



Nordøst

Danish Archive North East
May 2019

Hello!

In addition to the President's letter, there is a wonderful article on St. Stephen's Danish Lutheran Church in Perth Amboy and Edison. Unfortunately, the church recently closed, so the article is a tribute to this major part of the Danish culture in central New Jersey. Janice Grace located a wonderful newspaper article on the Danish Home in Edison. The picture from the article is included and the rest of the article is transcribed.

If you are in the New Jersey area, please join us for one of the DANE programs (schedule at the end of this newsletter). If you would like to see our museum, then please email us at danenj@aol.com and we will be happy to set up a time.

Enjoy!

DANE President's Letter

Kaere Alle,

The museum and archive have had several visitors and inquiries over the past few months. We had family members from Florida looking to find grandparents. Thanks to Wendy Hudson and Janice Grace, the interments were located in the Mindehøjen. Wendy and Janice have photographed all 196 urns. Wendy then proceeded to record them on "Find A Grave" website. Our visitors were able to find the interment listing and came to visit with us. In addition Wendy researched the family's history and forwarded the information on to our guest.

As always our ambitious and dedicated volunteers are on the move with their cameras, computers, and organizing skills. Important efforts are made that all displays, memorabilia and donations are kept in good order for our visitors. On a Sunday work day dust clothes were flying. Archival items were checked and wall displays were righted up as needed. All these things are important for the preservation of our collections.

We have a "gem" in the Danish Home, Edison. It is truly worth a visit to learn about Danish culture and heritage. You can find out about your "Danish Roots" and history. We would be most happy to give you a tour. The museum is open Tuesdays and Thursdays 10-2. Or, you can make an appointment to visit. Call 732-287-6445 and we can arrange a time and date. Spring has finally arrived. It is a good time to get out and make a visit.

Med Venlig Hilsen

Agnes Jespersen Hagmueller
DANE President

Our Annual Celebration of Fastelavn– February 2019....

by Janice Grace

Fastelavn is a tradition in the Northern European, historically Lutheran, nations of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Iceland and the Faroe Islands. The holiday occurs the week before Lent and is similar to Mardi Gras in the US. Today, the festivities of Fastelavn are generally considered to be a time for children's fun and family games, and it is a fun time that we enjoy every year at DANE.

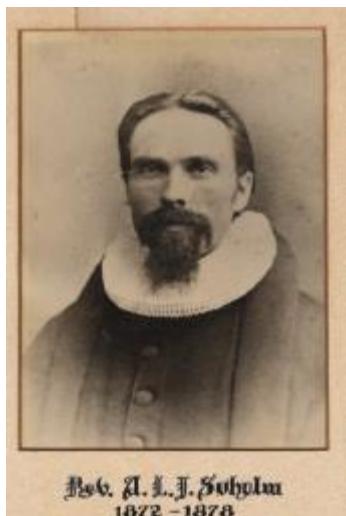


St Stephen's Evangelical Danish Lutheran Church ... the passing of 15 decades

by Agnes Jespersen Hagmueller

It was during the middle to late nineteenth century when a large community of Danish immigrants and their families settled in Perth Amboy, New Jersey. Due to knowledge of the growing terra cotta industry, they knew there was work to be had. As in all cases, these Danes needed not only work but ways and means to feed, clothe, and build a community for their families.

There was no television and the amazing innovations we now take for granted. Danes spent their precious time off gathering and trying to hold onto culture and heritage in this new homeland. Fraternal organizations and churches would be the places where they could share togetherness and remembrances that were left behind in the old country.



One such place was St Stephen's Evangelical Danish Lutheran Church. Its' congregation was established on the twentieth day of August 1872. The members numbered forty one people with President Peter Duse.

On 15th September Pastor Anders Lausen Jensen Søholm preached his first sermon in a local site on High Street, Perth Amboy NJ. The total property of the newly established church was listed as on organ, a communion cup, an altar cloth, candle holders, a Bible and a key. The pastor's salary varied from \$6.75 to \$15.75 per month as funds permitted. Pastor Søholm remained with St Stephen's Church until 1878 when he passed on the pastorate to Reverend Rasmus

Andersen.

During the period from 1872 to 1879 the congregation dwindled due to economic times. Yet the group remained solid in their dedication to the church. They met in the hay loft of Therkelsen & Brown's shop at 107 Smith Street in Perth Amboy.



*St Stephen's Danish Lutheran Church
101 Broad Street, Perth Amboy NJ
ca 1896*

Services were held in private homes, and various rented facilities. A property was finally purchased on the corner of Broad and State Street in Perth Amboy, New Jersey. The edifice had the seating capacity of 250. The structure was completed and dedicated in December 1896. The mortgage was finally paid off in 1928 due the efforts of the congregation.

As the years went on, several groups emerged. The Ladies Aid Society met each Thursday of the month. Since 1889, the group held festive gatherings to celebrate Fastelavn, had Strawberry Festivals, and yearly bazaars. The hospital group met every Tuesday afternoon to make bandages for the local hospital during World War I and World War II.

The Junior Young People's Society was formed in 1928 by the younger members of the congregation. They met every Friday night. They staged and presented plays and musicals at DANA Hall, Washington Hall, or the Masonic Temple.



*Junior Young People's Society
1934*

The choir was a very important part of the weekly services. Ernest Christophersen and Rolf Gunst played the organ for many years. Ellen Christiansen and Cecelius Petersen led the attendees in familiar hymns and songs.



By 1934 it was decided that dual language church services would be held. Danish services were held at 10:00 AM and English followed at 11:00 AM. In that year confirmation classes were now conducted in English.



A NEW BEGINNING AND LOCATION



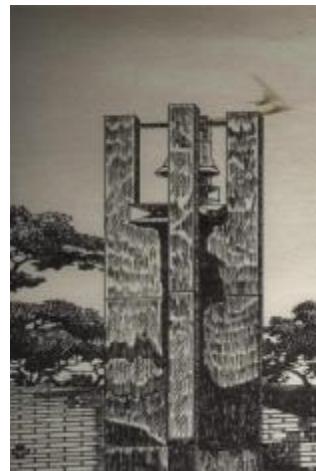
In October 1940, Mr. & Mrs. Axel Olsen offered three acres of woodland which they owned in nearby Edison Township. They did not have any use for it and their thoughts were the church might benefit by it.

On November 29 of that year, the offer of land was gladly accepted. By January of the following year, Chris Konshoz, Axel Andersen, Chris Stensgaard, Anton Andersen and many other volunteer workers started work on the building. The work continued every Saturday until the building was complete. Harry Lund and his painters completed the job.

On 15 May 1960, the first service was held in the new church. There were church dignitaries from the surrounding churches and 250 members in attendance. Nine young people were confirmed as well.

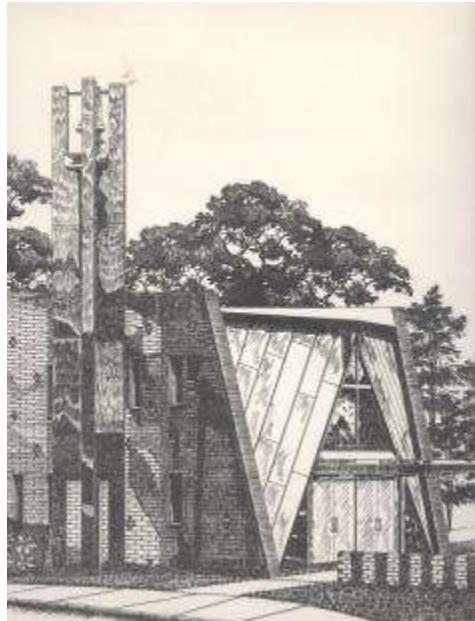
The church was located at 120 Pleasant Avenue Edison, New Jersey. It was dedicated at 3:30 on 8 October 1960. The building has a Danish modern theme both in its architecture and décor. The entrance is covered with copper and the rest of the building is made of concrete.

The concrete bell tower houses a 60 year old bell which rang in two church buildings. The bell has an interesting history. When the church at 101 Broad Street in Perth Amboy was completed in 1896, the congregation could not afford to purchase a bell. Twelve young women of the church vowed that they would not marry until they had enough money for a bell. They worked making fancy handwork and embroidery to sell for funds for a bell. In 1900, the twelve kept their promise and presented the church with that hard earned money to buy the bell. It has rung in both churches for over 60 years.



For over 146 years, St Stephen's, both old and new, had been a place for a congregation of family groups. There have been parents, grandparents, grandchildren and great grandchildren who have attended services. Looking at the church records, we can find many, many names that can be recognized throughout the years. The church had many notable visitors both church administrators and guests. In 1939, Crown Prince Frederik and Crown Princess Ingrid attended a service at the church on Broad St and celebrated with the Danish community at DANA Hall in Perth Amboy. On Sunday 28 July 1985,

Former president Jimmy Carter and wife Rosalyn with a busload of "Habitat for Humanity" members attended a church service and stayed to have breakfast with the congregation in the Community Hall located next to the church.



**St Stephen's Danish Lutheran Church
120 Pleasant Ave. Edison NJ**

Over the next years, the number of parishioners started to diminish. The time had come when the church could not support itself and the Church Council deemed it was necessary to close down the church.

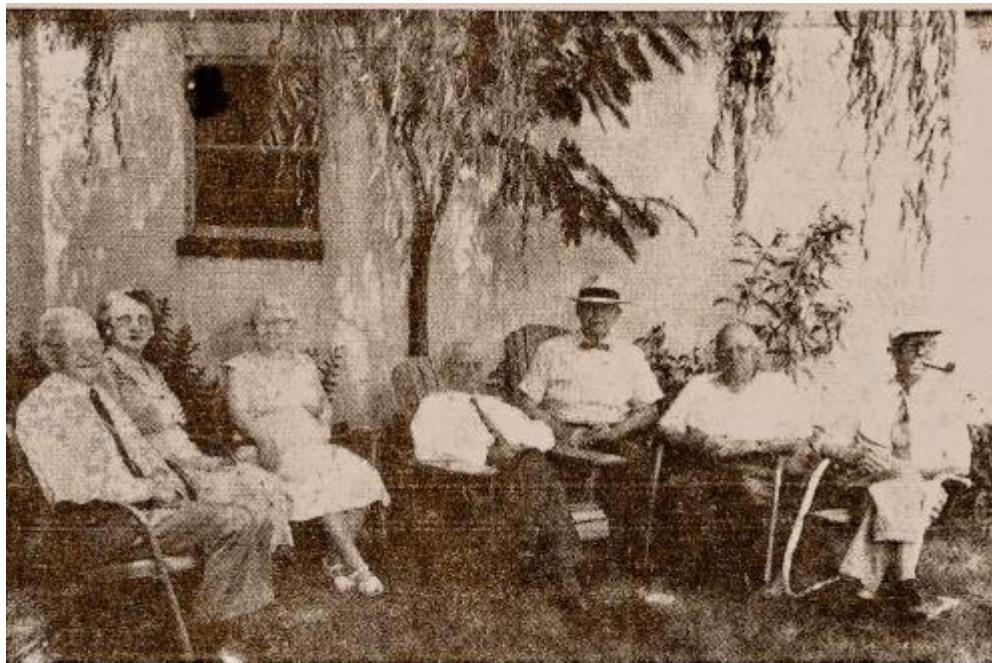
On Sunday 30 December 2018 the last service was conducted and attended by many old church members and church officials. The bell in the tower tolled 15 times for the 146 years of the church's existence. It was truly a sad day for all. Another very old and timeless Danish tradition and heritage had come to an end.



DANE has digitized and indexed the church records. These include baptisms, confirmations, marriages and deaths from the church's beginnings. The Church Council has donated many items, photographs, and important paperwork. Included is a Danish Bible dated 1648. All these donations will be displayed at a future date at DANE. Anyone interested can contact DANE and get information and copies of records which are on file.

Newspaper article about the Danish Home (circa 1959)

thanks to Janice Grace



IN THE SUNSET: Residents at the Danish Home for the Aged gather at their favorite spot under a weeping willow tree. Shown, l. to r., Mr. and Mrs. Carl W. Nielsen, Mrs. Peter Berndsen, Hans Hansen, who is the only living member of the group that bought and started the home in 1914. Otto Jensen, Otto Skoubue who was one of the early treasurers, and John Miller.

Cheerful Residents Make Danish Home a Happy Place

Some people may think old folks' homes are lonely, dreary places to live. If these people ever took a look around the Danish Home for the Aged on New Durham Rd. in Edison, it sure would change that idea in a hurry.

There, in a reasonably new clean white sprawling one-story building, live 27 very happy men and women ranging in age from 65 up into the 90's. George Hansen, president of the home, explains, "The minimum age to be admitted to the home is 65, but many are in their 90's and still getting around."

Getting around is right. Although a couple are now blind and several are hard of hearing, none are bedridden and they are all active. They just don't conform to the stereotype of old age – swaying in a rocking chair wiling away the time.

What's their secret? It's hard to say. It could be an old Danish recipe for living, of course, but Hansen says that companionship is the clue to the Home. Many of the folks enjoy taking walks about the 60 acres surrounding the Home. Others play cards, crochet, sew, and some of the men, who are nearly all former craftsmen, enjoy painting and have done some amazingly good portrait work.

Some enjoy reading and listening to the radio and television. They usually retire early, about 9 p.m.

Some of the men keep themselves busy taking care of the small garden. They grow tomatoes, peppers, egg plants, strawberries and raspberries. They also raise some beautiful flowers.

Speak Two Languages

A few of the people have television in their own rooms and some subscribe to Danish newspapers and magazines. Most all of them were born in Europe and all speak English in addition to their native tongue. They often speak Danish among themselves. Many have brought heirlooms from the old country to the home with them.

When pressed, Hansen had to admit that all the residents are not Danish. There is one Swedish lady and one Norwegian lady. "However," he added, "they are married to Danes."

The people are always happy and active because many have the same interests and they all have friends for mutual help, comfort, and conversation. They all help in leading the blind and are always ready to engage in conversation, which just might be the Danish national pastime.

Or is that coffee drinking? The old people at the Home drink coffee continuously. The kitchen is always open and they help themselves from morning to night, and always at 10 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. Of course, three full meals are also served – at 8 a.m., 12 a.m., and 6 p.m. The biggest meal is always served at noon. Hansen says the meals are just like those that would be served in a typical American household except when some of the women decide to try their expert hands at Danish pastry. And then you should see, or rather taste, the results!

They Love Visitors

Many Danish specialties are made around Christmastime. This is an especially gay season at the Home. Hansen said many church groups and civic groups, including the Girl Scouts, make visits and sing and play around the Christmas tree.

Visitors are always welcomed by the men and women, who love someone to converse with, especially if they should be Danish. They have many visits from friends and relatives, who often take the old people out for the day. Then they have their housemother, Mrs. Ann Christensen, who brings them into Metuchen and to the doctor frequently.

"There is always a waiting list for the Home," Hansen mentioned. "We are always at our 27 capacity." Every person has his own room. Where there are married couples, two adjoining corner rooms are arranged, one as a bedroom and one as a living room. The Home also has a very large front porch and a living room with a library, television set and piano. There is also a large kitchen, freezer room, and laundry room.

Two Couples Help

The home is nearly all on one floor, making it easy for the old folks to get around. However, over the kitchen there are two apartments for the two couples, the managers, Mr. and Mrs. Juel Juelsen, and Mr. and Mrs. William Sendener, who help run the house and cook and clean for the old people.

In the front lawn the folks are anxious to erect two flag poles, one with an American flag and one with a Danish flag. However, a new highway is about to be built which will upset the property for some time. So the flags will have to wait. The cellar of the home is used for storage and above the living room is a meeting room which is used by the board of directors of the Home when it holds all-day meetings on the second Sunday of every month.

The Home is run by the Danish Brotherhood and Sisterhood Lodges of the Eastern States. The old people themselves pay nothing for their home, food, and medicine.

In March, there is a convention to which each lodge sends two delegates. From these delegates a board of directors is formed, and from this board an executive board is formed, consisting of a president, vice president, secretary, financial secretary, and three trustees. The nearest brotherhood lodges are Port Reading No. 90 and Perth Amboy No. 46. There is also the sisterhood lodge, Perth Amboy No. 37 [should have been 36]. These are always available to help the home in an emergency. Most of the old people are former residents of the Philadelphia-New Jersey-New York area.

Hansen works during the day, but spends a minimum of four nights a week at the Home. His wife often lends a helping hand during the day.

Started in 1914

The Home was incorporated by a group of Danes in 1914. The only one of this original band alive today is Hans Hansen, George Hansen's father, who is now living in the Home himself. In 1914 the Home was an old three-story farmhouse across the road from the present location. At this time they raised cows, pigs, chickens and actually lived off the farm, growing their own vegetables and supplying their own eggs and milk. But a three-story structure was not

appropriate for a group of old people and eight years ago the present Home was constructed. Two years later the old wooden farmhouse burned down.

The Home receives revenue from Christmas seals sold during the holiday season. The Home also owns the adjacent Tivoli Park picnic grove. This is rented out to various organizations for weekend picnics. The income from this helps pay operating expenses of the Home. In October, the Home expects to celebrate when it retires its mortgage.

The Home uses the grove twice a year for its own festivities. July 4 a Summer Festival is held and a Harvest Picnic is held the third Sunday in September. This past Independence Day Count Kiled Gustav-Knuth Winterfeldt, the Danish Ambassador to the United States, and Paul C. Ryder, the Danish consul general, attended the festival. Hansen said the dignitaries were greatly impressed with the home – and with good reason. The old people really have something to be proud of.

DANE meetings:

- June 30 – DANE Archive work day
- September 22 – Harvest Festival, time TBD
- October 20 – DANE Archive work day
- December 7 – Julemarked, 10 AM - 3 PM
- December 15 – Julefest

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DANE has membership in:

- Museum of Danish America, Elk Horn Iowa
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