

DAILY

GRIND

FARVEL, OLD DANISH WORKSHOP!



After 30 years, Gene ‘Beaner’ Thomsen is closing down his woodshop with eyes on retirement. He has been working to sell off the remainder of his stock, furniture, and tools throughout the Summer. Gene has been an institution of Elk Horn for many years, helping countless people repair furniture, keepsakes, and more while always sharing his wealth of knowledge and generosity with anyone who walked in.

The countless birdhouses, oven squirrels, canes, toy cars, and more have found themselves scattered all around the country. Some of these will continue to be sold in the Danish Windmill’s gift shop once Gene settles into his newfound freedom. We know he will we back to creating as

as he can.

An auction for the remainder of Gene’s tools and miscellaneous items will begin this week before the building is officially sold.

We wish to thank Gene for his years of service and commitment to his craft, and his unending generosity to share his skills and materials with the windmill over his tenure. So many of the changes we’ve made in the past few years were possible because of his ability and his woodshop. We owe so much to Gene for his aide in maintaining the windmill and various exhibits over the years and will sorely miss the presence Old Danish Workshop held in our community. Thank you, Gene, for everything.

NEWS FROM THE MILL

Shaun Sayres

We have quite a bit of news to share this month and only so much space, so bear with us as we run through some of the highlights.

First, the numbers are in from Phyllis Hoegh and we had 2,408 visitors sign our guestbook in July this year. The top states were some of the usuals, Iowa, Nebraska, California, Colorado, and Illinois. We had 115 foreign visitors including 84 from Denmark, rounded out by a veterans group from Copenhagen.

We’ve been in the middle of some capital projects this month. First, as we’re sure everyone is aware of by now, our southern cottonwood is now gone. We contracted Top Hand Tree Service to cut down the tree and trim some of the low-hanging branches on the western three that will remain standing. This decision was not made lightly. First and foremost, we do not build wind farms in forests because trees block wind. All of our cottonwoods have grown upwards of 25-30 feet since the windmill arrived in 1976 with the southern tree taller than the windmill. The windmill is designed to face the wind, and we need to ensure it does so as much as possible, especially during storms. It was recommended by our Danish colleagues that this tree be removed for this reason. Additionally, there were growing concerns about the welfare of our Vikinghjem. Cottonwoods are notorious for dropping branches, due in part to their rapid rate of growth that produces heavy branches, but weak wood. For the security of the Vikinghjem and the safety

of our performers down there in addition to regular visitors, it was best to act now. And sure enough, we found a number of signs during the removal which showed the tree’s years were numbered. We’re sorry to see it go, but it was the best way forward for our organization. We want to thank Dirk Wasson and Scott Jensen of Top Hand Tree Service for their excellent work and creating a nice, new view of Elk Horn from the South.

Our next project has also been a long-awaited move. We want to thank the Shelby County Community Foundation for their latest grant award which helped us fund a new video surveillance system. This new system will be critical for our own use, but comes with some added bonuses for our community. That is because we will have a 24/7 livestream of the windmill from the opposite view of the millcam which will be housed fulltime on YouTube. This new angle will stream alongside METC’s millcam and allows our non-local visitors to watch the mill in real time. We’re very excited for this new livestream to debut and expect it to be made public this week.

Finally, we are excited to announce that we are acquiring Gene ‘Beaner’ Thomsen’s Old Danish Workshop. The i’s and t’s have not been dotted and crossed just yet, but soon we will be adding another building to our complex. The woodshop is a necessity for us and will be rebuilt and maintained as one. The retail space will be transformed into a classroom. The intent is to form a new center for the education and preservation of Old World skills that Danish immigrants brought with them such as woodcarving, blacksmithing, etc. featuring hands-on classes and more.

There’s one more announcement coming soon!



An article from the August 22, 1995 issue of the Harlan Tribune on the opening of Old Danish Workshop. It features an image of Gene Thomsen with his late wife, Robin.

ELK HORN LIBRARY LANTERN

Shining the light on what is going on at your library!



The Elk Horn Public Library completing our Summer Reading Program! Stop in to get your forms, look over the prizes, get one of our summer reading brochures and participate in our summer reading programs for all ages! For those who have participated we invite you to the Elk Horn Pool for pizza and swimming from 4 – 6 on August 10th!

We are creating a new organization for our community called ‘Friends of the Library’. Anyone can be a member. Our organization meeting is Monday, August 18th. We will be having events every third Monday on behalf of this organization. More information will be coming.

We are planning a special event for the communities on September 1st! That is Labor Day Monday and from 11 – 2 in the park we will be having food trucks, snacks, activities and materials for our public to have access to. We have already gotten a great activity from METC! We hope you all can participate! If you are interested in participating, please stop in to the library to get more information.

Nikki Bricker has been working on our Monday, no school day programming. She has some tremendous opportunities for our children. September is all about Decoding the School Year with Morse Code and so much more! Please plan to have your children participate!

Here is our August schedule:

August 2 – Adult Dungeons and Dragons and Board Game Night 6 - 9

August 4 – Monday Matinee 1:30

August 6 – Storytime Characters! 2-4 pm Children of all ages

August 8 – Storytime in the Prairie ‘Winter Days in the Big Woods’ by Laura Ingalls Wilder 10 am

August 10 – Summer Reading Celebration at the Pool with Film Awards and Pizza 4 – 6 pm

August 11 – Monday Matinee 1:30

August 12 – Library Gnome and the Wild Kratt Brothers! 2-3 pm

August 13 - Storytime Costumes – 2 – 4 All ages

August 13 – Storytime Sharing! 2 – 4

August 15 – Summer Cinema Spectacular! ‘If 8 pm with Student Films

August 18 – Monday Matinee 1:30

August 18 – Friends of the Library Organizational Meeting 6 pm

August 22 – Friday Matinee and Coffee 2 – 4 pm

August 23 – Young Adult Coffee and Silent Book Club 2 – 4 pm

August 27 – Community Coffee and Fall Decoration! 9 – 12

August 29 – Book Discussion on ‘The Lost Bookshop’ by Evie Woods 2 – 4 pm

September 1 – Labors of Love in the Elk Horn City Park 11 – 2 pm

If you have any extra produce to share, please use our shelving that Beaner made for us in front of the library.

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Navigating Danish Genealogy

Eric Mortensen

What can we learn from census records? Census records are one of several primary sources used in genealogy research.

In the United States, the Constitution mandates that a national census occurs every 10 years. The first federal census occurred in 1790, and the most recent in 2020. Data from the 1890 census is mostly non-existent since these documents were destroyed in a fire. Data on individuals is not available for 72 years by law for privacy reasons. Currently in 2025, the most recent publicly available census is 1950.

In addition to the federal census, most states conducted censuses at various points in time, particularly during peak periods of pioneer settlement and immigration. These state census records generally contain less data but can be useful for tracking individuals in the gaps between federal censuses, particularly in the 1880s and 1890s given the lack of a federal 1890 census.

In Denmark, censuses have been held at irregular intervals (usually 5-10 years), with the first census occurring in 1769. Data is publicly available for all censuses up to 1940. Since 1971, Denmark has used its Civil Registration System (CPR) to track births, deaths, marriages, and other personal information, and data from this database is used to generate population and demographic information, rather than a census.

Analysis of census data can give us insight into individuals, families, and historical and cultural norms. The most obvious piece of information is revealing where a person lived at a particular point in time. In most cases, a census may be the only piece of information to confirm a person’s existence in time and place. Just as important, though, it reveals personal relationships.

Census data tells us everyone living in one household, and the relationships between them. Households may often be a married couple with children of various ages. There may be paid servants in the household (which didn’t mean someone was wealthy). There could be multiple generations in the household, including elderly parents – it was common for a widowed parent to live in the household of one of their children.

Most of my research experience with Danish census information has come from rural areas of Denmark in the 19th century, so these observations are reflective of that subset. Children often left home as teenagers to seek work, unless they were able to be employed in the family farm operations. Normally they would move to a nearby farmstead to live and work as a servant or farmhand.

In the case of a spouse’s death at a young age, it was common for the widowed spouse to remarry within a few months, likely for economic reasons. Married couples would often have a significant number of children born over an extended period. Women would continue to give birth in their late 30s and early 40s as long as nature allowed. Child mortality rates were relatively high – 15% of children did not survive their first year of life in 1835.

In general, reviewing census records from 19th century Denmark points to two of the major factors that led to emigration from Denmark – poverty and overpopulation. The population grew rapidly in 19th century Denmark, and economic conditions made it difficult for young people to find livelihoods, particularly in rural areas. This led many to risk everything to seek new opportunities in North America.

PRAIRIE ROOTS RUN DEEP, Pt. 9

Warren Watson

Turning the soil over was just the first of many challenges the Danes faced in Clay Township. But getting that FIRST plow from one end of the field to the other meant that the value of that furrow/land had at least quadrupled. Not all the land was heavy topsoil. Swampy marshes, of which there were many, were a constant problem. A short article in the Elk Horn history book by Tom Doonan titled, “The Lay of the Land”, gives some solutions:

“My grandpa, Art Doonan, and I could always talk to each other. I guess it was because we both liked to talk, true Danes to the core. One day I asked him if the lay of the land had changed since he was a kid. His recollection was there were not many runoff ditches, creeks and small rivers years

IT’S ONLY SCIENCE

Bob Mortenson

Lets take a look at the “nuts and bolts” of community and economic development. This is something that many people working on often miss a portion of what it details. And far too often never look beyond what will happen if their project is achieved.

The absolute first thing to consider is retention of the existing assets of your community. Who is providing the employment you are currently enjoying? What is it that sets your community apart from others of your size or in your area? Who would provide the necessary assistance for your efforts? And last but certainly not least, what changes are in process right now that might guide the shape of your plans?

The next step should be to determine whether there are physical limitations to your growth. Is there no suitable land for some things you have considered? Does your Electric Provider have excess capacity that you could use? What about your local facilities like water and sewer? Is there excess capacity that would allow expanded use without having to do expensive upgrades? And will your built infrastructure be able to handle increased traffic volume or weight without problems?

Rural communities are facing a nation-wide decline in population. It is estimated that over 60% of our population will reside in a large city

YES, THERE IS GOOD NEWS!

Bill Rollins

It seems as though it has been a long time since I gave some thought to the title of these articles.We started out many years ago considering some of the problems of the world and all the ‘bad news’ presented to us by the news media. It looked like a good idea to grab a lesson from God’s word and explore the very scriptural word, Gospel; which literally means ‘good news’ – and that seemed appropriate. If the word ‘gospel’ means good news, what is the true ‘good news’ that we should find in the pages of the bible?

After Jesus began His ministry, we find Him, in Matthew 4:23 “Going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.”

Paul tells us in the book of Romans 15:16 “(I am) to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God”. In Paul’s day, this was a wonderful message, for gentiles everywhere had felt excluded from having a relationship with the true God. Paul’s job became one of letting these gentiles know that God was calling them also! And in fact it was the gentiles and not the Jews that took to heart this good news message.

Today, in the 21st century, this message is just as important and exciting as it was in the first century. The idea that the God of the entire universe is calling out individuals to His family is an awesome thought. Family is truly the foundation of any society and God is putting

ago. Instead, there were marshes. Farmers would farm around these quagmires until someone came up with ideas to drain them. One idea was to trench through them with hand spades. The easier solution was to pull a single-tooth plow through the marsh with a team of twenty oxen. Attached to the plow was a steel ball which was hooked to the plow with a chain. The idea was to drive the team pulling the plow through the swamp. The ball attached to the plow would leave a neat trench for the water to drain out of the marsh. This worked great. The only problem was the trenches left by the plow started to cave in and water started to erode the rich soil. This caused much harmful erosion. The increased free flowing water created streams becoming deeper and deeper. Then in the 1930s the WPA straightened the larger streams, allowing more runoff.”

Throw in a few million grasshoppers grazing on fields in the mid-1870s and trips gathering sunbaked cow chips for winter fuel supply, and you’ve added some variety to the challenges. Picking potato bugs off the potato plants was designated kid’s work. No pesticide issues with that chore. Most kids collected the bugs in a can with a small amount of kerosene in the bottom.

or metropolitan area in just a few years. But this is a trend that we can minimize with careful planning. We need to learn what will draw people to a smaller town. Is it the quiet, slower paced life? Is it more affordable housing? Is it having an outstanding school system? Is outdoor recreation and frequent events part of the answer.

One thing that is going to change is that by 2030 there will be more people over the age of 65 years old than there will be people 18 years old or under. There has always been 30% of our population the either does not or cannot drive. The demographic may increase with the aging population moving to the majority. How does someone who can not longer drive manage to do what they need to do? How do they get groceries, prescriptions, eye exams, see their doctors, or simply stay involved in the community? While this demographic has not enjoyed much political power in the past. You are now talking about those of voting age, people who have time to write letters to the editor, email their elected representatives, and show up at local government meetings. Have you ever considered how your normal weekly activities would chang if you did not drive for 7 days?

Next article we will look at the five distinct sources of capital that can be used in your economic and community development efforts. (Hint) they are not all monetary capital, but each can have just a large effect on your efforts.

together a future society, might I say a perfect society, that He calls “The Kingdom of God”!

This ‘calling out of individuals’ is referred to in the bible with words such as, salvation, reconciliation, redemption; and these concepts lead to what is called ‘righteousness’. Righteousness is what allows us to be in a ‘right state of being’ with a perfectly holy God! We are to be found washed clean from our sins. But how do we, mere flesh and blood, find ourselves right with God? Here is where the concept of ‘Good News’ comes in; for scripture tells us in John 3:16 “God so loved he world, that He gave His only begotten Son (yes, a very familiar passage – but let’s keep reading) that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.” Here is where we find the concept of ‘salvation’.

But again, let’s keep reading, verse 18 “Whosoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God.”

Do you believe? Do you believe in the Good news? Can you rejoice in the light?

But there are stories of boys eliminating the dreaded bugs in a more exciting fashion. When the can was about full, the firecrackers were pulled out. Drop a lit firecracker in the can, slam shut the lid and run like hell. Explosions must have been a favorite pastime. A hole would be drilled in a large Elm tree log. The hole was filled with potash and sugar, a fuss added, packed tight with dirt and newspaper. By adding a lit match, instant split firewood was produced.

Edwin Bleachfield, understandably, could NOT illustrate in his “Westward” mural the entire taming of the wilderness. There were many more stories that were hidden on the other side of the wagon in that painting. It was not all heavenly angels and utopian pioneers. Hopefully, I’ve faithfully related a few stories on a more pragmatic level. It would probably seem somewhat ironic for the early pioneers to watch us go about our business today. We painstakingly work to transform crop land back into a tall grass prairie at the Museum of Danish America. But our efforts certainly will never be in vain. Future generations need reminders of the past. They need a place to ‘stand on history’. They need to understand the depth of their Danish roots. Thank you for giving me time to share my stories.