

Danish Heritage Museum



On April 3, 2024 a bus from Precinct 3 took nineteen garden club members on a long drive to Danevang, Texas, the location of the Danish Heritage Museum.

Danevang is a small farming community, established by Danish immigrants between 1894-1895. Danish migration to the US started in the mid-18th. Initially emigrants settled in the Midwest where they established their communities around the Danish Lutheran Church. Parishioners worked together to preserve their traditions which centered around church, family, language and 'Volklife' (people's way of life).

Land grants available in Texas enticed Danish community leaders to expand to other parts of the country. Texas was said to be ideal for farming and the first Danish settlers bought 25 acres of land for \$9.00 per acre in this area. They named the settlement 'Danevang' which translates into 'Danish Farm'. The farmers soon learned that the climate in Texas was not favorable to grow midwestern crops and they had to become cotton farmers, and later also grew corn and sorghum. They lived off the land, hunted animals and eventually prospered as a community of about 100 settlers. As a farming co-op they shared in the expenditures for modern farm equipment which improved farming over the decades. In 1904 the community built a church which became the religious and social center of village life.

Over the decades the citizens of Danevang became Americanized. People still living in Danevang and other Danes with ties to Danevang, realized that their Danish heritage was being lost. They formed the 'Danish Heritage Preservation Society' in 1993 for the



purpose of restoring and preserving their heritage and community.

The society purchased three additional acres of land from the church for the 6,100-square-foot museum building. Two additional buildings were moved to this site, a building to resemble a Danish barn with the Danish flag prominently painted on its side and an original Sears-Roebuck 'Kit house'.



In 1995 the Texas State Legislature proclaimed Danevang to be the Danish Capital of Texas.

Our tour started at the historic church. Jim, a descendent of an original settler, explained the history of the settlement and the church.

The original church was destroyed

during a storm in 1940. The current chapel was purchased from a dismantled military post nearby and renovated reflecting Danish heritage and traditions.

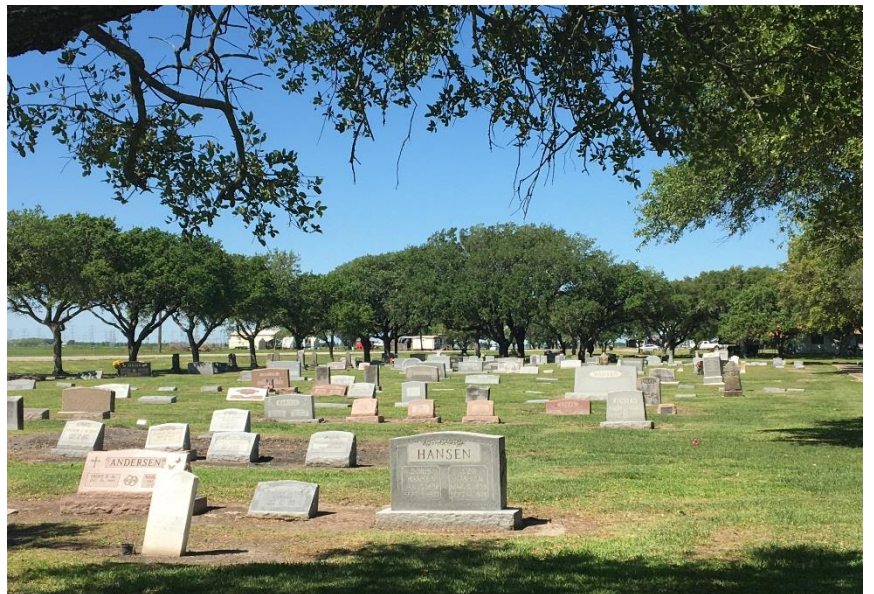


One such tradition calls for a Viking type ship to be displayed in every church as the ship is believed to sail departed souls to heaven.



Currently, only 10-12 Danish families still worship at this church. Most farmers sold the majority of their farmland to large cooperate farmers.

Jim has to admit that life has changed much over the decades and it is difficult keeping Danish traditions alive. At the cemetery, next to the church, are the gravesite of many founding members. Old headstones bare their names.



One grave marker caught our interest. Al Jensen, an accomplished engineer from Danevang, wanted to be buried in the Viking tradition under a pile of glacier formed stones.

His widow had the huge glacier formed boulder transported from the Rocky Mountains. It took the heavy equipment of Txdot employees, who happened to work in the area, to place the giant rock onto his grave site.



Next, we were invited to the museum house. In the charming dining area at the back of the museum, the friendly staff served us an authentic Danish country meal.

Some table ware, in traditional Danish blue and white design, was donated by Danish families. On each plate was a Danish prayer we all recited before the meal was served.



The meal consisted of whole grain bread, Danish meatballs with gravy, pickled cucumbers, beets, and red cabbage and fried potatoes. Dessert was a light and refreshing version of an apple pie, served cold on a graham cracker crust with a dollop of whipped cream on top. It was all very good.



While we were dining, Bridget, Jim, Mike, and other museum volunteers entertained us with anecdotes from their lives in this community and the traditions they grew up with.

After lunch we watch a short documentary about the history of the Danevang community. Then we were free to explore the museum on our own.



The museum is organized in section depicting various areas of Danish community life.

Artifacts and pictures telling the story of the Danish royal family which our hosts seem to be very proud of. Bridget explained that queen Margrethe II just recently stepped away from her royal duties. Her oldest son, Frederick is now the ruler but his official portrait is not yet available.

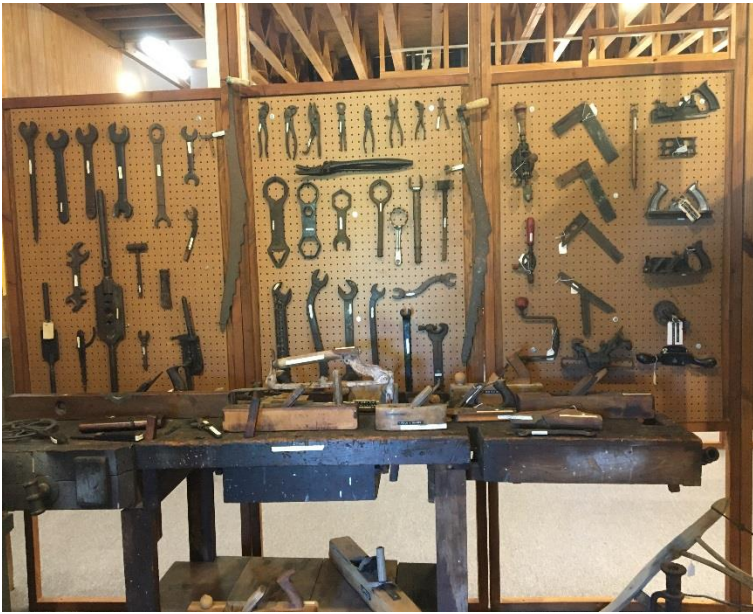
<https://www.kongehuset.dk/en/the-monarchy-in-denmark/history>

The demanding work of farming left little time to socialize. Music seemed to have been central in their leisure gatherings. Another Danish tradition on display are the iconic blue plates representing the royal heritage, craftsmanship and passion for the color blue since 1775.



The annual plate idea originated in 1888 when the artist Frans August Hallin of the 'Royal Danish Porcelain Factory' created a plate for the 'Nordic Industrial, Agricultural and Arts Exhibition'. Since then an artist annually creates a design for a limited number of plates. Then the form is destroyed. Danevang Museum has a complete collection.

<https://www.royalcopenhagen.com/en-gb/our-legacy/our-history/christmas-plates-through-the-years>



Old fashioned tools and farm equipment are on display in a different section of the museum.



This beautifully crafted organ was played in the church.



Before we made our way to the Pioneer home, Bridget led us in singing a Danish folk song and then took a picture of our group.



The pioneer house, a Sears Roebuck 'Modern Homes' kit house, is one of a few still remaining from the area. It was purchased by a Danish family around 1890 and cost about \$795.00.

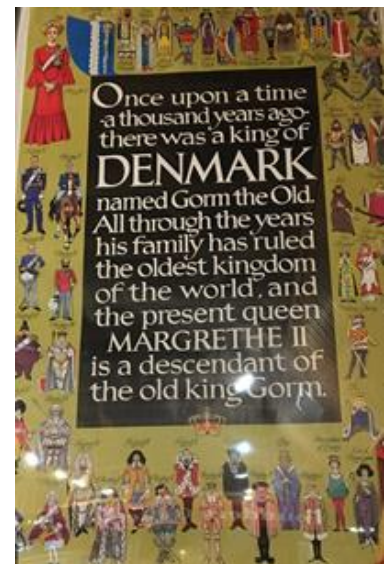
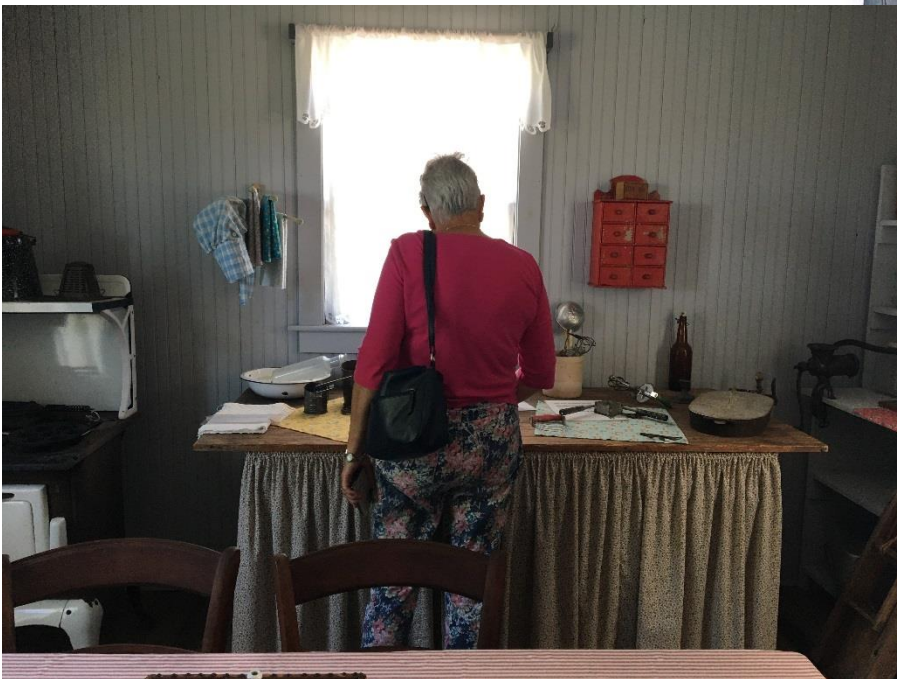
The house was shipped via railroad boxcars and horse drawn carriage and contained most of the materials needed to build the house.

The home was usually assembled by the new homeowner with the help of relatives, friends and neighbors, in the traditional barn raising fashion.





Surprisingly spacious, the home had a kitchen, living room and 2 bedrooms downstairs. Additional bedrooms were on a second floor under the roof. No running water but a pump just outside supplied water. The outhouse was not too far away.

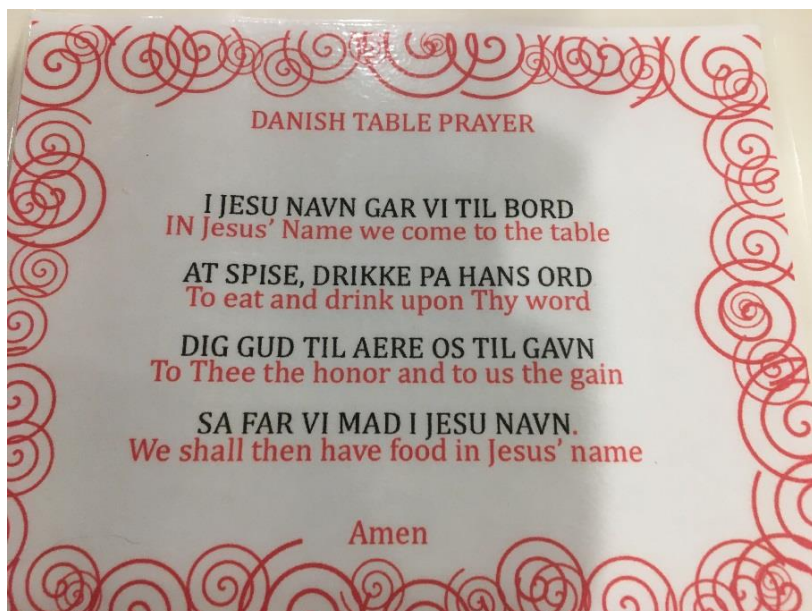


Many delicious meatballs, cakes and other traditional dishes were probably created in this kitchen. The ornate plaque proclaims queen Margrethe II to be the descendent of Gorm, king and ruler of the oldest kingdom, the kingdom of Denmark.



The barn as well as the pioneer house were restored by volunteers of the Danish Heritage Preservation Society. The barn stores and displays some farm equipment that was used by the original settlers.

The Danish flag is prominently painted on the side of the barn (see picture on first page). During WW II, when Germans occupied Denmark, flying the Danish flag was verboten! The Danes worked around the order by painting the flag on their barns. A tradition that is still followed today.



There was much to see and do. The friendly staff enthusiastically shared their history and personal anecdotes and happily answered our questions.

Definitely a worthwhile trip, but bring more time!

<https://danevangtx.org/our-history/>