Lodge History 1910 Through 1950

(Reminiscences of Harold A. Bastrup, Chief of Police (Retired), who now resides in Anaheim, California.)

(In 1992 the Kenosha Danish Brotherhood celebrated its 100th year anniversary. Long gone are the members of the very first years of the Brotherhood but there are still many who, as children, recall the late twenties and thirties and the activities of the Lodge in those days. We also recall the early remembrances of earlier years as passed on to us by our parents. This article is on some of those early activities of the Lodge.)

My father, Laurits (Lawrence), and my mother, Sofia Bastrup, emigrated to the United States in 1914. They came through Ellis Island in New York. With them were my two brothers, Kai (Kay) and Borge (Berg). Both were small children at the time. I was born in 1923 in Kenosha and my sister, Helen, was born in 1928. All of us would be involved with the Danish Brotherhood throughout our lifetimes. (Helen is now Mrs. John Piwoni. They are active in the Lodge.) In later years, my brother, Kay, and I would move to California at different times and join lodges there.

When my parents came to Kenosha, the Lodge was already 22 years old and the center of Danish social activities. In Kenosha, there was a mixing of many people of many ethnic cultures and religions, most were recent immigrants. They worked together at the many large factories, but in those early days gathered together at their own clubs with people of their own origin. The Polish, Germans, Italians, and Danes, all had large clubs in Kenosha. There were also smaller clubs of other nationalities. These clubs would all join together each year for the splendid day-long Fourth of July celebrations at the Washington Park Bowl. There, the combined clubs celebrated the birthday of their newly-adopted country and would demonstrate the custom, dress, and dances of their former home countries. Thousands of people would attend, many in the traditional clothing of their former homes. Each organization would take turns providing entertainment on a stage in the bowl. Food from all nations could be purchased during the festivities.

My father joined the Danish Brotherhood and my mother became a member of the Sisterhood shortly after they arrived in Kenosha. There, they made many lifelong friends. Their best friends were Carl and Petra Olsen. (Carl, Senior, was the Lodge secretary for over 20 years.)

Most of my earliest fond recollections as a child have to do with the Danish Brotherhood and its many activities. There were the children’s Christmas parties, the dances, the annual Review, the annual Bazaar, the Danish holiday celebrations, numerous activities sponsored by the Women’s auxiliary, the Men’s Singing Society, and the many-faceted Danish Athletic Club which included tumbling, baseball, and soccer teams. And, there were also the frequent celebrations, as there are today, for weddings and anniversaries of all kinds. Along with the weekly Lodge meetings, there was never a week that there was not some type of Lodge activity going on, especially in the fall, winter, and spring months. Numerous summer activities also took place at the Men’s Singing Society Camp at Lilly Lake.

For members only, there was the basement bar which the current membership has so thoughtfully kept in its original form. The bar was open daily in the afternoon and evening and all day Saturday. It was run for the Lodge by a member who was elected in those early years for a one-year term. He and his family would live in an apartment furnished for them and located on the first floor of the Lodge. His responsibilities would include all of the janitorial services needed to keep the building in shape as well as running the bar. For many years, he would also open the Reading Room on the first floor at 9 a.m. The Reading Room had current newspapers and publications from Denmark, and a library of Danish books which could be checked out. This was a gathering place for the Danes to read and to talk about current events or about days past in “the old country.” My father was elected to the position of Lodge caretaker for a year, sometime in the early twenties. I recall my mother and two brothers talking about the work it involved. My mother would have to make Danish open face sandwiches to be served in the bar on Saturdays and Sundays, and the boys would have to keep the upstairs hall swept and the chairs and tables placed in order, depending on the days activities. They said it was a lot of work as each day had a different need.

**The Second Floor – – “The Big Hall” and “The Little Hall”**

The big hall, which is the dance hall, originally had a stage located on the east end. The large stage had a curtain and stage lighting. On both sides were rooms which led to the stage and which would be used for props and for cast members, when there was entertainment or the annual show called the Review. That annual show was something all of the Danes looked forward to and it had a variety of acts and skits. All were presented in the Danish language. The comedy skits were always the most popular. I remember one act during a Review where a large boat had been built and five members of the cast were in it. The simulated water, painted on wood in front of the boat, was constructed to look like waves. Three levels of these waves were moved irregularly to give the illusion of moving water. It was quite ingenious. The boat, with a large Danish flag on the bow, was placed on a see-saw so it looked like it was pushing through the waves. The Review, which lasted about two hours, always featured the Danish Brotherhood Singing Society which was composed of all the men. The Sisterhood, which also had a singing group, and the Lodge’s Danish Folk Dance group would also perform. Talented members of the Lodge would also provide entertainment and song or dance. I remember Carl Olsen, Jr., at the age of six or seven, singing “Let Me Call You Sweetheart.” The audience responded by throwing pennies and nickels to him on the stage. As a no-talent person, my only claim to fame could be that I ran out on stage to help him retrieve his small child’s fortune. Perhaps in the archives of the Danish Brotherhood, a musical score of one of the annual Reviews can be found. The original music was written by Carl’s Dad, and the Review was directed by him. A many-talented person, he would also write songs or poems for other special events such as anniversaries and weddings.

Under the stage was the storage space for chairs and tables. After a program requiring seating or tables, all the men and boys would quickly store them under the stage in preparation for the dance which would usually follow. Some chairs were removed to the sides for seating. Getting those chairs, and sometimes tables, off the floor quickly, seemed to be a challenge to the members, and it was fun to watch or to participate in the removal. Many records were set, only to be beaten at a later date.

Music for the dances was almost always played by a small group of musicians, usually numbering not more than four or five. There was a Dane named Lindstrom, who was a local insurance man. He was the group leader. The music played was a mixture of the currently popular American music. Every third or fourth dance, however, was music from Denmark. When these Danish songs were played, the Danes would quickly crowd the floor and dance and, sometimes, sing traditional songs. More than once, I have seen the tears of some of the participants as they remembered their earlier days in Denmark. Small children were allowed to wander or run around on the dance floor. There were never any restrictions, and I can imagine the irritation of the dancers as the happy children raced from one side of the dance floor to the other through the dancing crowd.

The Small Hall, as it was called, was located where the present upstairs bar is now located. It was used for the weekly Lodge meetings and contained all of the ceremonial chairs of office and the podium for the Lodge leaders. They were often pushed aside to provide room for current activities. The Small Hall was used most often for the serving of food during activities or dances in the Big Hall. A “dumb waiter” was the food elevator used to bring the food up from the kitchen and was operated by means of a rope. I shudder when I think of all the unauthorized rides we kids would take when adults were not around. Luckily, the rope never broke. Old timers will remember the kringle and other Danish pastries often served during Lodge activities by the Danish Sisterhood in the Small Hall. Proceeds were used to support their many social and community activities.

**The Bazaar**

An annual event, using both the Large and Small Hall, was the Bazaar. Booths were constructed in the Small Hall and in half of the larger hall. The other half was kept for dancing. These booths would contain items for sale, food, games, and demonstrations of various Lodge activities. The Bazaar was put on for two nights, a Friday and Saturday, and during Sunday afternoon. Many people from Kenosha would attend. My favorite booth was always the “Aebleskiver” booth where completely round pancakes were served, covered with jelly and powdered sugar, and the second favorite was the booth where home made marzipan candies made to look like fruit, vegetables, or open face sandwiches were sold. Both the aebleskiver and marzipan Danish delicacies are still a Danish tradition today.

One of the most memorable of the Bazaar attractions was a merry-go-round. A complete circle wall with a center pole supporting it was constructed so that the wall could be rotated around seating which was placed inside. A person would enter through a small door, a part of the wall, which would then be closed and locked. The wall would then be spun around by men standing on the outside and people sitting inside the wall would have the illusion that they were moving around in a circle rather than the wall. I have seen more than one Dane, who had first imbibed a few beers before entering, leave the ride after it had stopped and not be able to stand up.

**The Children’s Christmas Parties**

One of the most looked forward to events by the children of Lodge members was the annual Christmas Party. A large tree which always reached the ceiling, was placed in the middle of the dance hall. Children would rotate in two circles in opposite directions around the tree as they sang both American and Danish Christmas songs. Parents seated around the hall would often join in the singing as a small band played. Santa Clause would always appear at the end of the circling of the tree by the children and would take his place in a chair on the stage. Children then, one by one, would go up to Santa. The gift was always a pound box of chocolates, a rare treat during the days of the great depression of 1929 and the early 30s. On leaving the stage, each child would also receive a bag from one of the Sisterhood women which contained apples and oranges, and sometimes a small toy or Danish Christmas ornament.

One of the comical things which would occur at the beginning of each children’s Christmas party was when the minister of the Danish Lutheran Church would arrive to say a prayer before the beginning of festivities. A lookout would be watching outside the Lodge for his arrival. When the signal was given all of the people holding beer or a mixed drink in the dance hall would hasten to conceal them by either placing them under chairs or by covering the drinks in some manner on their laps. Some would just run from the room into the smaller hall where they would stay until the minister left. Since most of the Danes were also members of the church they did not want to offend the minister who was not tolerant of drinking or dancing. I am quite sure the reverend, who was named Petersen, knew what was going on. During prohibition, when alcohol was against the law, members would bring their own home-made brew to the Lodge. My dad, who made exceptionally good beer, was a very popular fellow in those days. Bootleg beer was also often sold in the basement bar when the Police were being lax in enforcement.

After the Children’s activities, a dance would always follow. Children would race around for a short time but one by one would disappear. Some would be taken home, but the majority would be taken down to the women’s lounge or reading room where they would fall asleep on the many benches or chairs which had been placed together. This was common at most Lodge activities. I remember being awakened many times to be carried out into the cold weather for the drive home. The Danes, who were family oriented, would not leave the very small children home alone. We were always a welcome and tolerated part of the Lodge.

**The Basement Bar**

Still in existence today, the bar is almost exactly as it has been for many years. Just a few years ago, the Danish paintings on the walls were carefully restored to their original luster. Visitors to the bar should take the time to carefully study these paintings by a Danish artist.

The barroom has always had the tables and chairs as they are still placed today. For many years, when this was the only barroom in the Lodge, it was always open from noon and into the evening. Older retired members of the Lodge would gather in the early weekday afternoons to play cards and talk. After 4:00 p.m., the patronage would increase. Lodge members, done with their day’s work, would gather for a few beers or drinks and to socialize with other Lodge members. Slacking off for a short period during the supper hours, the business would again increase during the evening. On Tuesday, Lodge meeting nights, the barroom would always be filled before and after the meeting. The small bar, as it is today, was never large enough to accommodate but a few members. Members would stand if the tables were all occupied, and sometimes elbow to elbow. As a small child, I can remember pushing my way through the legs of those standing men, looking for my father. Often some member would pick me up and hold me high for my father to see me. Children were permitted in the bar if our parents were there. If we got lucky we would be given pop in large glass bottles. If not, we were told to go play someplace else. In those days of courtesy to the fairer sex, the women would always be seated at the tables with the men standing or seated at the bar.

To the back of the bar was a small storeroom for bar supplies, and the keg beer which was tapped and piped into the bar. Nelson’s bakery was next to the hall and the bakery goods were made in the bakery basement. Between the bar and the bakery was a small opening which had a hinged door with a lock on the bar side. The Danish bakers would rap on this door and the bartender was often seen drawing glasses of beer to be passed through the opening to them. This, of course, was understandable as they had to clear the flour from their lungs.

On the nights that the Men’s Singing Society would meet upstairs to practice their singing, most of the men would adjourn to the barroom after the meeting to socialize and water their parched tonsils. Often, one or two members would start singing a Danish or American song and soon everyone would join in the singing – – all except my father, who supported and enjoyed the Singing Society but could not sing a note. I know, he would sometimes sing a Danish song at home and I can attest that the Society was better off without his singing talent.

From time to time, slot machines would appear in the barroom, to disappear for a time and then to reappear. Owned by the Lodge, the money was used for Lodge activities.

As there are today, there were “smokers” once a month as well as Fish Nights, where sardines or eel would be served. That was one part of the Danish culture I never took in. That, as well as the open face goose lard sandwiches which were served with smorgasbord. My taste buds just reject them.

Card playing was always a Saturday morning and afternoon activity in the barroom. The room was always crowded and members would play various card games, including poker. The stakes were never high and it was mainly a social gathering. The men would get so involved that they would often forget the lateness of the afternoon. Sometimes, when there was an evening activity, my father would arrive home just in time for supper and to get ready, with the family, to return for some evening activity. One time, as a joke, my mother brought a supper down to the barroom and fed all of the men my father usually played cards with, so they would not have to go home for their suppers.

When I was about 16, I drove to the barroom one Saturday afternoon to pick up my father. It was filled with card players and my father told the bartender to give me a Coke as I waited for him to finish. Bored, I saw the juke box and decided to put a nickel in it to play a song. The music started, and when it did, there was an instant complete silence as everybody stopped their card playing and looked at me. One Dane stood up, his face filled with anger. He walked straight toward me. I thought he was going to strike me as he was looking so intently at me, but, instead, he passed me and walked to the wall where he pulled out the cord for the jukebox, stopping the music. “We do not play music when we are playing cards,” he said, as I also heard words of approval from other players. Almost as instantly as the silence had started, the men were again talking and laughing and playing cards. No one seemed to bear me any ill will, but I had learned my lesson that Saturday.

A most memorable occurrence at the bar one evening happened when my mother walked up to a man she knew and who was standing at the bar. His name was Torvel Jensen, and he was well known and admired as a successful administrator for a major factory in Kenosha. Torvel was a heavy set man and, as my mother passed behind him, she pulled on the back of his belt to get his attention, saying in Danish “How is it going Torvel?” At the moment his belt was pulled, Torvel pulled in his stomach and my mother released the belt. Torvel’s pants fell to the floor, revealing the brightly colored shorts he was wearing. The people in the barroom immediately went into long and uncontrollable laughter, as an embarrassed Torvel quickly pulled up his pants. Later, that incident was to be acted out in one of the Reviews on stage. Danes enjoyed that sort of humor and Torvel was not offended.

**Men’s Singing Society & Summer Retreat at Lilly Lake**

I do not know when it was built, but the members of the Brotherhood Singing Society had a large clubhouse on property they had purchased on the northeast side of Lilly Lake. The clubhouse was built by the members and had the outside markings of a Danish style which made it distinctive from other buildings and cottages on the lake. The property was at least two acres large, with a beach and a small pier built out on the lake. In early years, a number of cottages had also been built for members to rent. Those cottages were no longer in use when I was a small child. They were later removed from the property.

A nice sandy beach was maintained and there the families would enjoy swimming and playing in the lake. There were also horseshoe playing areas, and swings were attached to some of the limbs of the many trees which were close to the waterfront. There was also a single outdoor wooden bowling alley where wood pins were set to be struck by small wooden bowling balls. The balls contained no finger holes but the alley even had a return ball track. It was a popular place near the beach. Those of us who were lucky enough to be pin boys earned a few nickels and would send the balls back to the bowlers along the inclined track.

The clubhouse was a large one, with combination meeting and dance hall. A very small bar, where only four persons could stand was in a separate room next to the hall. Most purchasers of drinks would return outside or to the hall to enjoy them. There was a woman’s lounge to the back of the building and small living quarters for the person who would take care of the property and tend bar during the summer months. There was also a large well-furnished kitchen, where meals could be made for any occasion, including banquets.

On the outside of the building was a screened porch area, which traversed the entire south and west side of the building. Chairs and tables could accommodate many people. There were also a number of rocking chairs and porch swings. It was here that guests, especially the women, would sit for hours. During inclement weather all activities would take place on the porch or in the hall. Bad weather would never deter any planned event.

The upstairs was a large loft-like room, whose walls were the tapering roof. The room was originally used for sleepers. There were still some beds up there, but it was mainly used as a dressing room for those who wanted to put on their bathing suits. The upstairs had not been popular as a sleeping room because of the summer heat and because privacy was lacking.

Although owned by the Singing Society, the Lilly Lake camp was used by all members of the Danish Brotherhood. Many Brotherhood activities took place there in the summer, including the annual picnic which was the highlight of the summer season. All sorts of games and events were put on for the children and there were events for the adults. Women’s races of all types were popular and there was a beer drinking event to see what man could drink a certain number of beers in the shortest time. Ice cream and pop were in abundant supply for the children. In the evening there was dancing for the adults. At that time, children would be put onto the back seats of cars to sleep into the night while their parents danced.

Another popular day was the Fourth of July, when the Singing Society would sing patriotic song out on the lawn. Fireworks were not outlawed at the time and the use of fireworks was an all-day event. In the evening, sparklers would be held by the children as the adults fired firework aerial displays out onto the lake. It was exciting to see the rocket bursts of many colors from all around the lake.

To get to Lilly Lake you had to drive west from Kenosha on Highway 50. It was over 20 miles to the camp and over hilly roads which were not too wide. Shifting to first and second gears on the hills was often necessary. After passing the Old Settlers Park in Paddock Lake, there was a steep grade to be climbed to reach Brass Ball Corners. My mother would instill fear in us children as she started to yell when we slowly climbed to the top of the hill in our Auburn automobile. We always made it but, more than once, my mother threatened to get out and walk. Speed was also very slow at the time and “going like 60” was a familiar phrase used for speeders. The trip to the Lake would take an hour.

Next to the Singing Society camp was a large home owned by a man named Oscar Peterson, a Swede. He owned a tavern in Kenosha and also had a bar in the basement of his summer home, which was only open from June to August. It was patronized by many of the Danes as a second place to go for a drink. During prohibition, it was a popular place because bootleg beer could be bought there.

In the back of Peterson’s place, his son had a refreshment stand and shuffle board courts. It was a popular place for us kids because penny candy and other refreshments could be bought there. Fireworks were also sold there for a few days before the Fourth of July. My brother, Kay, met the daughter of Peterson at the stand. Her name was Ruby and they were soon married. They had a long life together until there recent deaths. They were also active members of the Danish Brotherhood.

**The 50th Year Celebration in 1942**

I was a teenager at the time and the occasion was marked with a number of celebrations prior to the actual anniversary date. On the anniversary, a big banquet was held up in the Large Hall. Many of the teenagers of members served as kitchen help or waiters. My sister and I both worked as waiters. On the night of the celebration, tables in the Large Hall were beautifully set with center pieces of crossed American and Danish flags. Members were all dressed in their finest clothing with some of them wearing old Danish costumes. Many dignitaries were there, including a representative from the Brotherhood’s national headquarters and many city dignitaries. The stage was used for entertainment and for skits depicting the history of the Lodge. The dinner ended with the singing of the Danish and American National Anthems. There was hardly a dry face as tears flowed down the faces of the revelers. It was an unforgettable evening.