

Danish Windmill Quarterly Newsletter

THE BREEZE

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Director's Message:

Dear Members,

We are still catching up, but better late than never right? We will have two newsletters coming out in a fairly short amount of time. This is the first and focuses mainly on Spring and Summer. We will have another one out (hopefully soon), that will go a bit further into some of the projects mentioned here as well as the happens of the past couple of months.

We have some exciting news to share and more on the way. Thank you for your patience and be on the lookout for another issue of *The Breeze* shortly. Don't forget to check out additional resources and content over at danishwindmill.org.



As always, thank you for following along on our windy journey. We look forward to what comes next and thank you for coming along with us.

Mange tak!

Shaun Sayres, M.A.
Manager

 Nørre Snede, DK 1848-1975

Celebrating
49 years in
Elk Horn
Elk Horn, IA 1976-present 

In 1975, local farmer and Danish-American Harvey Sornson approached the Elk Horn community with an unthinkable idea: to relocate a windmill from Denmark to the United States. It was no easy feat, but to the amazement of most, Harvey's "impossible dream" became reality.

During the winter of 1975-76, an authentic Danish windmill from Nørre Snede, DK was dismantled, ferried across the Atlantic, and transported cross-country to Elk Horn, Iowa. Once arrived, community volunteers set about putting together the pieces one by one until eventually, the old Danish windmill towered over downtown Elk Horn where it remains to this day.

For nearly 50 years, the windmill has stood as a tribute to Danish-American heritage, agricultural history, and the power of community.



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Tivoli Fest



The windmill and community both celebrated a very successful Tivoli Fest this year. For those who don't know, Tivoli Fest is an annual Summer festival in the Danish Villages of Elk Horn and Kimballton, featuring Danish food, music, and broad range of activities for all ages. These include an æbleskiver and medisterpølse breakfast, Danish hotdogs, live Danish folk music, Scandinavian folk dancing, viking battles, and of course free admission into our local attractions including the windmill.

The crowds were noticeably large this year, and many local residents noted the unusually high number of Nebraska license plates this year. This might have been due to our billboard in Omaha that we commissioned to advertise the festival.

Billboards are a difficult segment of advertising to manage, but they are more effective than people tend to give them credit for. In 2024, we applied for grant funding from the Iowa Tourism Office to lease a digital billboard in Omaha over the months of May and June. We've never targeted the Omaha metro before in this kind of way and believed the results could be well worth the investment. With the board being digital, we had the flexibility to advertise both Tivoli Fest and summer travel over a span of time that included the annual Berkshire-Hathaway gathering and the College World Series, major draws of visitor traffic into Omaha.

Local artist, Deborah King, designed

the Tivoli board for us with a combination of pieces she had designed previously for our updated Danish Villages brochure and other projects. You can also find the design on our new Tivoli Blend coffee in the gift shop and online.

The Iowa Tourism Office declined to help, but we knew this opportunity was too good to pass up and committed to it anyway, thankfully with some help from Shelby County's Hotel/Motel Tax grant program, but the windmill still covered the bulk of the cost. The results spoke for themselves as many businesses and organizations in Elk Horn broke longstanding records, suggesting this was easily the most successful festival in the last 20-25 years.

Our experience at the windmill was less pronounced, but still an evident increase. We attribute this to how successful 2024 was for us and that there is unfortunately a limit to how many people we can fit in our gift shop at any given time. It was a great weekend all around and a wonderful time to catch up with many of the festival's regulars.

We wish to thank Nicole Butler, Jon Adams, and Sarah Sayres for running our outdoor booth this year. Emily Nelson stepped up to take over the Mill to Mermaid 5k, and countless other volunteers worked tirelessly to make the festival possible. We also want to extend sincere thanks to the windmill's staff who work the entire weekend year after year while everyone else is out

celebrating.

Tivoli is always a great way to open the Summer and often serves as an indicator of how we might expect the travel season to go. In hindsight, we can say today that the festival ushered in another busy summer with travelers coming from all over for a taste of Danish culture, or at least the kringle.

Tivoli is also a ton of work for all of those involved. Meetings among the volunteers putting it together begin in February/March, and a significant amount of the planning is put on the windmill. This includes all of the marketing; the solicitation of event sponsors and donations; the development of event brochures, artwork, and other literature for the event; the ordering, distribution, and selling of annual Tivoli t-shirts; coordinating entertainment including the vikings, folk dancers, and folk music; the coordination of the opening ceremony; and we're even responsible for acquiring the porta-potties.

Preparation for this festival requires an enormous amount of time, and that doesn't even include the work we have to take on for the mill itself including all of the Spring landscaping, preparations in the gift shop, and operating under extended hours while ensuring the flow of visitors goes as smoothly as possible.

We wish to again thank all of those involved for helping make this festival possible, while also inviting others to consider joining us next year to ensure Tivoli continues to be a success.

Summer Projects

We had a number of major projects going over the Summer that kept us on our toes, and the first of which was rather controversial.

In 2023 and 2024, it was recommended by our on-call Danish millwright, Erik Batenburg, to look into cutting down or at least thinning out the large cottonwood trees that surround the mill on the west and south sides of our block. These trees were the only things on the lot when the mill was brought to Elk Horn in 1976, and they had grown substantially over the last 49 years to block both the sight of Elk Horn's grain elevator as well as the wind.

But when dealing with windmills, blocking wind is not necessarily a good thing. A windmill depends on clear readings from the wind to maneuver effectively. It is important for the windmill to be facing into the wind at all times, but it can be difficult for the fantail to make those adjustments if the wind is obstructed by towering trees.

There was also a growing concern of the safety of the southern cottonwood which towered over our vikinghem. Cottonwood trees are popular as shade trees and for their fast rates of growth. They're also great for drainage as they can draw in a lot of moisture. At the same time though, these circumstances produce a wood that is very heavy and particularly weak, making cottonwoods notorious and unpredictable branch droppers. As they age, the wood rots from the inside out, leaving little indication of when a branch might fall. This year, we got to the point where we felt it was best to act. Our Viking performers no longer felt safe near the vikinghem in high winds, and we knew the mill itself would only benefit from removing the tree that blocked our most frequent winds.

In July, we worked with Dirk Wasson and Scott Jensen of Top Hand Tree Service to take the tree down and thin out the other three. Dirk and Scott did a fantastic job from the very start, and safely managed to take down the entire tree. They made it look easy, but it took years of experience to accomplish this



The billboard design we ran during the 2025 College World Series

without incurring any damage to the surroundings or their equipment.

After a week of cutting, the tree was gone, leaving only the large stump shown below. Many people have since tried counting the rings with some reporting about 80 to 90 and others counting well over 100.

One of the more fulfilling benefits since this project has been how much more natural the mill looks standing in open air. While we enjoyed getting to turn the sails in the southern winds all summer, it has also been a treat to drive into town from the south and be confronted with the windmill towering at the edge of town in clear view.

We could not be happier with how this project turned out and want to thank Dirk and Scott for making this very intimidating task feel easy and straightforward. It is a relief to know that the mill and everyone on our grounds are a little bit safer, as we learned during this project, it was only a matter of time before this tree caused some serious damage.



Scott and Dirk planning their cuts



One big stump

Our next project has been a bit more drawn out than we would have like, but we can't wait for the final result. Thanks to a grant from the Shelby County Community Foundation, we received funding to invest in a modern surveillance system around our grands, including the placement of two new cameras on the shed we built next to the state last year. One facing the stage and vikinghem, the other trained on the windmill.

This might not sound exciting, but there's more. Part of the benefit of this system is we can turn these cameras into livestreams with the goal being to have a full video livestream operable on the internet via YouTube that can be accessed from anywhere. Best of all, these cameras are backed up, so that even during storms, they will continue to broadcast provided local internet doesn't fail.

This allows staff to keep track of the windmill remotely in real time while also offering a fun feature for our visitors and supporters to enjoy the windmill from anywhere.

This will be an invaluable asset for us as it is very difficult to know how the windmill is handling high winds without being on site. It also opens the door for us to install additional feeds later on that can capture other elements such as the gears, a feature one can experience when touring Pella's Dutch windmill.

Unfortunately, we have had a number of technological issues related to our livestream feed which we are still working through. The feed will be live soon on our YouTube channel: @DanishWindmill1848, and we will announce when we are up and running again. The image on the right is the vista of the windmill viewers can expect once we begin broadcasting again.

Now we mentioned another camera facing the stage. We hope to be able to broadcast this camera as well for Tivoli Fest and the folk dancing that is part of the festival every year. We will have more information on that next year.

We are hoping our windmill livestream will be up and running soon and will be making another announcement when the project is finally complete.



How the mill and trees looked in 1977



A view of the windmill following the cottonwood removal



Fantail Repairs

We had another breakdown of our fantail in June, but this time we are hopeful we have resolved some of the underlying issues thanks to the help of Mike's Welding.

Back in 2018, the mill's cap structure and fantail were overhauled. Rotten shear beams and other pieces were replaced, and the entire fantail assembly had to be rebuilt with the existing gearing. During these repairs, the new horizontal axle connecting the fantail wheel to the upper gearbox was installed with a minor misalignment. This is what caused issues with the gearboxes, leading to premature wear and damage in 2020 and 2023.

After assessing the situation, Mike Mortensen of Kimballton devised a strategy to install a new u-joint onto the axle that would allow more flexibility for the axle to spin freely. This was the only feasible option to adequately address the main problem without lifting the entire assembly with a crane back to the ground.



The repair Mike Mortensen made to the fantail axle

The repairs went smoothly, and the fantail has been working flawlessly since. We're grateful to have such skilled craftsmen in our community capable of helping in these kinds of situations. Mike has come through for us a number of times in the last few years and we remain thankful for his

expertise and ability to find the solution that best fits our needs.

More information on this repair including a more technical explanation of the problem is available at danishwindmill.org/news.

How Does The Fantail Work?



Aerial view of the windmill's fantail

The windmill's fantail is responsible for keeping the windmill faced into the wind. It consists of 8 large blades, each angled to catch the wind from any direction including from the front or from behind. These blades can spin in either direction depending on which

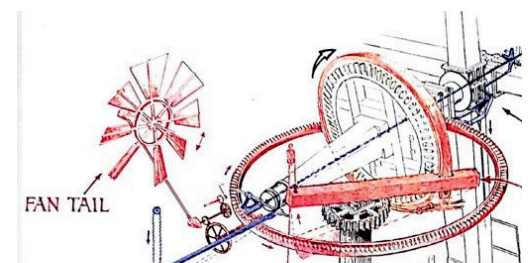
direction the wind is coming from.

As the wheel spins, an axle rotates into a gearbox (green) which directs another shaft down to a gearbox resting at the base of the fantail assembly outside the window. Out of this gearbox comes another shaft that

moves a series of gears hanging between the parallel shear beams of the cap frame and base of the fantail. This is where the motion of the fantail wheel is sent into the windmill's cap, forcing the cap frame to rotate clockwise or counter-clockwise, depending on the direction of the wind.

This assembly allows the windmill to maintain its position of facing into the wind at all times, which is optimal for usage as well as the safety of the entire structure. A strong wind coming from behind the mill can lift the entire cap and wings clear off.

The diagram below shows how the fantail assembly connects to the internal track upon which the mill's cap can rotate.



New Assets

We've added another building to our organization that will be a major asset for us in the near future.

After 30 years, Gene 'Beaner' Thomsen has closed shop. The Old Danish Workshop has served as a local curiosity and woodshop for many years. Gene sold wooden toys and the crafts, repaired furniture, and captured the hearts of visitors peeking through the windows. At 92, Gene is retiring from his retirement project, and that meant his building was up for sale.

Thanks to the generosity of the Mike & Lou Howard Endow Iowa Foundation, we purchased the building and are in the process of renovating it for our purposes. When all is said and done, it will be our new Education & Preservation Center, a place for learning about historic preservation and the historic skills and trades Danish immigrants brought with them to the US.

The woodshop will be remade with new equipment capable of handling more intense repairs such as what the windmill often requires. The retail space will be transformed into a classroom.



Having a classroom will help significantly in furthering our mission to offer educational programming on Danish culture and traditions. These can include a number of skills and trades including woodworking and woodcarving, and may even feature some hands-on demonstrations in smaller groups. Otherwise, the space will be fitted with the flexibility to handle both lectures and workshops where people can learn more about historic Old-World skills and how we apply them still today.

Gene will still be around and working in the woodshop once it is up and running again. Much progress has been made already in our transformation, and we will be able to share a more comprehensive update and plans for the center in our next newsletter.

We do wish to thank all of the local volunteers who have helped in this transition so far. We are aiming to open the center with a slate of programs in 2026.



HYGGE
INN & SUITES

UNIQUE VENUE!

Accommodates your main event, after party, and over-night stay!

A brand new venue spaced tucked away in rural Iowa. Our space is perfect for ceremonies, receptions, or the combination of both! This space offers not only a large event hall with beautiful beam ceilings, but also a cozy, fireside cocktail area, a bar connecting to the event hall, and bridal suites with Jacuzzi tubs on the upper level! Event coordination services available, decor available for rent, and local winery five minutes away for outdoor ceremonies!



Cozy Cocktails Over Night Stays Versatile Spaces

712-210-5594 hyggeinn.com 4037 Main Street Elk Horn, IA

We're also excited to share that Elk Horn's local hotel has reopened this year! Tivoli Inn & Suites opened last Spring and features a selection of rental apartments and overnight rooms. The room that once housed the pool has been converted into an event space and can be rented along with the cozy fireside lounge and kitchen/bar for events of all kinds.

We're excited for the investments that owners Shauna & Perry Gross have put into our community and look forward to utilizing their event space ourselves for anniversary events in 2026.



News & Updates

We had a very busy Spring with some surprises along the way! In April, we had a visit from Denmark's national landscaping team. This year, Denmark was chosen to host the EuroSkills competition and their various teams were given some ability to travel as part of their training for the event. The landscaping team stopped in Elk Horn on their way from Chicago to Kansas City. Shaun gave them a tour of the windmill and grounds before Tim Palmer volunteered to walk them around the Museum of Danish America's complex.

Leading up to Tivoli Fest, the vikings made some nice upgrades to the Vikinghjem including a new floor inside the living area and a very sharp paint job all around using historic colors. A lot of the rock surrounding the hjem was repositioned, and the crew has more plans coming next year to further enhance the entire exhibit.



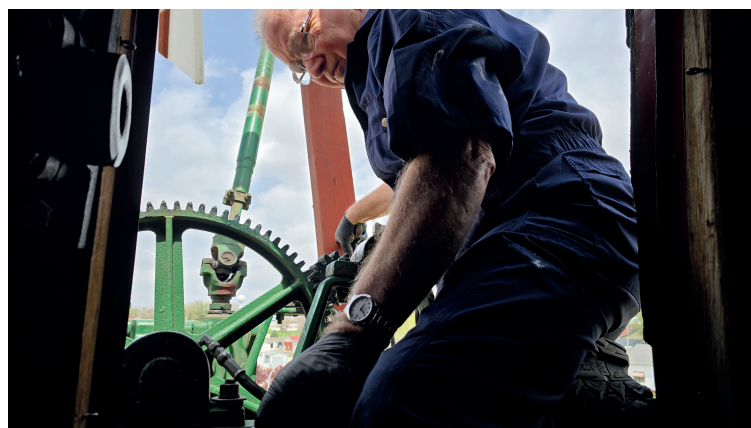
Danish landscaping team touring the mill



The Vikinghjem with new paint



MODA tours the windmill



Ole Mieth inspecting our gears

In June, we exchanged tours with the Museum of Danish America. Museum staff toured the windmill and grounds before hosting our staff in their space. This was a great opportunity for everyone to get updated on what both organizations offer and the extent of our amenities. It wasn't windy enough to run the mill, but we spent a lot of time learning more about its history and how it works.

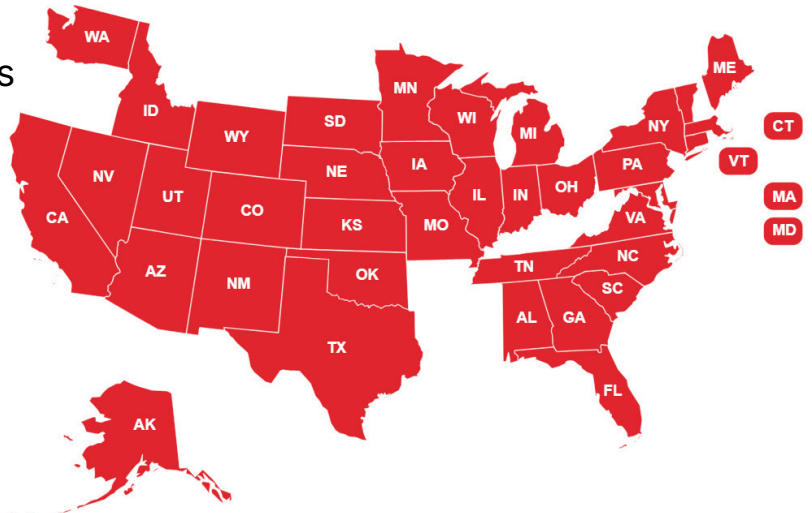
Finally, we had another volunteer from Denmark stop by to lend a hand this year. Ole Mieth, a retired railroad engineer, offered to inspect all of the mill's iron gears and help with recoating the cogs in a fresh coat of grease on the fantail. This wasn't his first time in Elk Horn either. Ole previously visited to inspect the mill's gears in 2015 leading up to mill's Spin Campaign. This time, he explained for us how to best maintain our weather-exposed gears and ensure they work properly for years to come.

Visitor Information

From April to June, we are down in visitors compared to last year:

- 7,618 visitors signed our guestbook including 61 from Denmark
- Visitors from 49 states and at least 14 foreign countries
- We estimate that we had over 2,000 visitors during Tivoli Fest!

Top 5 states: IA, NE, CO, IL, and MN



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View this issue and past issues of *The Breeze* online at danishwindmill.org

Are you a member?

Become a member today and receive direct copies of *The Breeze* by mail or email. Scan the QR code to learn more.

Family memberships now available!

Additional benefits include:

- Free tours of the windmill & vikinghjem
- 10% off in the gift shop and online
- Direct access to news, updates, and catalogs
- Access to our digital archive
- Pride of supporting a local museum



Become a member today:
call (712) 764-7472 or visit danishwindmill.org/membership