-service-cross/service-cross-world-war-i/navy-cross-world-war-i/navy-cross-wwi-navy/navy-cross-wwi-navy-d-to-g/.

22 See https://valor.militarytimes.com/hero/17257.

23 See Dansk Biografisk Leksikon, “Sosthenes Behn,” https://biografiskleksikon.lex.dk/Sosthenes_Behn and Det Danske Udvandrerarkiv, A302-2, second page in the digitized material, https://www.udvandrerarkivet.dk/soegeside/detaljevisning/?no_cache=1&tx_niddua_pi3%5Br%5D=320782&tx_niddua_pi3%5Bs%5D=2&tx_niddua_pi3%5Bc%5D=2.


26 Det Danske Udvandrerarkiv, file A6173-2 P Indkaldelses ordre til den amerikanske hær, digitized at https://www.udvandrerarkivet.dk/soegeside/detaljevisning/?tx_niddua_pi3%5Br%5D=33900&tx_niddua_pi3%5Bs%5D=2, and A6173-6 P Dokumenter vedr. KBs repatriotisering, digitized at: https://www.udvandrerarkivet.dk/soegeside/detaljevisning/?tx_niddua_pi3%5Br%5D=33900&tx_niddua_pi3%5Bs%5D=6. The year of immigration explains his absence from the draft board in the Danish conscription register (the stamp §13), see https://www.sa.dk/ao-soegesider/billedviser?bsid=19834#19834,1616452.

27 Det Danske Udvandrerarkiv, file A308-14: K breve til datteren Gudrun, http://www.udvandrerarkivet.dk/soegeside/detaljevisning/?tx_niddua_pi3%5Br%5D=320933&tx_niddua_pi3%5Bs%5D=14. “Ja, saa vil to af dine Bredre gaa med i Hæren, men ikke efter deres Forældres Ønsker. Vi kan ikke ofre vore Børn. Men naar de vil ofre sig selv for at kæmpe mod Tyranniet, saa har de Lov til det. Og mens vi ikke kan lade være med at sørge over Udsigten til at faa dem sendt ind i det modbydelige Slagteri, saa maa vi jo glæde os over deres Mod og Offersind.”

28 Danish Immigrant Archives, Grand View University, Des Moines, MsC 08: Kristian Østergaard Family Papers, box 2, folder 5: Letters to Kristian and Kristine Østergaard. This is the same source for all his letters.
Ibid. “Der er endnu ingen udsigt til at komme hverken frem eller tilbage. Kan ikke komme til søs og ikke hjem og min tilværelse her er ikke gemytlig. Jeg har det godt nok paa en maade men det er saa kjedsommeligt.”

Ibid. “Men krigen er jo ovre og folk begynder allerede at glemme. Det er ikke mig selv jeg tænker paa men soldaterne der kommer her fra Frankrig faar [?] ikke længere den samme velkomst.”

Danish American Archive and Library, HNP 2008, Box 19, Packet 2, Joseph Hansen.

Unfortunately, the Digital Library of Danish American Newspapers and Journals available at the Museum of Danish America website does not include the issues of Bien after no. 46, November 15, 1918, and the rest of that year, so I cannot say if there were more—assuming that these issues were published. See https://box2.nmtvault.com/DanishIM/jsp/RcWebBrowseCollections.jsp.

Nordlyset, October 11, 1917, 8.


Nordlyset, October 24, 1918, 4: “Mon Folk i U.S. tilfulde forstaar, hvor lykkelige de er, at Krigen ikke udkæmpes derovre!”


Joseph Axen, “Min Rejse til Fronten,” Bien, March 7, 1919, 1. “Kan vi nu efter Krigen have Medlidenhed med den Slags Barbarer?”


Sheffield Times, September 30, 1921. Danish American Archive and Library, HNP 2008, Box 12, Olivia Hansen Madsen/Henry Hansen, packet
4, Alfred Madson. The files contain a photo of Alfred Madson, newspaper clippings, photocopies of honor rolls etc., but no soldiers' letters.


45 NARA, St. Louis, Burial Case Files, Kristian Jensen. See also https://www.abmc.gov/decedent-search/jensen%3Dkristian.

46 NARA, St. Louis, Burial Case Files, Arent Bruhn. See also https://www.abmc.gov/decedent-search/bruhn%3Darent.

47 NARA, St. Louis, Burial Case Files, Hans Lindberg Nielsen-Sorring. See also Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen, 10063, Komiteen for Mindesmærke ov. Faldne. Sager vedrørende opførelsen af Marselisborgmonumentet (1920-1925).


49 Jyllands Posten, April 17, 1919, 7.


51 Ibid., 5. “Ved Graven bragte Lærer Asbæk afdøde en Tak, fordi han ikke glemtte sit lille Fædreland, men villig ofrede sig for at værne det, da han mente, det var i Nød. Vi bør være taknemmelige, for at saa mange unge Danske baade i Amerika og i Sønderjylland fulgte Pligtens Bud og kämpede saaledes, at det blev til Ære for den danske Nation; thi de har bidraget til, at Krigen fik saa heldigt et Udfald for os, og vi har Ret til at haabe, at Danmark faar Lov at bestaa, saa længe dansk Ungdom sætter Pligtens Bud højt og villigt gaar, hvorhen deres Samvittighed byder dem, selv naar det gælder Livet. Ære være Hans Nielsen Sorring's Minde blandt os.”


53 Some of the most interesting material I have found so far at the archive in Aalborg is a typewritten extract from Knud Moe's (1888-1965) diary with the headline “Minder fra Krigen” (Memories from the War), so this kind of material obviously exists. Furthermore, Moe is the only Danish American participant I have come across that has published his memories: I smelthediglen. En dansk præstesøns udvandrerarsaga (1965) (In the melting pot. The emigrant saga of a Danish vicar’s son). I wanted to focus on soldiers’ letters here, however, so Moe’s story has to wait for another occasion.
Book Review


Reviewed by Troy Wellington Smith

In their thought-provoking introduction to *Danish Literature as World Literature*, editors Dan Ringgaard and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen reflect on the fates of various Danish authors. Although writing in a so-called minor language, some Danish authors, such as Hans Christian Andersen, have had their work disseminated on a scale that exceeds even that of other major world-literary authors writing in (for example) English, German, or French; but the works of other Danish authors, who are equally important to the national canon, such as Johannes Ewald and Steen Steensen Blicher, have yet to be regarded as part of world literature. According to Ringgaard and Thomsen, the absence of discussions of Ewald and Blicher from the current volume distinguishes it from a history of Danish literature (5), though most of the rest of the authors are equally central to that canon. However, if we take David Damrosch’s broad definition of world literature, quoted in Kjældgaard’s essay, as “encompass[ing] all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language” (194), every essay in this collection is about an author or body of works that undoubtedly belongs to world literature in this sense of the term.

The collection is organized chronologically around the historical highlights of the Danish canon, starting with an essay on the Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus by Pernille Hermann, and concluding with a study of Nordic Noir by C. Claire Thomson and Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen. These bookends to the volume, which bracket essays on Danish ballads (Lis Møller), Ludvig Holberg (Svend Erik Larsen), H. C. Andersen (Karin Sanders), Søren Kierkegaard (Isak Winkel Holm), Georg Brandes, J. P. Jacobsen, and Herman Bang (Annegret Heitmann), Johannes V. Jensen and Henrik Pontoppidan (Jon Helt Haarder), and Isak Dinesen (Lasse Horne Kjældgaard), as well as Danish modernist and postmodernist poetry (Anne-Marie Mai), demonstrate how Denmark has seen its literature become world literature.
in the hands of its neighbors to the west, as Shakespeare is said to have largely based his *Hamlet* on an episode from Saxo's Latin *Gesta Danorum* (Feats of the Danes), and Scandinavian crime novels and TV drama have been especially well-received in the United Kingdom.

Following Hermann's piece on Saxo's European entanglements, Lis Møller's paper on Danish medieval ballads starts with their German reception, but ends with an examination of this popular genre's influence on British authors like M. G. Lewis (author of the notorious gothic novel *The Monk*), and the inventor of the historical novel, Sir Walter Scott. Karin Sanders' article on Andersen is filled with interesting facts about this writer's world literary legacy; for instance, one of his early poems, "The Dying Child," was translated into Greenlandic two years after it had first appeared in German translation and then in Danish. With an author of Andersen's truly global reach, a multi-volume series would be necessary to do justice to his influence on the literatures and cultures of every inhabited continent; Sanders focuses primarily on Britain and the United States, probably because Andersen played an active role in this intercultural exchange, and the present volume is, of course, in English.

Isak Winkel Holm's article on Søren Kierkegaard, which is as much about Kafka as it is about Kierkegaard, breaks with the national literary historical mold of the other essays, giving little heed to Kierkegaard's biography and *oeuvre*, and dwelling instead on a single passage from the Dane's journals that was to inspire Kafka's *Das Schloß* (*The Castle*). I found this sort of close textual analysis to be at odds (although somewhat refreshingly so) with *Danish Literature as World Literature* as it has been devised by Ringgaard and Thomsen, as a sort of history of Danish literature with an international flavor; Holm does not even attempt to place Kierkegaard within Denmark's literary history, as the other authors did with their respective figures. He instead makes several references to the philosopher's importance to specific Central and Western European authors, but these remarks tend to be brief. Like Andersen, Kierkegaard has exerted a lasting influence far beyond the North Atlantic world of letters, and so a couple of additional essays would be necessary to adequately capture his "world-literary dimensions," as well. Even if Kierkegaard has a rather forbidding reputation, he was a popularizer of sorts himself, and is now second only to An-
dersen among the Danish poets in worldwide renown, largely (I think) because his writings challenged the abstractions of academic philosophy with the concretization of fiction, parable, and metaphor, and thus provided inspiration for generations of poets and novelists. Moreover, like Andersen, Kierkegaard has taken up permanent residence in the literatures of Eastern Europe, Asia, and Latin America. That is to say, there is much more to “Danish literature as world literature” than what is to be found in the Germanic language circles.

Isak Dinesen (or Karen Blixen, as she is known to her Scandinavian audience) wrote most of her stories and autobiographical narratives first in English and then in Danish, and so she is right at home in this collection, just as she never quite fits into either Danish or English literary history—or American literary history, for matter, in spite of the fact that she enjoyed her first critical and popular accolades in the United States. Instead, as Lasse Horne Kjældgaard demonstrates in his essay on her work, not only do Dinesen’s bilingual corpus and its wide array of literary allusions grant her work an international appeal, her publishing success—not only on both sides of the North Sea, but on both sides of the Atlantic—places her squarely in world literature.

Some of the contributions to this volume focus more on how their respective subjects participated in international literary movements, rather than how their works were received in foreign contexts. Svend Erik Larsen’s paper on Ludvig Holberg, for instance, is a solid introduction to the great Danish satirist as an Enlightenment figure, and while it offers some interesting tidbits on the translation history of Holberg’s works, these remarks tend to be cursory. Likewise, Ann-Marie Mai’s essay on the Danish modernists and postmodernists considers their cosmopolitan orientation (such as their enthusiasm for Beat Poetry) but concludes that Danish poets such as Inger Christensen are largely overlooked by readers abroad.

Annegret Heitmann’s article on the critic Georg Brandes, and the novelists J. P. Jacobsen and Hermann Bang, as well as Jon Helt Haarder’s piece on the novelists Johannes V. Jensen and Henrik Pontoppidan, will fascinate those readers interested in Germany’s adoption of Danish literature and criticism in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries. Although Heitmann mentions in passing that Jacobsen, Bang, and Brandes were all translated into Chinese, intriguing
transcontinental transactions of this sort tend to be shortchanged; despite the importance of the latter two authors to the United States, this dimension is left almost untouched. In Haarder's paper, the world-literary credentials of Pontoppidan and Jensen are established mainly through their contemporary success in translation on the German book market, and by their Nobel Prize in Literature victories (in 1917 and 1944, respectively). Pontoppidan's masterpiece, *Lucky Per*, is, of course, world literature; even if it was not published in English translation until 2010 (and then again in 2017), it did draw the attention of the great Hungarian critic Georg Lukács, and contributed to its author winning the Nobel Prize for Literature.

There is, however, a difference in world literary caliber between *Lucky Per* and the fairytales of Andersen, which have been translated into almost 150 languages. Given Andersen's much wider range, Sanders' fine essay would have been nicely complemented by another contribution on the fairytale author's enormous influence in Asia, for example, by an article from Fudan University's Sun Jian, who has co-edited an English-language anthology on Andersen's influence on his country's cultural life.* Something similar might be said of Isak Winkel Holm's paper on Kierkegaard; it offers a fruitful reading of a passage in the Danish philosopher's journals that was to be reimagined in Kafka's novel *The Castle*, and even makes several references to the importance of Kierkegaard for certain Central and Western European authors, but Kierkegaard's enormous impact on twentieth-century Anglo-American literary culture—aside from the authorship of Dinesen—goes completely unnoticed. Again, this omission is not ultimately the responsibility of the author of the article; to fully live up to the title *Danish Literature as World Literature*, the collection would have needed a second or even a third essay on Kierkegaard.

Nordic Noir, the subject of the final essay of the collection, all but demands an approach that goes beyond the parochial constraints of national literary history. Not only does the name of the genre indicate the regional rather than the national; the production and dissemination of TV drama, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, is quite often a multinational undertaking, which Thomson and Stougaard-Nielsen vividly illustrate with a wealth of historical detail and empirical data. As the authors claim, it is precisely as popular
culture that Nordic Noir has been capable of circulating globally. They write, “Nordic Noir is framed by internationally recognizable genre conventions and appeals to ‘what people of all lands have in common,’ that is, perceived global threats such as organized crime, environmental degradation and transnational trafficking” (240). Thomson and Stougaard-Nielsen had previously quoted Brandes’ evaluation of Andersen, in which the great critic attributes the fairytale author’s popularity to his seemingly universal accessibility, and they suggest that something similar is now taking place with Nordic Noir.

As an introduction to Danish belles lettres with a world literary inflection, Ringgaard and Thomsen’s collection is to be highly recommended, as its essays are invariably of excellent quality, and many are written by scholars who are among the experts on their respective authors or topics. Yet, looking back on the list of contributors and the table of contents, which dutifully proceeds step-by-step through Danish literary history, I could not help but feel that the editors had missed a valuable opportunity to truly realize the goals of the Literatures as World Literature series. For one thing, although this series professes to capture “the polyphonic, multiperspectival nature of world literature,” the contributors to this volume are by and large Danes based at Danish universities, the editors’ own Aarhus University above all. We might expect a history of Danish literature to be written by someone who can claim it as her patrimony, and Danish Literature as World Literature seems to have been conceived as something of a national literary history, albeit one with constant reference to this history’s credentials as world literature.

These objections aside, the contributions are all of excellent quality, and they are written by some of the leading authorities on Danish literature. While it admittedly contains some blind-spots as a history of this literature, Danish Literature as World Literature is to be highly recommended to anyone who would like to learn more about some of the contact points between this history and the world.

Endnotes

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