

DANISH SETTLEMENT IN MINNESOTA

The prophecy by Fredrika Bremer of Minnesota as a new Scandinavia has long since come true.¹ All the five Scandinavian groups — the Swedes, the Norwegians, the Danes, the Finns, and the Icelanders — have settlements there.² Minnesota is today the state having the largest number of citizens of Scandinavian descent, — about seven hundred thousand, — of whom nearly fifty thousand are of Danish blood.³

Danish immigration to Minnesota began even before its organization as a territory. One of the first and most prominent bankers of St. Paul in the forties and fifties was Dr. Charles W. Borup, a native of Denmark who had come to St. Paul in 1848. Writing of him in 1851, Miss Bremer says:

I have become acquainted with a Danish merchant, resident here, who has made a considerable fortune in a few years in the fur trade with the Indians, and who has built himself a large and handsome country house at some little distance from the city. His wife, who is the daughter of an Indian woman by a white man, has the dark Indian eye, and features not unlike those of the Feather-cloud woman [*a fair Indian woman among the Sioux whom Miss Bremer visited*] and in other respects is as much a gentlewoman as any agreeable white lady. I promised this kind Dane, who retains the perfect Danish characteristics in the midst of Americans, that I would, on my return, in passing through Copenhagen, pay a visit to his old mother, and convey to her his greeting.

At the time of Dr. Borup's death in 1859 he was one of the "wealthiest citizens" of St. Paul.⁴

¹ Fredrika Bremer, *The Homes of the New World; Impressions of America*, 2: 55-58 (New York, 1853).

² Culturally, at least, the Finns are essentially Scandinavian, and Mary W. Williams, in *Social Scandinavia in the Viking Age*, 12 (New York, 1920), suggests that they are probably racially akin to the Teutons or Nordics as well.

³ *United States Census, 1920, Population*, 2: 973.

⁴ Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 2: 58; J. Fletcher Williams, *A History of the City of Saint Paul, and of the County of Ramsey, Minne-*

The United States census reports for 1860 show that there were thousands of Swedes and Norwegians in Minnesota, but there were less than two hundred Danes. The heaviest immigration from Denmark began in the late sixties and continued during the next three decades. A large number of the early immigrants had been agricultural laborers and small farmers in the old country. Many of them brought their families with them. Toward the close of the century and up to the time of the World War, a large number of the Danish immigrants were mechanics. Most of the later comers were unmarried men and women who went to the cities rather than to the country. It was the earlier immigrants who founded the rural settlements.

Practically all of both the earlier and later immigrants could read and write and some had attended folk high schools, a kind of secondary school managed frequently by clergymen. Only a very limited number had had a higher education, since only the well-to-do or specially gifted could afford such training in the fatherland. If occasionally there was a black sheep among the immigrants or "one who had done something," it is also true that even they sometimes made good. When the Danish immigrant arrived in the North Star State he was usually in good health, rosy-cheeked, wearing homespun clothing, perhaps, but rarely wooden shoes. Economically, he had been schooled to do such light but tiresome tasks as herding cattle from the age of eight or ten and attending to the

sota, 390 (*Minnesota Historical Collections*, vol. 4). Before settling in Minnesota Borup had been a prominent fur-trader at Yellow Lake and La Pointe, in what is now northern Wisconsin. In 1854 he established the banking house of Borup and Oakes in St. Paul. Some of his activities as a frontier doctor during his fur-trading days are discussed in a sketch entitled "Dr. Charles W. Borup: An Up-to-date Wilderness Physician," *ante*, 7: 150. A great many of his letters are included in the American Fur Company Papers, photostatic copies of which are in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

ordinary duties indoors or outdoors, according to sex, from the age of fourteen.⁵

The Danish immigrants in Minnesota represented practically every part of Denmark — the larger islands, Seeland (*Sjælland*), Funen (*Fyn*), Lolland, Falster, and the peninsula of Jutland, as well as the smaller islands. In Denmark they had spoken different dialects in their homes and communities; but all had also learned the national Danish in the schools. A change in the mother tongue took place in the American settlements, where several dialects were frequently represented. In addition to the usual admixture of some English words, the immigrants tended in their daily speech to approach the national Danish more than at home. Among the Danes in Freeborn and Steele counties, however, the Vendelbo dialect has been maintained to the present time.⁶

Religiously, most of the Danes had been Lutherans of either one of two types, if they had been active Christians at home. These types were the Inner Mission People — not unlike the German Pietists — and the Grundtvigians, a nationalistic kind of Lutheran to whom an idealized Denmark seemed but little less delectable than heaven itself.⁷ Among the earlier immigrants were also a number of Baptists, who had suffered under

⁵ Chapter on "Danish Emigration to the United States," in the author's manuscript "History of the Danes in Iowa," in the possession of the State Historical Society of Iowa; Soren J. M. P. Fogdall, *Danish-American Diplomacy, 1776-1920*, 162-166 (Iowa City, Iowa, 1922); Edward A. Ross, "The Scandinavians in America," in *The Century*, 88: 291-298 (June, 1914); "Immigration into the United States, Showing Number, Nationality, Sex, Age, Occupation, Destination, Etc. from 1820 to 1903," in Treasury Department, Bureau of Statistics, *Monthly Summary of Commerce and Finance of the United States*, 4345, 4347 (June, 1903). This is published also as 57 Congress, 2 session, *House Executive Documents*, no. 15, pt. 12 (serial 4481).

⁶ From the author's observations.

⁷ See, for instance, Bishop N. F. S. Grundtvig's poem "Paradiis," written in 1842 — a program for social reformers.

a petty persecution at home, and a few Methodists and Adventists.⁸

The latter were, so far as the Danes are concerned, a product of conditions in the early days of the settlements when there were frequently no ordained Lutheran ministers but only zealous lay preachers who eagerly seized the opportunity to become leaders and to study the Scriptures without state-prescribed supervision. They may have helped the pioneers to do some necessary original thinking in matters of the spirit. Unfortunately they could direct their followers to but a very limited amount of data on which to exercise their thoughts. And to the orthodox Lutheran ministers they simply created "a sinful confusion" wherever their ideas took root.⁹

Independent in other things, the Danish pioneers in Minnesota were independent in settling, for instead of collecting at a few places under efficient leadership they scattered widely. The large settlement in Freeborn County, however, owed much to its early leader, Reverend Lars Jørgensen Hauge, who directed a considerable number of Baptists to this part of the state in the sixties and seventies.

Hauge was born on the Danish island of Funen. He was so precocious a lad that the bishop of the island suggested that he be educated at the expense of the state. During his boyhood the Baptists and other dissenters were beginning to establish churches in Denmark, and young Hauge became a Baptist. In 1858 he emigrated to Wisconsin, where there was already a small congregation of Danish Baptists. Soon Hauge was one of their most active preachers and evangelists, working intensely and traveling widely in the interest of his church.

⁸ Frederik Barfod, *Fortællinger af fædrelandets historie*, 2: 421 (Copenhagen, 1874). An excellent account of the early Baptist congregations may be found in William Gammel, *History of American Baptist Missions in Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America*, 278-298 (Boston, 1849).

⁹ P. Jensen, *Minder gennem halvfjerdsindstyve aar*, 79-90 (Cedar Falls, Iowa, 1920); N. S. Lawdahl, *De danske baptister historie i Amerika*, 154, 164 (Morgan Park, Illinois, 1909).

He married in 1863, and with his young bride and other Danes he set out in the same year from Raymond, Racine County, Wisconsin, for western Minnesota by ox team. On the way these immigrants were warned against settling so near the region where Sioux tomahawks had recently been at work. To all such warnings the young zealot, anxious to scatter the pure seed of the Baptist faith as well as to find suitable lands for settlement, turned "the deaf ear." The immigrants pushed across the Mississippi but did not go far to the west. Instead, they located near Lake Geneva in Freeborn County, where they met a few other Danish families, which had come the same year from Waushara County, Wisconsin.

Hauge made trips to Raymond both in 1863 and 1864, each time bringing back more settlers, and he wrote a small pamphlet about the Danes in the United States which was published in Copenhagen. This auspicious start was to end abruptly. Hauge studied the Scriptures diligently and soon came to the conclusion that evangelical Christians should observe the Sabbath on Saturday rather than Sunday. In this he met opposition from his congregation and a fight, not figuratively speaking, was at one time imminent in the little log church. We can understand that the ire of this earnest preacher was aroused when his parishioners accused him of heresy, this man who had crossed both water and land to preach the gospel unadulterated. Though Hauge remained in the settlement for some time laboring both for its material and spiritual welfare, — he was an ardent advocate of dairying, — his influence was broken and he spent the greater part of the remainder of his long life as a free-lance missionary among the Sioux Indians. He retained his interest in the Danish immigrants, however, and in time became reconciled to his former Baptist brethren.

The settlers bought land, in some instances slightly improved, and made dugouts or built tiny wooden houses. Some of the land had to be cleared by grubbing out the burr oaks before breaking, a Herculean task performed with an

immense breaking plow drawn by several teams of oxen. Wheat was the first main crop and it yielded well, but there was little prosperity until the settlers turned to more diversified farming. In the eighties dairying was agitated. Visitors to Denmark told of the encouraging changes there wrought by the creameries, and dairy farmers in such states as Iowa had already accomplished results worthy of imitation. Finally in 1890 the Clark's Grove farmers built a creamery at the cross-roads near the center of the settlement. It was operated on the coöperative plan with which the settlers had been familiar in Denmark and which already had been put into practice in the Bath Farmers' Insurance Association, organized in 1877.

Around the creamery a little town grew up, and this gradually became the social center of the settlement, though the first churches were not built there. It was called Clark's Grove after an early postmaster, J. M. Clark, whose farm buildings were located in a grove; hence the name of the post office, town, and settlement. Though the name was not of Danish origin, it became endeared to the people. When a railroad tapped the settlement, the company wanted to change the name; the track ran through Clark's Grove, but the depot was built a mile south of the town. The people refused to patronize the road, whereupon the depot was moved to Clark's Grove and named James. But the residents continued to call their town by the old name, rich in its associations with pioneer days, and finally it was accepted by the railroad company.¹⁰

The general economic progress of the settlement may be gauged by its church-building activities. The first church, a log building erected in 1866, served the congregation until

¹⁰ Lawdahl, *Danske baptister*, 146-161; *Danske i Amerika*, 1: 186-191, 271; 2: 271-286 (Minneapolis and Chicago, 1908-18). This two-volume work is brimful of information about Danish-American personalities and affairs. Dr. P. S. Vig of Dana College, Blair, Nebraska, is the chief contributor. Ministers, teachers, editors, farmers, and laborers have contributed to this unique but rather uncritical work. A valuable source on the history of Clark's Grove is the register of the First Danish Baptist Church, preserved in its archives.

1873, when a new frame church was built on a new site. This structure was enlarged in 1894 and continued in use until 1916, when a few of the old pioneers and many of their children and children's children dedicated the present church, built on the hill near the creamery at a cost of about twenty-two thousand dollars.¹¹

The pioneers exercised a strict church discipline — a kind unknown to Danes in the mother country and inspired by the general Baptist ideals of the nineteenth century. A few items from the old church registers will illustrate this discipline and the spirit of the pioneers better than any general account could do. Soon after the organization of the church in 1863 members were forbidden to cut timber on land not belonging to them. In 1864 it was decided by the church that "no brothers should be permitted to travel on Sundays, and if any were on a longer journey and not able to reach home or some other place where there was divine service they were to remain where they were." In 1865 "four members were expelled for having worked on the Lord's Day." In 1873 "a matter concerning M. J., who had married an unbeliever, was debated several hours. It closed with a vote of six to one in favor of her expulsion." The items for 1873 mention discussions about how to discourage vanity and whether it is preferable to have the marriage ceremony performed in the church or by the civil authority. Naturally there was a preference for the church.

The following item from the church register is dated 1875: "O. S. rose and stated that his daughter had become engaged to an unbelieving young man. It was unanimously decided that those who married outsiders would be expelled and also

¹¹ A. W. Warren, *A Brief Historical Sketch of the First Danish Baptist Church, Clarks Grove, Minnesota*, 13-17 (Clark's Grove, 1923); *Dannevirke*, January 26, 1916. A complete file of this Grundtvigian weekly, published at Cedar Falls, Iowa, is in the possession of its editor, Mr. M. Holst; the Minnesota Historical Society has a file which begins with the issue of March 20, 1918.

that young people when joining the church be told that it did not permit engagements or marriages with outsiders." Nevertheless, an item for the next year runs: "After much regrettable discussion in the matter of K. S. [*who apparently had married the "unbelieving young man"*], the majority decided to let her remain in the church." The matter, however, was not yet closed for later in the year the church "agreed that it was wicked for a believer to marry an unbeliever and that the church reserved the right to act according to circumstances." And the next year the church decided that "it was desirable that everybody who became engaged should notify the church of the fact." Notwithstanding this action, the register for the next year reveals the fact that M. N. had married an unbeliever. Again the question of such marriages was warmly discussed and resort was had to prayer, but no disciplinary action was taken.

The church disciplined a member in 1877, however, for not having partaken of the Lord's Supper and another for dishonesty in a wheat deal. In 1882 the church voted that it was sinful and wicked to drink intoxicating liquors. Grape juice was then used for the Eucharist. But this prohibition did not extend to the delicious home-made beer which the Danish housewives, following old country customs, continued to make in America, and without which the men thought it well-nigh impossible to endure the hard work during haying and harvest. In 1899 the church took an action that may seem cruel to youngsters of a later day: it forbade its young people to play ball. The wish was recorded the same year that something should be done about "the young brothers who are not able to be quiet during the sermon." In 1890 a rumor was reported during a church meeting that a member had been guilty of playing cards. And in 1892 a member was expelled for having traded on a Sunday at the store in the near-by village of Geneva.¹²

¹² Register of the First Danish Baptist Church of Clark's Grove, 1863 to 1900.

Those who in our day and generation may be prone to smile at such intermeddling in personal matters, should remember that these earnest Danish pioneers also decided in 1890, when they completed their coöperative creamery, that no milk should be received on Sundays, and that this accordingly became the custom generally throughout Minnesota. This meant more of a holiday for the young people, though perhaps not in the sense that these latter-day Puritans thought of it. But they, too, may have built better than they knew.¹³

Let it also be remembered that these hardy pioneers at one of their few social gatherings, which took place each year on the Fourth of July at the Narrows, — a strait connecting the two parts of Lake Geneva, — took up generous collections for the benefit of needy brothers and sisters of the faith in the fatherland. The first collection for this purpose was taken in 1882 and the custom has been continued down to the present time.¹⁴

Immigration to the Clark's Grove settlement continued during the seventies and eighties but fell off in the nineties. During the latter decade, however, many newcomers went to the vicinity of Geneva, north of Clark's Grove. At the close of the century northern Freeborn County and southern Steele County contained the largest Danish settlement in Minnesota. Most of the immigrants lived in the country, but many were found in the villages and towns of Alden, Albert Lea, Geneva, Blooming Prairie, and Owatonna. Not all were Baptists. The Inner Mission People generally prevailed north of Geneva and the Grundtvigians near Alden. Danes had also settled among the Norwegians in Goodhue, Houston, Fillmore, and Mower counties.¹⁵ The presence of the Danish minister, Claus Laurits Clausen, at Austin after 1878 also tended to draw Danish

¹³ *Danske i Amerika*, 2: 281.

¹⁴ Register of the First Danish Baptist Church of Clark's Grove.

¹⁵ The first Norwegian settlement in Minnesota was established in Fillmore County in 1851. Martin Ulvestad, *Nordmændene i Amerika, deres historie og rekord*, 496 (Minneapolis, 1907).

immigrants to the southeastern part of Minnesota. Clausen, though a Dane, did his ministerial work mainly among the Norwegians, but his nationality and his general concern for the Danish immigrants made him one of the outstanding characters of early Danish-American history.¹⁶

The general trend of the Danish pioneers in Minnesota was toward the north and the west. Before 1870 they were found in most of the counties in the state. In 1880 Freeborn County ranked first in the number of Danish-born residents; Steele, second; Brown, third; and Hennepin, with the city of Minneapolis, fourth. Otter Tail, Olmsted, Ramsey, and Mower each had over two hundred.¹⁷

Soon after the Danish pioneers established the Clark's Grove settlement, other Wisconsin Danes located near Sleepy Eye in Brown County. The first Danes arrived there in 1866 by way of Clark's Grove. The following year more settlers arrived in Brown County from Wisconsin and others from Clark's Grove. There was also considerable immigration direct from Denmark. Among the latter were a mother and her two grown children who took up three homesteads about eight miles from the village of Sleepy Eye. The father had become ill on the voyage from Denmark and had later died and been buried in Mankato. The three survivors built three sod houses, the largest of which, on the mother's land, could easily accommodate not only the family of homesteaders but also their cows and oxen. They planted trees and laid out a garden with flowers and vegetables which became the wonder and delight of many a passer-by. Within the humble sod house might have been seen Danish copper utensils that had been brought along from Denmark, for these people were well-to-do farmers before their emigration. Pioneering was hard. The mother did not live long enough on her homestead to obtain the title to it nor

¹⁶ A good short biography of "Pastor C. L. Clausen," by Svein Strand, is published in *Symra*, 9: 204-223 (Decorah, Iowa, 1913).

¹⁷ *United States Census, 1870, Population, 360; 1880, Population, 1: 515.*

to see her son drive horses as she had hoped, but her remains were drawn to the grave by the first horses that he owned. The daughter married Lars Walthers in 1874. She and her husband continued to live on the mother's homestead until 1883, when they built "the first decent frame house in the settlement." The neighbors wondered why Walthers did not buy another quarter section of land instead of building this big house; they could not see why he wanted the latter, living as they generally did in one-room sod houses. The Walthers were hospitable people and the completion of their new home was celebrated by a Fourth of July festival the like of which had never been seen in the settlement. It was attended by about three hundred people from Sundown, Golden Gate, and Sleepy Eye.

The settlement spread into Redwood County and near the close of the century was the third largest Danish settlement in the state. Adventists, Baptists, and Lutherans (Inner Mission People) organized congregations and built churches. Such results were not accomplished without the usual contentions, but these were perhaps less bitter here than elsewhere among the Danes. The Baptists and Lutherans even built union churches, something very unusual in Danish-American history.¹⁸

Other Wisconsin Danes located at Elm Dale, Morrison County, in 1867. The year before, Jens Hansen, formerly a tailor in Copenhagen, had gone there to observe the lay of the land. The immigrants who left Waupaca, Wisconsin, early in the summer of 1867 made up a caravan of six ox carts, which passed through St. Paul on the Fourth of July. The inhabitants of that city were celebrating and the sight of the rustic ox teams tempted some of the yelling merrymakers to shoot over the heads of the frightened home-seekers, who

¹⁸ M. Sorensen, "Sleepy Eye. Et stykke af prærien's saga," in *Julegranen*, 1913. This is a Danish Christmas magazine which has been published annually at Cedar Falls, Iowa, since 1898. See also *Danske i Amerika*, 2: 293-303.

began to wonder whether the city named for the great apostle was inhabited by madmen. At Elm Dale the pioneers built log cabins, more substantial than sod houses; but pioneering was as trying there as elsewhere. It was alleviated somewhat because some of the immigrants were mechanics and could ply their trades at better wages than common laborers could command.

The settlement was not without religious contentions, frequently caused by the activities of lay preachers; but it is interesting to note that there was considerable inter-racial coöperation. The Lutherans, who predominated among the settlers, soon built a log church and organized a congregation that was long served by Norwegian Lutheran pastors. Such religious coöperation was frequently to be observed among the Danish immigrants of central Minnesota living scattered among Norwegians, especially if they had not become identified with either the Grundtvigians or the Inner Mission People before settling in Minnesota. Other groups of Danes who coöperated in church matters with the Norwegian Lutherans located in the sixties near Nelson, Douglas County; and near Arndahl, Meeker County.¹⁹

A compact group of Danish pioneers began to locate near Hutchinson, McLeod County, in the late sixties. A number of families arrived there direct from Denmark in 1868 under the leadership of M. C. Pedersen, who founded the West Denmark settlement in Wisconsin the following year. Religiously, the people in this settlement as usual were divided. Methodists, Baptists, Inner Mission People, and Grundtvigians each organized a congregation and built a church in or near Hutchinson.²⁰ As in so many other settlements the Danish farmers in the Hutchinson settlement were excellent dairymen. In 1901 they helped to build a creamery that was pronounced in every respect a model; and its butter-maker, Mads Sönder-

¹⁹ *Danske i Amerika*, 2: 386, 391-395, 535.

²⁰ *Dannevirke*, March 10, 1909.

gaard, was declared to be the champion butter-maker of America. He was born in North Slesvig, now once more a part of Denmark.²¹

Probably the first Danish name to be put on the map of Minnesota was Danewood, Chisago County, where Ferdinand Sneedorff Christensen attempted without much success to build up a Danish community. He was born in Denmark, was well educated, and emigrated to the United States in 1866. In Minnesota he began in 1868 the publication of *Nordisk Folkeblad*, the first Dano-Norwegian paper in the state. In 1870 he established himself in Rush City as a land agent and two years later he opened a bank in that city. He collected paintings and historical objects, which he kept in "Willow Wild," as he called the handsome home he had built for himself. The destruction of this house by fire is said to have caused him to take his own life. A small chapel built in his memory by his wife, whose maiden name was Selma A. Willard, was dedicated in 1897.²²

Associated with Christensen in the publication of *Nordisk Folkeblad* was the Danish journalist, Sören Listoe, who was born in Copenhagen. Listoe became a member of the Minnesota legislature in 1874, the first Dane to hold this office. Christensen was a member himself in 1878, and he was assistant secretary of state from 1880 to 1882.²³

²¹ *Dagen*, 4: 124 (January 1, 1904). Volumes 3 and 4 of this bimonthly publication are in the author's library.

²² Olof N. Nelson, *History of the Scandinavians and Successful Scandinavians in the United States*, 1: 386 (Minneapolis, 1893-97); *Dannevirke*, October 9, 1895; *Dansk Luthersk Kirkeblad*, February 10, 1897. Some of the files of the latter paper, the official organ of the United church (Inner Mission People), published at Blair, Nebraska, are in the library of Augustana College at Rock Island, Illinois. The first Swedish settlement in Minnesota was founded near Danewood in 1851. The history of the Swedish settlements in the state is told in Erik Norelius, *De svenska lutherske församlingarnas och svenskarnes historia i Amerika*, 1: 534-763 (Rock Island, Illinois, 1890).

²³ Nelson, *Scandinavians in the United States*, 1: 435.

In the late sixties other small groups of Danish pioneer farmers settled near Kasson, Dodge County, and in the vicinity of Storden and Westbrook, Cottonwood County. The settlers at the latter places were to a large extent emigrants from the Baptist groups in Freeborn and Brown counties.²⁴ Other southwestern counties also received Danish settlers at this time, some of whom in a few years helped to swell the current of pioneers to Lincoln County, where the second largest settlement of Danes in the state was established.

The Lincoln County pioneers were Grundtvigians, Danish Lutherans who had organized a church association or synod under the name of the Danish Evangelical Lutheran church in America, briefly called the Danish church.²⁵ The Grundtvigians owe their origin to Bishop N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783-1872), poet, preacher, and patriot, and without doubt the most prominent Dane of his time. He drew much of his inspiration from romanticism, the German philosophers, and contemporary political conditions in Europe, especially England. Economically, he hoped to see a better Denmark where "few had too little and fewer too much." Nationally, he strongly encouraged the development of Danish literature and institutions; and under the spell of his voice and pen the heroes of Danish history lived again in the minds of Danes. Taking his cue from the German philosopher, Fichte, he advocated the establishment of folk high schools, a kind of secondary school for adults, where inspiring lectures were to replace largely dry textbooks, for Grundtvig asserted that the spoken word is living and the written dead.²⁶

²⁴ Lawdahl, *Danske baptister*, 175-186, 208-211.

²⁵ Originally there were also Inner Mission People in the Danish church, but they withdrew in 1894 and, with other Danish Lutherans who had formerly belonged to the Norwegian-Danish Conference, formed the United church.

²⁶ Bishop Grundtvig is very little known among English-speaking people. Though he visited England several times and busied himself with some English literary subjects, the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 12:640 (eleventh edition), makes the following comment on his works and

To Grundtvig, nationalism and religion were closely associated. In his youth he once said that the strife between the strong Thor and the white Christ was blotted out. Later in life he suggested that the apostolic creed rather than the Bible was the source and fount of Christian life.²⁷ This suggestion caused a bitter controversy between Grundtvig's followers and the Inner Mission People, who believed in the verbal inspiration of the Bible — a controversy that was continued by the Danish Lutherans in the United States, where Bishop Grundtvig's youngest son, the Reverend F. L. Grundtvig, became the standard-bearer of Grundtvigianism in 1883 and remained so until his removal to Denmark in 1900. During these years he was pastor of a Lutheran congregation at Clinton, Iowa. Besides preaching, he was engaged also in lecturing and writing for the promotion of Danish-American ideals. He died in 1903.²⁸

Under the inspiration of the younger Grundtvig, the Danish church in 1884 secured an option on thirty-five thousand acres of land in Lincoln County from the Winona and St. Peter Railroad Company through the company's agent, Adolph Boysen. For a period of three years the land was to be open to purchase by Danes only. The price for the first year was to be seven dollars an acre, and there was to be an advance of fifty cents in the price each succeeding year. The railroad company donated a tract of 240 acres for a church and a folk high school, and the church agreed to secure at least one hundred settlers the first year.

influence: "He was above all things a man of action, not an artist; and the formless vehemence of his writings, which have had a great influence over his own countrymen, is hardly agreeable or intelligible to a foreigner." Much, however, has been written about Grundtvig in German. Winkel Horn, *Grundtvigs liv og gjerning* (Copenhagen, 1883) is one of the best earlier lives of Grundtvig in Danish. See also P. Hansen, *Illustreret dansk litteraturhistorie*, 2: 629 (Copenhagen, 1886).

²⁷ N. F. S. Grundtvig, *Den kristelige børnelærdom*, 282-286 (Copenhagen, 1883).

²⁸ See the chapter on the "Reverend Frederik Lange Grundtvig," in Christensen, "History of the Danes in Iowa."

The church was able to meet this requirement within the time specified. It was then decided to celebrate the founding of the settlement in an appropriate manner. The occasion and the manner of this celebration, which occurred on June 28, 1885, make it one of the most interesting events in Danish-American history. It was held on an island in Lake Benton, on the shores of which nestled the little town of that name.²⁹ About fifty persons, including the settlers and a number of ministers of the Danish church, were in attendance. Grundtvig spoke on the value of the social heritage of the Danish-Americans and made a touching appeal for its preservation in harmony with Grundtvigian ideals. The same thoughts had been embodied by him in a song that was sung here for the first time and may still be heard at social gatherings of Danish-Americans throughout the United States.

Settlers arrived during the following years from other parts of Minnesota, South Dakota, Iowa, and Illinois, though only a small number came direct from Denmark. A large contingent arrived from Clinton, where they had been members of Grundtvig's congregation. They filled up several townships and spread into the adjoining counties of Lyon and Pipestone. Immigration continued during the nineties, but since the beginning of the present century the situation has been changed and some emigration has occurred, especially of young people, to other Danish settlements.

Lincoln County had been settled before the coming of the Grundtvigians, but pioneering had been so difficult that many early settlers had left in despair. The Grundtvigian pioneers endured the hardships of pioneering — hailstorms, drouths, and the resulting crop failures, poverty, and high rates of

²⁹ The lake and the town were named for Thomas Hart Benton, United States senator from Missouri from 1821 to 1851. Joseph N. Nicollet and John C. Fremont, who explored this region in 1838, named the lake. Fremont was married to Benton's daughter Jessie in 1841. Warren Upham, *Minnesota Geographic Names; Their Origin and Historic Significance*, 308 (*Minnesota Historical Collections*, vol. 17).

interest — better than their predecessors because of their capacity for hard work and their social solidarity. As early as 1894 “a giant stride of progress” was made with the building of a coöperative creamery that gave the farmers a regular income and contributed to their prosperity. Creameries were also built in the following years in Ruthton and Lake Benton, two towns on the outskirts of the settlement. Other coöperative enterprises promoted economic progress, but the chief factor in the advance of the settlement was intensive diversified farming.

On July 11, 1886, the settlers organized a Danish-Lutheran congregation and the next year they sent “a call” to Grundtvig, who replied that he would accept it only on the condition that no members of secret societies would be allowed to join the church. This condition was aimed at the Danish Brotherhood, a fraternal organization patterned after the American secret societies. As it had several members in the settlement, the church refused to accede to Grundtvig’s request; and finally in 1888 it called the Reverend P. H. Pedersen, who had been connected with the folk high school at Ashland, Newaygo County, Michigan.

A letter written by Pedersen to the congregation shows that he was a man of energy and resolution, well-fitted to be one of the honored founders of the settlement. “I am coming without conditions,” he wrote. “The salary makes no difference. So do not be concerned about that. I will look out for the salary myself. Besides, we will soon have twice as many members in the church as it now has, for I am the kind of man who enjoys work and will not permit you to fall behind. . . . I am not courting the congregation for pleasure’s sake but for the work, for which I do not consider myself unfitted.”³⁰

He was right. In 1888 a folk high school was built. Some pious people may wonder why the school was built before a

³⁰ *Danske i Amerika*, 2: 492.

church, but they should remember that the Grundtvigians "delight in enlightenment," even about "so humble a thing as a sedge," but first and last about life — personal, home, national, and religious life. And such enlightenment this folk high school aimed to give. The next year the Stone Hall was built. The farmers dragged stones from the fields. These rough stones were cut into shapely blocks by two skilled workmen, Niels Pedersen and Kristian Klink. For them this was a labor of love and they worked gratuitously. Klink died shortly after the completion of this building, happy in the thought that he had helped to give the settlement a community center. The Stone Hall served as a church, a gymnasium, — for the Grundtvigians believed a sound mind should be housed in a sound body, — and a general meeting house until a neat, commodious frame church was dedicated in 1895. The educational activities of the Grundtvigians also included a parochial school for which a building was erected in 1892. Its aim was to teach the common branches in English; and religion and Danish history and literature in Danish. It also aimed at a closer coöperation between home and school. Not all the Danish children, however, attended it. All these buildings were located on a slight eminence near a pretty little lake immediately south of the corporate limits of Tyler and the place was named Danebod (pronounced Dän'-ne-boh) in honor of Queen Thyra Danebod, the consort of Gorm the Elder, an early king of Denmark. She is thought to have directed the building of an earth and stone wall across the peninsula of Jutland as a protection against southern foes, and in gratitude the Danes named her Danebod, that is, the comfort of Denmark.

Pedersen was the moving spirit in these enterprises. That he also aided in a material way will surprise the uninitiated, for he received but a small salary. The explanation is that Pedersen, besides being an able preacher and educator, was also a man with superior business ability. In 1903 he and his family removed to Ruthton, where he continued to be active in

church work until his death in 1905. The Reverend Thorvald Knudsen succeeded him at Danebod.

At the turn of the century the settlement was in every way a prosperous and happy community. The anticipations of its founders had been realized. Everywhere in town and country might be seen evidences of Danish thrift, order, industry, and sense of beauty. In the homes Danish was spoken. It might also be heard on the streets, well and proudly spoken. Danebod had become a fountain of comfort and inspiration to the community, drawing visitors from near and far to its larger meetings. In all this there was no extreme and exclusive clannishness. The settlers became Americanized — they learned English, became naturalized, voted, and were active generally in political affairs. Speakers at Danebod would sometimes explain the national affections of the people as analogous to those of the husband who loves his wife, but continues also to love his mother.³¹

Believing that a special society rather than the church should undertake the formation of settlements, Grundtvig and his friends organized the Danish People's Society (*Dansk Folkesamfund*) in 1887, with the general aim of conserving and developing the social heritage of the Danish immigrants. The society's first venture in this respect was Danevang in Wharton County, Texas; and its second, Askov in Pine County, Minnesota.

Through its agents, K. H. Duus and L. C. Pedersen, both of Tyler, the Danish People's Society in 1906 purchased twenty

³¹ J. H. Bille, "A History of the Danes in America," in Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters, *Transactions*, 11: 26 (Madison, 1896-97); *Danske i Amerika*, 2: 473-507; Lawdahl, *Danske baptister*, 201-206; Kristian Ostergaard, "De danske højskoler," in *Kors og stjerne*, November 1, 1903; Kristian Ostergaard, "The Danish Settlement at Tyler, Minnesota," in *Scandinavia*, vol. 1, no. 4, p. 20-24 (April, 1924). *Kors og stjerne* is a periodical published in Denmark in the interest of the Grundtvigians; the article on Tyler is based largely upon *Danske i Amerika*. The church register, number 1, of the Danish Lutheran Church at Tyler, in the possession of the church officers, was also used.

thousand acres of cut-over and burnt-over land in Pine County. These lands were bought at different prices, but sold at a uniform rate to the settlers. Forty-five tracts, many consisting of only forty and eighty acres, were sold the first year and about twenty-five families moved in from southern Minnesota, Nebraska, Illinois, and Iowa. Settlers continued to arrive in the following years from these and other states; only a few immigrants came direct from Denmark. Having been in this country for a period of years, most of the pioneers, therefore, knew English and had acquired property. Not a few, indeed, were well-to-do. This made the pioneer period a short one, though it was not without hardships.

One who has seen the cut-over and burnt-over lands of northern Minnesota can scarcely imagine anything more desolate. What a hopeless task, it would seem, to farm such wastes. It seemed the very soil itself had to be created, for the land was full of rocks and of white pine stumps that would not rot in a century. But these thrifty, vigorous Danes set to work with a will and made the wastes blossom like the rose. That it was done during the span of a single decade, at the close of which every visitor expressed his wonder and admiration for what had been accomplished, was due to various factors. Among them were the economic advantages that the settlers had before coming to Pine County, the aid given by the People's Society and its efficient agents, and probably chiefly the strong faith of the people in their ability to achieve success. As in Lincoln County a large number of the settlers were Grundtvigians with a capacity for a varied but healthy sociability and conviviality. None perhaps more than the Grundtvigians have realized so fully that man does not live by bread alone, but by the things that make for a better social life as well.

In 1916, only ten years after the founding of the Askov settlement, it had about a thousand people of Danish descent. Most of them were living in Partridge Township, with Askov,

a little brand-new village inhabited exclusively by Danes, as social center. The name Askov is of ancient origin and seems originally to have meant "ash wood." It was chosen because it was the name of the Askov Folk High School in Denmark, an institution especially dear to Grundtvigian hearts. Besides stores and shops, in 1916 the little village also boasted a large public school, two halls for social gatherings, a fine Danish Lutheran church, a bank, and a weekly newspaper, the *Askov American*. There were no saloons. In the *Askov American* a visitor to the town in that year might have read in the bank's advertisement this philosophical observation: "Character is the basis of credit, the dollar absolutely secondary." If he had questioned the villagers, they would have told him that they had a public school offering twelve grades of work, that Danish was taught an hour each day, and that the local church supported a Danish religious school for children and a continuation school in winter with courses for adults in both Danish and English. The inquirer might also have learned that Askov had a ladies' aid society, a young people's society, a lodge of the Danish Brotherhood, a band, and a local chapter of the Danish People's Society, not to speak of the farmers' club and other organizations of an economic character. None of these organizations were without educational aims, and the stranger in Askov would have believed readily that one of the mottoes of the Grundtvigians was "Enlightenment must be our delight."

Such a social life was supported by an intensive cultivation of the red soil of the former pineries, with dairying and truck-farming as the chief branches of agriculture. A coöperative creamery was built in 1910.³² Many other Danish settlers have

³² Hugh J. Hughes, "Now up at Askov," in *The Farmer's Wife*, 22: 67, 86 (August, 1920); "One Way of Handling the Settlement Problem," in *The Farmer*, 30: 1031 (August 31, 1912); L. C. Pedersen, "Partridge, Minnesota," in *Julegranen*, 1908; "Story of a Growing Town," in *Partridge Wing* (Askov), August 4, 1911; L. Mosbaek, "Askov, Minn., 1915," in *Solomons Almanak* (Seattle, Washington, 1916). This *Almanak*, which

located on the prairies and in the woods of northern Minnesota during the present century, but none have formed larger settlements with a distinct Danish community life. Askov in that respect is therefore an exception.

A sketch of the founding of Danish settlements in Minnesota would be incomplete without mention of the Icelandic settlements in Lyon and Lincoln counties. At the time of their establishment the Icelanders were Danish citizens and they are listed as such in the United States census reports.³³ Though Danes and Icelanders are too far apart linguistically and nationally to have a common community life, they cherish their racial and cultural kinship.

Most of the Icelanders in North America live in Canada. In the United States there are large settlements in North Dakota and Minnesota, and smaller groups in Wisconsin, Utah, Idaho, and Washington. The settlements in Minnesota are in the vicinity of Marshall and Minneota in Lyon County and of Ivanhoe in Lincoln County. They date from the later seventies, the first Icelandic settler in Lyon County having arrived in 1875 and the first in Lincoln County in 1878. Enough additional settlers came during the following years so that three Lutheran congregations, now having a total membership of over five hundred, were formed. The Icelandic pioneers took homesteads or bought the farms of other settlers who had already located on the public lands. For a few years they lived in sod houses and drove oxen. But by 1885 horses were commonly used, an evidence of the rapid progress that the early settlers had made.

In these settlements, as indeed elsewhere, the Icelanders have cherished tenderly their home traditions. The pioneers taught

was published from 1914 to 1918, contains a good deal of historical material and especially a wealth of biographical data on Danish-Americans. Since 1906 numerous articles on the Askov settlement have appeared in *Dannevirke*, *Ugebladet* (Minneapolis), and *Den danske pioneer* (Omaha, Nebraska).

³³ Since 1918 Iceland has been an independent country, united with Denmark only in the person of a common king.

their children Icelandic and read periodicals from the mother country as well as Icelandic-American publications. Americanization, however, rapidly added to the interests of the people. The children eagerly learned English and both young and old busied themselves with questions of public interest. The result has been that an unusually large number of these northern people have become politicians both of local and state fame. Since 1913 three men from these settlements have been members of the Minnesota legislature — Gunnar B. Björnson, C. M. Gislason, and J. B. Gislason.³⁴

THOMAS P. CHRISTENSEN

IOWA CITY, IOWA

³⁴ Data obtained from the Honorable J. B. Gislason.



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