



Danish Historical and Cultural Tour of Greenville, Gowen and Sidney Areas

There will be signs at most location

The **Danish Cultural Center** located at 126 W Grove St. in Greenville, MI 48838 is a non-profit whose purpose is to preserve and disseminate the rich heritage and traditions of Danish immigration in Montcalm county and to educate the community and visitors about Danish culture.

The Danish Cultural Center became a non-profit in 2012, but the Danish Brotherhood and Sisterhood have been meeting at the same location since the 1890's. The current building was built in 1930 when the Grange burned down in 1928.

We hope you take a tour to see some of the historical Danish locations in this and neighboring areas. The *kort* (map) was created by Doug Hinken, city engineer and the script was researched by the Danish Youth Ambassadors, providing the addresses for the feathered locations.

Walking Tour

1. Danish Cultural Center

126 Grove St.

The Danish Brotherhood and Sisterhood shared use of the building known as the "Coliseum" owned by the Grange until 1916. The former "Coliseum" building burned in January 1928. The present building was built in 1930 and was known as the Danish Hall. Throughout its history, the space has served as the primary meeting space for the Greenville Lodge No. 70 of the Danish Brotherhood of America, established in 1893, as well as the Dorthea Lodge No. 65 of the Danish Sisterhood of America, established in 1902. For decades, the space allowed individuals to celebrate their Danish culture through the years. Presently the building is known as the Danish Cultural Center. -Cory Smith *Daily News* and *From the Archives* by Amy Larsen

2. The Little Mermaid Statue:

near Gazebo on Flat River; across the street from the Flat River Historical Museum

The Greenville Little Mermaid statue is a replica of the Danish Little Mermaid sculpture by Edvard Eriksen. Our Little Mermaid sits at the banks of the Flat River near the Flat River Historical Museum and was crafted by Steve Willison who dedicated it on August 18, 1994. There are some key differences and similarities between the original sculpture and the Flat River Mermaid. The pose and legs, or fins, of the mermaid, are based on the Danish Statue. On the other hand, the face is drastically different. Most people probably know the Disney movie, *The Little Mermaid*, and the statue does relate to that! The Little Mermaid movie and the statue are based on the famous Dane, Hans Christian Andersen's original 1837 fairytale.

3. Flat River Historical Museum

213 N Franklin St. open Saturdays and Sundays 2:00-4:30 (not in the Winter)

The Museum has an exhibit called *Greenville's Danish Heritage* featuring Danish immigration and settlement to the area. There is also a replica of the Silver Theater, a fixture in Greenville for many years, that plays a hologram movie called the *Ghost of Greenville*. One of the ghosts depicted by Nels Hansen is August Rasmussen. This year there is a temporary exhibition for the 60th Anniversary of the Danish Festival.

4. Fighting Falcon Museum

516 W. Cass St.

This impressive museum exhibits displays on the wars that the United States took part in over the years and exhibits of local Danes that fought in those wars. It also honors those who worked to build the famous glider plane used in the invasion of Normandy. A life-sized replica of the *Fighting Falcon* is on display. This museum is a must visit.

5. Pocket Park Murals:

downtown on the east side of Lafayette St.

These murals are some of the brightest colors in Greenville. Painted by Karen Pollock, a local artist. They celebrate some of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales, the oldest one done in 2007. In 2008, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, 2009 *Thumbelina* and 2010 depicted another well-known fairytale, *The Princess and the Pea*. These murals are very

detailed. If you like these murals, there are other murals on the bank located across the street from Ziebart, on the north wall of Preferred Credit Union on Lafayette St.

6. Ugly Duckling Statue and Fountain

At City Hall on the corner of Lafayette and Washington Streets

Marshall Fredricks, a prominent American sculptor with Scandinavian ancestry, created the Hans Christian Andersen *The Ugly Duckling* (1843) statue and fountain. This fountain was dedicated on August 17, 1985 in honor of Hendrik and Gezina Meijer, parents of Fred Meijer.

7. Flat River Community Library:

The Hans Christian Andersen Collection

200 W. Judd St.

The Library has numerous Hans Christian Andersen books. There is also a foreign language section with a Danish language subsection that includes Danish cookbooks. The Danish Settlement Lutheran Church records are also at this library. You may use ancestry.com for free of charge, to do any genealogy research.

Driving Tour

8. St. Paul Lutheran Church

Corner of Lafayette and Coffern Streets

Present location 9844 SW Greenville Rd

In the mid 1850s, Danes began coming to the Montcalm County area and settling here with their new life. Most of these Danes were known as Lutherans and were strong in their faith, meeting informally whenever they could to share the word. In the late 1860's, the Lutheran Danes started worshiping regularly and formally in various parts of Montcalm County. Because of geographic constraints, Lutherans started forming various congregations around the area. The *St. Paul's Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church* congregation started in 1901 and purchased an existing building at the corner of Lafayette and Coffren Streets in north Greenville. It had to be expanded many times to accommodate the growing congregation. In 1963, the name changed to *St. Paul Lutheran Church* to be more welcoming to those that weren't Danish, however, many of the congregation members could trace their roots to those that initially started the congregation and to this day have many Danish ancestry as members. In 2014, the members of the church moved to a new building constructed south of town on S. Greenville Rd. on land donated by the estate of Ruth and Ray Groh who had used the land for farming and a small orchard. St. Paul Lutheran Church has

an affiliation with Settlement Lutheran in Gowen. Both congregations have a strong Danish background.

9. Monroe Road Cemetery

Montcalm Township Little Dane Settlement

Directions: Go north out of Greenville on M91 turn Left (west) on Peck Rd; Right (north) on Monroe Rd; Left on Muskrat Rd.; Left on Fuller Right on Monroe dirt road. Monroe Cemetery on the right

If you look at a 1921 plot map, the area was populated with many Danes. St. Petri's Church was constructed in 1875. This was a sister parish of Settlement Lutheran Church where Ole Amble ministered. St. Petri was torn down in the 1970's. There was a split in the congregation, so a second church was constructed on the property called Bethania in 1878 with pastors Petersen (1880) and Madsen. This congregation disbanded in 1925. Cemeteries were located at both churches. Danish historian, Lisbeth Pedersen referred to St. Petri as the "Happy Danes" that danced and played cards, while Bethania were the "Sad Danes" who followed more strict behaviors.

10. Little Denmark Cemetery

Cemetery in Gowen. It is south of Settlement Lutheran Church on Johnson Road across from Brookside Golf Course

The Big Dane Settlement cemetery, later known as Little Denmark Cemetery has numerous early settlers and their families buried there. August Rasmussen and his second wife, Ane and children are buried there. There are many Danish names on the tomb stones such as Christensen, Poulsen, Paulson, Petersen, Hansen, Fredriksen, Jorgensen, Nielsen, Johnson, Steffensen, Larsen, Mortensen, Olsen and many more. There is also a memorial in honor of Rev. Ole Amble at the site.

11. Settlement Lutheran Church

1031 Johnson Rd

At a service held at Monroe School, on April 22, 1873, by Norwegian pastor Rev. T. H. Weld, from Whitehall, Michigan, the desire to organize a church became evident. The next day, April 23, a number of men met again at Monroe School and with the assistance of Rev. Weld established the Little Denmark Evangelical Lutheran Church of Montcalm County, Michigan. In less than a year, the members realized they must have a resident pastor if their church was to grow. Rev. Weld recommended that they contact a young man, Rev. Ole Amble, who was serving two small congregations in

Iowa. Rev. Amble accepted the call and arrived in Gowen, May 20, 1874; and so began one of the longest and most active ministerial careers in this part of the state. In 1875 it was decided to build the first church. This was to be built on land given by Peter Nelson, one mile west and a little south of Monroe School. They called it St. Petri's Church, commonly referred to as the Little Danish Settlement Church. It was completed the following year and dedicated January 7, 1877. As the Danes continued to settle around Gowen, it was felt that a church was needed there. On December 17, 1876 a meeting was held in the Settlement School to decide whether or not to build a church in the area. Land was donated by Christian Neilsen. A committee of eleven men was named: Hans Christensen, Rasmus Jensen, Anders Larsen, Hans Nielsen, Niels Christensen, Lars Larsen, Hans Pedersen, Frederick Andersen and Hans Simonsen. On February 28, 1877 a meeting was held. At that time it was decided that the building not be erected on the land given by Christensen Nielsen, but a quarter mile farther north Jen's Rasmussen's corner (corner of Pakes and Johnson roads. Jen's Rasmussen would donate the land (a quarter acre). Since the cemetery was already laid out farther south, this was deemed land enough for the church building. On Thursday, October 4, 1877 the first stone was laid for the foundation. Two weeks later the foundation was completed by Nels Christensen. On October 23, Carl Jensen began the carpentry work. He was to do the outside carpentry and Christen J. Nielsen was in charge of the inside carpentry, including pulpit and altar rail. Anders Larsen made the baptismal font. The pews were made by Matias Bossen. Snow and cold weather hindered the work at first. On November 14, 1877, the church was raised and it was finished so that on the fifth Sunday after Easter, May 18, 1879, it was dedicated. A remarkable fact is that it was free of indebtedness. Many people worked and helped, but back of it all stood our beloved Rev. Ole Amble.

12. South Sidney Church/Dannebrog Lutheran Church

5501 W Muskrat Rd.

(Amble Memorial Sanctuary) Little Denmark Evangelical Lutheran Church of Montcalm County was organized by Rev. T. H. Weld in 1873. In 1876 it was divided into three districts or parishes; St. Petri's (Little Settlement), Little Denmark (Big Settlement) in Gowen and Dannebrog in south Sidney. Later Dannenbrog divided and the northern part of the parish became St. John's parish (North Sidney). Services at Dannebrog continued to be held at Fuller School until 1888 when a church was built. Chris Rydahl performed most of the carpentry on the church with many volunteers from the congregation. Mr. Rydahl was married there in the fall of 1889. Ole Amble was pastor at Dannebrog from 1888 until 1927 when Rev. A. C. Kildegaard served the congregation for 15 years and then Pastor C. A. Stub was called. In 1965

Dannebrog voted not to merge with St. John's (North Sidney) and Immanuel Lutheran of Sidney. 1967 it became the Amble Memorial Sanctuary nonprofit organization. It was about that time they no longer held regular Sunday services. The Amble Memorial Sanctuary holds an annual Memorial Weekend service and a Danish Heritage Service on Danish Festival Sunday. The Memorial Weekend service usually draws a capacity crowd every year. It is an annual pilgrimage for many of the descendants of the early 19th century parishioners. There are over 400 Danish immigrants buried in the beautifully maintained cemetery surrounding the old church.

13. North Sidney Church or St. John's Lutheran Church

The church has been open from 1:00-4:00 on Saturday of Danish Festival for a tour

(North Sidney Church) Organized in 1883, the work on the church began in April of 1884. Christian Winter laid the foundation, while Niels Christiansen of Greenville performed most of the carpenter work assisted by his son. On November 16, 1884 the church was dedicated by Rev. Ole Amble. Tragedy struck the congregation when on June 12th, 1902 a terrible storm hit the area and the church was blown down. The only thing that was saved was the bell which was found across the road. Work soon began for a new church and Chris Rydahl was the carpenter. The second building was built on the very same site as its predecessor. On July 12, 1903, the congregation's second church was dedicated by Rev. Ole Amble. Around the 1960's, the church synod decided St. John's and Immanuel Lutheran in Sidney would merge and build a new church building, the name of the church would be Faith Lutheran Church. Each congregation decided it would raze their buildings. Immanuel's building did come down. North Sidney was saved when the North Sidney Church & Cemetery Historical Association was formed. Harriet Olson spent her life committed to her Danish heritage and was a champion of the Historical Association. Her wisdom and kindness will be missed.

14. Danish Kingdom at the Community Center

900 E. Kent Road

15. Tunnel Museum with Danish exhibits

Washington St. near Ace Hardware and Isabella Bank

Researched by the Danish Youth Ambassadors of the DCC and the Danish Cultural Center Board members.

Next Year

Trufant Community Center

308 W 2nd St. Trufant

Foresthome Cemetery Civil War Soldier honored

11. Helen Kennedy's house

4394 Lake Rd Greenville

GREENVILLE'S DANISH HERITAGE

DANISH POINTS OF INTEREST

1. DANISH CULTURAL CENTER
2. LITTLE MERMAID STATUE
3. FLAT RIVER HISTORICAL MUSEUM
4. FIGHTING FALCON MUSEUM
5. POCKET PARK MURALS
6. UGLY DUCKLING STATUE & FOUNTAIN
7. FLAT RIVER COMMUNITY LIBRARY
- 8A. ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH (THEN)
- 8B. ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH (NOW)
9. MONROE ROAD CEMETERY
10. LITTLE DENMARK CEMETERY
11. SETTLEMENT LUTHERAN CHURCH
12. SOUTH SIDNEY CHURCH / DANNEBROG LUTHERAN CHURCH
13. NORTH SIDNEY CHURCH OR ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH
14. DANISH KINGDOM PLAYGROUND
15. TUNNEL MUSEUM

