

Danish Windmill Quarterly Newsletter

THE BREEZE

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Director's Message:

Dear Members,

We're finally caught up! Not wanting to skip a newsletter, we switched gears a bit for this issue to share some information from the turn of the year as well as some of the resources we've been working with as of late for our milestone celebration.

Given the timing (and the rising price of postage), we'll be mailing this out together with our Spring issue. We apologize for the delay and hope to get our Summer issue out in a more timely manner within the next month or so. Enjoy what we've included here and be on the watch for changes as our new website prepares for its debut in July.



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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Looking Back 50 Years

As we turn the corner of our 50th year, we thought it might be appropriate to share some of the archival materials we've collected over the years that document the windmill's journey and its reconstruction in Elk Horn.

To begin, the image on the left shows carpenter Vesti Andersen and his windmill model. Andersen and his Esbjerg-based crew were the ones tasked with dismantling the windmill in Nørre Snede. During this time, Andersen constructed a 1:10 scale model of the windmill with its pieces arranged as closely as possible to how the original windmill was constructed. This would give our builders in Elk Horn a reference to work off of. Additionally, every piece of the windmill was marked with tags that corresponded to their position on the model, allowing the Elk Horn crew to reconstruct the windmill like a 3D jigsaw puzzle.

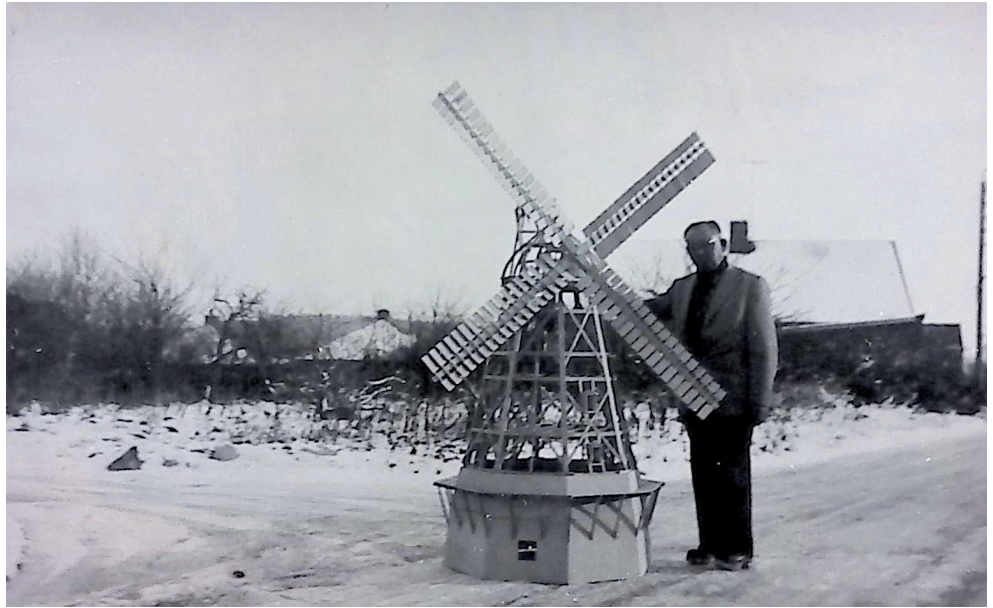
Unfortunately, the model was copied a little bit more closely than intended, and so our gallery (catwalk) is not quite as wide as compared to those in Denmark, and only one door opening was made on the second floor. The latter we hope to address next year.

Although the model itself is not, many of the tags are still perfectly legible. Most remain nailed to the pieces they came with and can be seen throughout the mill. One of these tags, "Kværn" refers to parts of the "core" of the millstones, shown below.

The other two images on the right show the process of dismantling and preparing the windmill for shipment. The mill's brick base and shingles were stripped down and discarded, leaving the timber frame, gears, and mechanical components to be sent across the ocean.



The tag for part of the millstone's core



Vesti Andersen and the Windmill Model



Crane lifting cap off of the mill



Loading the flatbed for port

Harry Petersen
Bakkesensalle 148
DK 6700 Esbjerg
Denmark

Consigned to order of

Warren Jacobsen
c/o Danish Inn
Elkhorn 51531 Iowa
USA

Notify address

Reference No.



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The Bill of Lading for the Windmill

On February 4, 1976, the final truckload of mill parts cruised down Elk Horn's Main St. towards the Danish Inn. The historic windmill's long journey from Nørre Snede to Århus to New York and finally to Elk Horn was finally complete. A volunteer crew worked around the clock getting each shipment unloaded, no easy task for gears, beams, and stones, many ranging from hundreds of pounds to more than a ton.

There was no time to lose, as the crew was informed it would cost an additional \$100 per day until the trucks were unloaded. Thankfully, Vern "Slim" Jensen of Audubon was able to send a crane that could move the 44,000-pound shipment.

The site that had been chosen for the new mill site, just south of the Danish Inn, became a scrapyard almost overnight with mill parts strewn about the ground in all directions. Local residents gathered around to see the pieces up close. Many were first-generation immigrants and for some of them, this was the closest they had come into contact with their homeland for the rest of their lives. 87-year old Peder K. Pedersen brushed off a bit of sea salt that still coated the timbers. He had not returned to Denmark since immigrating to the United States 66 years earlier. Tears welled in his eyes as he tasted the distant sea.

Everyone wondered how what looked like a pile of rotten could become a working windmill, but the key was inside a large wooden crate cast off to the side. Inside they found a 1:10 scale model of the mill, with markings all around that corresponded to the labels on each piece. This was the only blueprint they had for the project, and they followed it closely until the mill's completion later that year.

For the time being though, the work had only just begun. News of the ambitious project was already generating unusual attention from both local and distant news outlets. As volunteers began laying the groundwork, some even began to joke: "If there was something rotten in Denmark, it's here now."



Committee Sets Stakes for Danish Mill

The site committee staked out location for the Danish windmill early this week. L.R. Allan Larsen, Harvey Johnson, Jim Sporleder, Carl Bonnesen. Driving stake, Harvey Sorensen.



One of the delivery trucks including the crate for Andersen's model



Assorted gears and parts of the cap frame

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NEWS-ADVERTISER

Donations
 of \$100
 will buy a shingle
 Thank you

Hanging shingles

Dollars aren't the only ones who hang out shingles these days. Shingles such as those above decorate the inside of the Elk Horn windmill. Better Elk Horn Club officials say donations of \$100 will buy a shingle with the donor's name inscribed and donations are still being accepted. Proceeds go toward paying for transportation of the mill from Denmark and construction in Elk Horn. At the right, is a sample of the mill's finished product, flour, Sacks of Flour can be purchased at the mill (see photo, page 1).




Elk Horn's windmill is a jigsaw puzzle

By GENE RAFFENSPERGER

Register Staff Writer

ELK HORN, IA. — If you've ever tried to assemble a Christmas gift using directions that came in the packing box you know what's going on in Elk Horn these days.



Elk Horn now owns an authentic Danish windmill. Make that owns the pieces — several hundred of them.

The job ahead is to assemble those pieces, replacing and repairing a few that need it, and ending up with a windmill 48 feet tall at the tower and with arms having a diameter of 66 feet.

windmill located in Denmark. Then craftsmen took the mill apart, timber by timber, numbering each piece.

• The pieces were shipped to Elk Horn. Also shipped to Elk Horn was a 6-foot-tall scale model of the windmill. The model showed the main timbers and other parts of the windmill and each piece on the model was numbered to correspond with the number attached to the piece taken from the real windmill.

• Now, they are putting the puzzle together here.

Christensen says no one is sure when the mill will be completed because of uncertainties in replacing and repair-



A windmill street sign
 Trademark for tourists

Danish windmill. Christensen says at least 80 per cent of the approximately 700 residents here trace their ancestry to Denmark.

Christensen says the windmill being reconstructed here is estimated to be 127 years old. Such mills once dotted

The windmill arrived with a hefty price tag and the bills continued to mount as construction proceeded. The windmill was purchased for \$11,000, dismantled for \$14,000, and shipped for \$8,000.

Thankfully, members of the Better Elk Horn Club and the newly formed Danish Mill Corporation had been hard at work mobilizing local residents to fund the project. Lamont Christensen, then working for Shelby County State Bank, took the lead in gathering donations and selling memberships for the organization. He went door to door, encouraging everyone he met to support the project. Households that gave \$100 (nearly \$600 today) were recognized with shingles installed inside the windmill. Those shingles remain on display to this day.

The same energy could be felt around town as Elk Horn came alive. Ambitious plans were drawn to re-face the town with a fresh coat of Danish-ness from the street signs to the business facades. The image on the left shows the artists rendition of Elk Horn's new Main St. Not all businesses followed through on this plan, but one can recognize some motifs while driving down Main St. today.

Meanwhile, the windmill has marked Elk Horn's street signs ever since as well as serving as a logo for the City of Elk Horn and local businesses like Danish Mutual Insurance, Landmand's Bank, and the Kringleman Bakery. If one didn't know any better, they might have assumed the windmill had always been in Elk Horn.

Although it would take nearly a year to rebuild the windmill, the town's immediate embrace of its arrival assured that it was quickly woven into the very fabric of the community. On Memorial Day, a dedication ceremony was held outside the windmill. As was then a tradition for new builds, a *rejsekrans* (wreath) was raised to the top of the windmill. A ceremony ensued that intimately tied Elk Horn's Danish pride with heritage with nationally-bound patriotism inspired by the bicentennial celebration. The gathering quickly became an annual event, later to be known as Tivoli Fest.

Danmark set fra Luften

Denmark set fra Luften is a digital project consisting of aerial images taken between 1890 and 2010, many of which were taken in batches after World War II. The images are available for view online and are sorted by location. We're fortunate to have several images of our windmill in Nørre Snede as a result of this project and these can all be found online as well at

<https://www.kb.dk/find-materiale/tjenester/danmark-set-fra-luften/om-danmark-set-fra-luften>



This aerial of the windmill was taken in 1952 and shows the windmill to be in good condition. The fantail blades and catwalk remain intact.

The northern door to the catwalk is also visible.



By 1959, the catwalk appears to have been removed, and the chain to control the shutters still hangs in the air. The southern door to the catwalk can be seen above the millhouse where a radio shop was maintained by the Vestergaards.

This photo perfectly captures much of the farmland north and west of Nørre Snede, placing the windmill back into its rural context.



News & Updates

As mentioned elsewhere, our Danish *postkasse* is here. It was the last box from Faxe, a Zealand town approximately 65km south of Copenhagen. The box was in very good condition, but unfortunately was wrapped tightly in plastic during shipping. The moisture has damaged some of the paint and so we are working on touching it up. It also came with a working key as well as the M-F day tags to indicate when mail would be picked up.

An inscription on the front says, “Brevene må ikke indeholde penge,” meaning “the letters must not contain money.” However, we are developing a special station and envelope for visitors to leave us donations or notes that can be deposited into our box. So while the current display looks as the image on the right, we are actually going to be overhauling the entire wall very soon with some fun new details that we think visitors will enjoy.



Our Postkasse's location in Faxe



Our Postkasse Today



Record crowd for Annual Meeting



Harlan's 3rd Grade visited in January

We thoroughly enjoyed gathering together with members and community residents at our annual meeting in January. We broke from tradition this year as a way to begin our 50th year celebration and hired a caterer for a full meal at Hygge Inn in Elk Horn. We filled the entire room as Shaun presented the accomplishments of 2025 and plans for this year. Mike & Lou Howard were also recognized for their support with a special cog from our brakewheel. Towards the end of the meeting, three new board members were elected, all for their first ever terms with us: Timothy Andersen, James Cogdill, and Mike Howard.

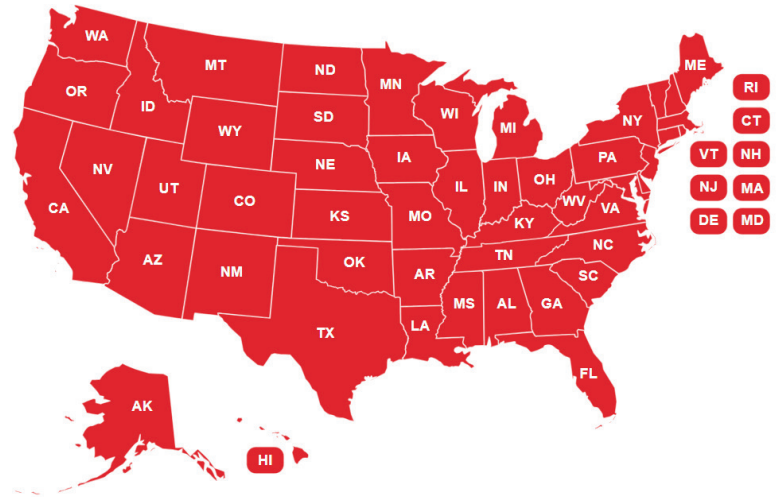
We also enjoyed our first school trip of the year in January with a visit from Harlan's 3rd grade class. Most of the group had actually toured the windmill last year as 2nd graders, and we were blown away with how much they remembered. This year we were able to challenge them a bit more and each class enjoyed getting to build on their previously knowledge and develop better grasps on how the windmill worked.

Visitor Information

From October to December, we finished with less visitors than the previous year:

- 5,176 visitors signed our guestbook including 56 from Denmark
- Visitors from all 50 states and at least 35 foreign countries

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



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