

# Danish Windmill Quarterly Newsletter


# THE BREEZE

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 Nørre Snede, DK 1848-1975

Celebrating  
47 years in  
Elk Horn

Elk Horn, IA 1976-present 

## Director's Message:

Dear Members,

It is hard to believe our second issue is already here! We are so grateful to all of the love and support our first issue received and are excited to keep this going. Thank you for your continued support that makes all of this possible.

As you will soon see, it has been a very busy few months here at the Mill with change being the theme of the season. Capital improvements including the new toilets, new breakroom, and alterations to the store have been met with a variety of new products, member services, and more. There is still plenty to get through as we reach the height of the tourism season, and we look forward to seeing what the rest of 2023 has in store for us.

This issue has another rather special story that I hope you all will share my excitement for. It's another long one, but it's well worth the read.



Thank you for supporting the Danish Windmill. We are so appreciative for the passionate following we have built over the years. Your enthusiasm puts the wind in our sails.

Mange tak!

Shaun Sayres, M.A.  
Manager

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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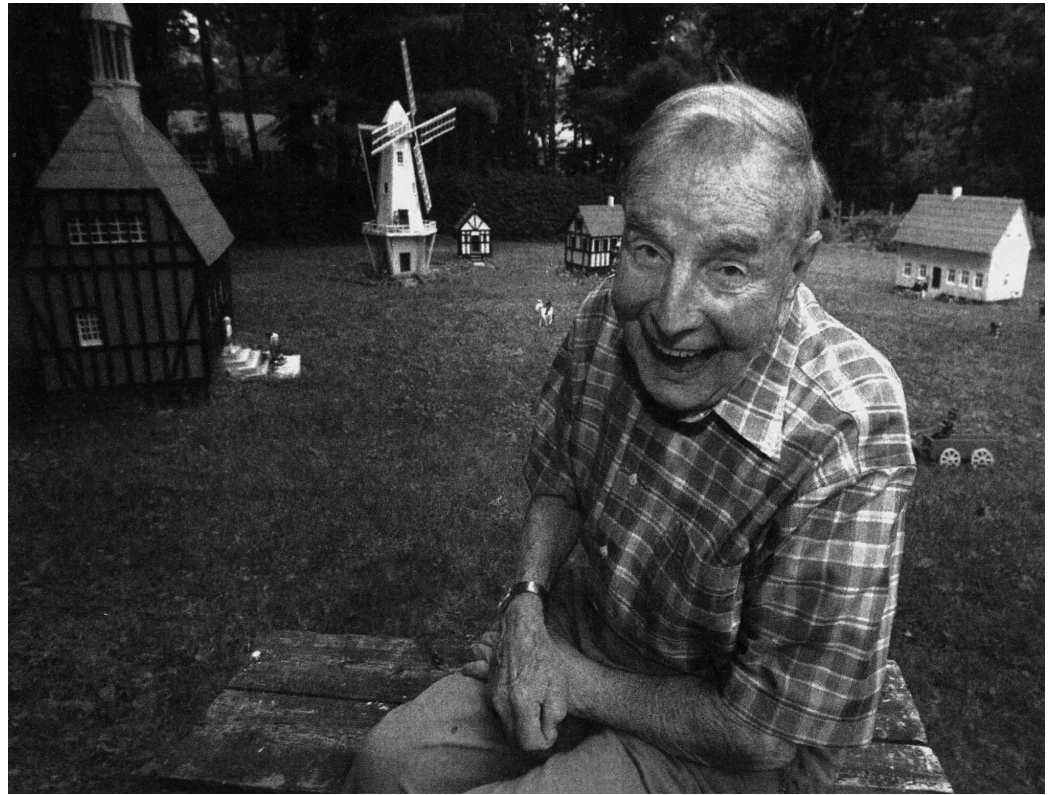
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## Feature Story: "A Triumphant Return: Richard Storkfelt's Folk Art Back in Family Hands"

As many of our supporters know, we have a small exhibit dedicated to Ebeltoft Village nestled outside between the windmill and the gift shop. It consists of three miniature buildings, two of which stand over six feet tall. These, and a number of wood-carved figures in storage, are all that remains of Richard Storkfelt's folk art creation. A recent chance visit by a friend of the Storkfelt extended family, Lorain, has brought about a very special occurrence regarding the collection and reinvigorated our appreciation for what remains of it and the story it tells.

Richard Storkfelt immigrated with his fiancé, Dagmar Larsen, from Copenhagen to the United States in 1925. A licensed electrician by trade, Storkfelt pursued work in Massachusetts, but none of the American firms would recognize his Danish electrician license. The couple relocated to Sharon, Massachusetts where they married soon after. Together, they made ends meet with Richard performing odd jobs while Dagmar worked for a local dressmaker. The couple also loved to dance and happily taught dance classes. Eventually, Richard earned his American electrician's license. He worked for Bird & Son in Walpole for 30 years until his retirement in 1965. He continued to take on electrical work here and there, jobs that helped fund his love for carpentry and woodworking.

By then, Richard had spent most of his life in the United States, but the memories of Denmark never left him. He spent his childhood summers with his grandmother in Ebeltoft, a picturesque village nestled along the eastern coast of Jylland (Jutland), amongst winding streets



*Richard Storkfelt outside his replica Ebeltoft Village, 1996*

and half-timber buildings so often regarded as the pinnacle of traditional Danish architecture. Richard enjoyed travelling to Denmark in his retirement, often bringing family members along with him to show them the "Old Country" and teach them about where his family came from. His enthusiasm for the Danish countryside would soon manifest itself in new ways back home.

At the ripe old age of 82, Richard built a functional windmill behind his home in Sharon. He modeled it after one near Ebeltoft that Richard recalled from his childhood. The sails at their highest point reached just about ten feet high, and a wood-carved miller stood outside on the catwalk. Unfortunately, being the oldest of the buildings, the windmill has not survived, but it was the beginning of a remarkable project.

It began, as with most things seem to do, with Bedstemor's House. In 1985, Richard constructed a miniature version of his grandmother's house as he remembered it from his childhood. But the building was too small and fragile to leave outside. A larger, outdoor version of the house was

completed in 1990. It's half-timbered walls perfectly encapsulated the cozy simplicity of village life. The cottage stood 46 inches tall, any taller and someone might have tried to move in. Richard placed it next to the windmill, and his grand vision for an entire village quickly began to take shape.

It is often said that death and taxes are the only two certainties in life, but Richard knew better. The next project for his village was his grandmother's outhouse, completed in 1991. He built the town hall in 1993 and a yellow house the following year. The completion of the church in 1997 marked the final installment. Each building was constructed with remarkable detail inside and out with painted walls and floors, staircases, and even a working clock tower. All of the buildings were wired with light fixtures. By the time the village was finished, Richard was 97 years old.

But no village is complete without people. As Richard worked on the buildings, he also perfected his method of carving the wooden figures intended to populate his town. Most of the human figures he carved were based on family members and friends, but he also



*Richard Storkfelt next to his church replica, 1997*

included several carvings of himself at different stages of his life in addition to a number of animals and characters from Danish everyday life and popular culture.

As Richard's backyard creations began to take shape, others began to take notice. Visitors and neighbors marveled at the village and Richard's jovial sense of humor. Hand-carved doors and windows offered unique views into Richard's own past, an autobiographical journey that reflected Richard's constant desire to keep busy and enjoy life. And almost like a rite of passage, each new visitor was encouraged by Richard to open the outhouse door. A carving of his grandmother waited inside. All of this was captured by Judith Montminy, interviewed Richard for a feature in the Boston Globe (June 23, 1996). That was how Jennifer Atkinson, a curator of the Fuller Museum of Art (now the Fuller Craft Museum) in Brockton, Massachusetts, learned of Richard's artistic works. An exhibition of his Ebeltoft Village debuted at the museum in September 1998, but Richard never lived to see it. He passed away earlier in March at the age of 98.

Art often outlives the artist and this time is no different. Following the closing of the exhibition at the Fuller Museum, what remained of the collection was moved to the Museum of Danish America here in Elk Horn. The museum held the pieces for a number of years, some in poor condition after years of exposure to the elements. A few pieces

including some carvings and the grandmother's house were kept within the museum's collection. What remained was transferred to the Danish Windmill in 2013. These include the church, town hall, and the yellow house which remain outside on display today.

The remaining wood-carved figures have been in storage since then. Although Richard intended for them to sit outside, our only plan for them has been to preserve them from the elements. At least that was the case until recently, when a chance visit during Tivoli Fest caught us completely by surprise.

When the village exhibit was sent from the Fuller Museum to the Museum of Danish America, family and friends of Richard had to say final goodbyes to his wholesome creations. Since many of the figures were based on real people, most chose to keep the ones based on themselves. But not everyone did.

We learned this during Tivoli when a family friend of Storkfelt-Reddick clan, Lorain, visited us in Elk Horn. She found us working in the store and explained her relationship to the family. She was completely elated to see that the village was still here on display and when she called her friends to share her enthusiasm, they had an important question for her. Did we still have the wood-carvings? And so Lorain approached us, hoping we might still have the figures or at least know where they might be if they still existed. Shaun immediately took her down to the basement where they had been stored, and she recognized the

right ones immediately. Richard's figures weren't just life-like. He intended to and succeeded in capturing what their subjects actually looked like. And so our visitor immediately recognized her friends Wes and Willy Reddick from the bunch. Wes was one of Richard's grandsons and Richard carved Wes, his wife Willy, and their dog Baron.

According to Wes and Willy, these portraits also happened to be Richard's first with fingers, a feat he was quite proud of. "His figures routinely made him laugh with delight," Wes and Willy recalled, "[a]nd the entire village brought joy and curiosity to neighbors when they visited it in his backyard in Sharon. Especially when grampa giggled as he pointed out his grandmother sitting in the outhouse!"

We agreed to ship the pieces back to the family. They didn't even know we had them and without a proper place to display them, we are very happy to be able to send them back to family members where they will be fully appreciated and appropriately cared for. As Wes and Willy put it to us: "We will treasure these pieces not only because they were made by our dear grandfather, but also because they speak to us of our human need to make things whatever your ilk, to communicate our heritage, remember loved ones and to tell stories about who we are."

Today, Wes and Willy are artisans themselves. Willy crafts jewelry and ornaments, called willy wires, which can be found on platforms such as Etsy. Wes, meanwhile, has followed in the creative steps of his grandfather as a woodworker. Wes attributes this career path, in part, to his own trip to Denmark with Richard, which led to Wes's entry into a program with the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Art in Copenhagen. Such is the ongoing legacy of Richard's infectious love for creating and making, for enjoying the most out of life and sharing his world with those closest to him. His wood-carvings of Wes, Willy, and Baron have made the journey home, where they may continue to inspire artistic endeavors.

*Shaun Sayres*



*The remaining wood-carvings in possession of the Danish Windmill*



*Ebeltoft Village Exhibit, 2015*



*Ebeltoft Village Exhibit, 2023*

The photographs above depict what remains of the Ebeltoft Village exhibit including the remaining wood-carvings and the three buildings on the right. The windmill has not survived. New steeples were placed on the meeting hall and church in 2022, but the buildings remain in an unfortunate state of disrepair after so many years in the elements. Due to financial constraints, there are no plans to rehabilitate the exhibit at this time, but we are doing what we can to prevent further deterioration. Donations to help preserve the exhibit, and possibly repair the more serious damage, are encouraged.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

The Danish greeting card line we carry, Mouse & Pen, is based in Ebeltoft Village. All designs are hand drawn with a selection curated for any occasion.



[www.mouseandpen.dk](http://www.mouseandpen.dk)

# News & Updates

This has been a very busy year thus far with plenty of changes and some considerable challengers.

In April, only a couple weeks after our charity auction, the the Mill's fantail broke down. The fantail is the mechanism behind the windmill which serves to keep the windmill facing into the wind at all times. This is important both for efficiency and safety, ensuring an effective use of wind energy while also preventing the windmill from undergoing unnecessary stress from shifting winds. There are two gearboxes that facilitate this process. The lower one had not been serviced in several years and eventually broke down in April. It took multiple weeks before the gearbox could be repaired, and during that time the windmill could not be rotated. As a result, the upper gearbox went through a considerable amount of unusual stress and consequently broke down. We are working to have it repaired as soon as possible and will provide updates on our social media once available.

Tivoli Fest was a huge hit again for us this year with even more visitors than last year. It's the one time of year when the gift shop isn't nearly large enough, but staff worked hard to make it work smoothly through the day. Both the vikings and folk dancers drew large crowds, and we could see people wearing our give-away windmill hats all over town.



*Thank you to Mathisen Tree Service for their help in the maintenance work on the fantail*



*Sidsel Munkholm signing books*



*Locals enjoying food truck fare*

June only brought more visitors. We enjoyed seeing some familiar faces when the DAHS conference came into town to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Museum of Danish America. We followed that up with an event of our own when Sidsel Munkholm, Danish author and blogger, visited our gift shop for a book signing of her latest recipe book, *Hygge - Danish Food and Recipes*. We paired this with an in-house aebleskiver demonstration and tasting using Munkholm's recipe. The event was a great success with plenty of visitors trying aebleskiver for the first time and a lot of signed copies of Munkholm's book going out the door.

But that's not all. We also hosted some food trucks for June including Zemog's Mexican Kitchen (Omaha), Spartan Pizza (Exira), and Master Griller Catering (Kimballton). All were warmly received with high demand for returns, we hope to bring them all back plus more vendors over the rest of the travel season.

Finally, after many requests for a new Elk Horn t-shirt in the old town color (orange), we've made it happen. It is now available in-store or online in addition to a number of windmill t-shirts including our new tie-dye ones. We still have a few more designs on the way, but we are happy to say we are now fully stocked with a full line of windmill shirts for anyone and everyone, including two new viking-themed shirts in youth sizes.

## In The Spotlight: Anna Hude



**Anna Sophie von der Hude (1858-1934)** was born in Ebeltoft in 1858. She is known as the first Danish woman to graduate as a professional historian (1887) and earn a Ph.D. degree (1893). Her dissertation on the origins of feudalism was awarded Copenhagen University's gold medal in 1888.

In 1889, Hude became the first woman to be employed at the Danish National Archives where she remained until 1910. She collaborated with a number of notable Danish historians including her eventual husband, Kristian Erslev.

Hude is also known for her formative work in women's rights activism in Denmark. She was a longtime member of the Danish Women's Society and in 1904, co-founded the Political Women's Association as a staunch advocate for women's suffrage.

## Visitor Information

### APRIL

**883 Visitors**

486 Travel Parties | 38 States | 3 Countries

### MAY

**4549 Visitors**

1243 Travel Parties | 48 States | 13 Countries

### JUNE

**2303 Visitors**

983 Travel Parties | 45 States | 5 Countries

\*These visitor counts are based on guestbook entries only.

## LEADERBOARD

1	IOWA	2588	★
2	NEBRASKA	1722	▲
3	CALIFORNIA	358	▲
4	MINNESOTA	337	▼
5	COLORADO	268	▲

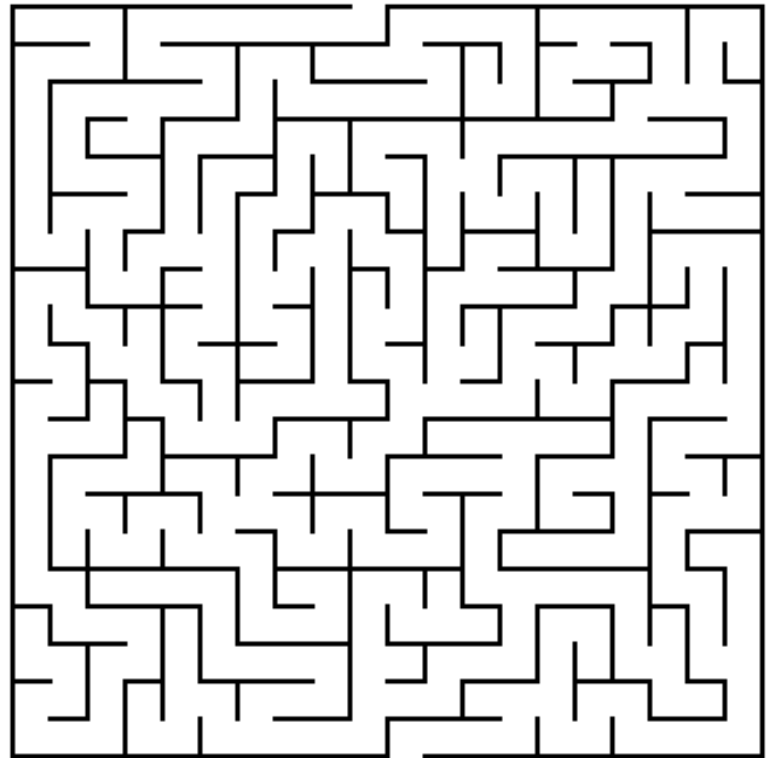
Iowa leads the 2nd quarter with 2588 visitors!

# Activity Page

IS YOUR FAMILY FROM DENMARK?  
CAN YOU MARK WHERE?



FIND YOUR WAY  
TO THE MILL



WRITE YOUR NAME IN VIKING RUNES

f	u	th	a	r	k	q	w	h	n	i	j	ei
p	z	s	t	b	e	m	l	ng	d	o		

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## New Member Benefit

We appreciate all of the support our members in the surrounding communities have given us and are always trying to think of new ways to give something back. This year, we set out to build a collection of yard games for our visitors to enjoy. We'll always have them out for special events, but members can come down and borrow them from our soon-to-be library of games whenever the Mill is open. We currently have axe throwing, cornhole, and kubb (a Viking yard game).



*A young Viking in training hitting the target*

### HELP US SAVE PAPER

**To save paper (and postage), you can elect to receive this newsletter electronically. If you would like to switch to paperless, give us a call at (712) 764-7472 or email us at [info@danishwindmill.com](mailto:info@danishwindmill.com).**

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## Are you a member?

Become a member today and receive direct copies of *The Breeze* by mail or email.

Additional benefits include:

- Free tours of the windmill & vikinghjem
- 10% off in the gift shop and online
- Direct access to news, updates, and catalogs
- Exclusive digital access to historical materials related to our windmill (coming soon)
- Pride of supporting a local museum

**Family  
membership  
coming  
soon!**

**Become a member today:  
call (712) 764-7472**

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