

Jottings

Spring 2025

JACOB AUGUST RIIS - DANISH-AMERICAN REFORMER

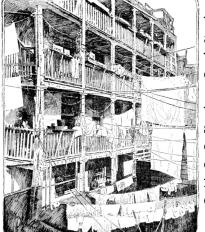
Jacob Riis, a late-nineteenth-century Danish immigrant of meager resources, followed his interests and became one of the most significant contributors to social reform in the city of New York and generally throughout America.

Jacob August Riis was born on May 3, 1849, in Ribe, Denmark, reputedly the oldest city in that country. The third of fifteen children, many of whom eventually died of tuberculosis ("consumption," as it was commonly known then), he chose to become a carpenter. Riis moved to Copenhagen to finish his training in that occupation after being discouraged by his master when it was discovered that Riis had a romantic interest in that man's daughter (Elisabeth Gjørtz). He later returned to Ribe where he found poor prospects for both employment and for romance. This led to his decision to emigrate to America, which he did in 1870, arriving at Ellis Island on June 6th, at the age of twenty-one with a gift from friends of \$40 (about \$700 in 2025) in his pocket.

So impressed was he with life in the turbulent and booming city of New York that his first purchase was for a \$20 pistol for self-defense. There is no report that he ever used it.

Through an interest in writing and several lucky incidents, Riis found his life's work in social reform when he was hired to write an article for the New York News Association. He eventually bought a small paper, *The News*, which he improved and soon sold for five times what he had paid for it. It was that money that financed his trip back to Ribe to marry Elisabeth, whose fiancé had died, and fetch her back to New York.

Upon returning, Riis got back into news reporting, first with the *Brooklyn News* and eventually *The*

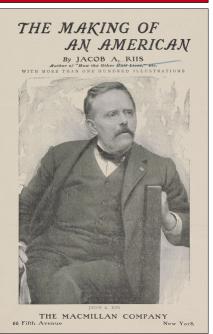


A tenement house on Roosevelt Street in lower Manhattan (line drawing of a photograph from *How The Other Half Lives*, 1890.

New-York Tribune. It was there that an incident from his youth in Denmark blossomed into a life of social reform. On that occasion, when he was still less than thirteen years old, he was so moved by the condition of a family living in a rat-infested tenement in Ribe that he gave them all the money he had, if they would agree to clean up their home. They did, and Jacob's mother also helped out when she learned of what he had done.

In his work as a reporter, Riis became intensely interested in the plight of the poor, largely immigrant population that was packed tightly into multistory run-down tenement houses in lower Manhattan, reputedly the most densely populated area on Earth. At the same time, he became interested in developments in flash photography, which by then used magnesium powder ignited on a metal plate to light a scene, and began using this technique to document what he saw on the streets, especially at night.

His February 12, 1888, article in *The Sun* included line drawings based upon those photographs. There he reported on his work as "pictures of Gotham's crime and misery by night and day...a foundation for a lecture called 'The Other Half: How It Lives and Dies in New York' to give at church and Sunday school exhibitions, and the like." This work evolved into an eighteen-



page article in *Scribner's Magazine* (Christmas, 1889) and later into his famous book *How The Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (1890). Riis's life as a social reformer had begun. That work extended to many areas of public welfare and well-being: poverty; housing conditions; the quality of the water supply; and, harking back to the deaths of several of his own siblings, the fight against tuberculosis through the sale of Christmas Seals, a highly successful idea originated in Denmark by Einar Holbøll.

Riis published several books and numerous articles over the years, most, of them dealing with such social problems. (Several of those works, long out of copyright, are available on the internet if not in book outlets.)



"Street Arabs", a photograph used for *How the Other Half Lives* in 1890. Riis used this term to refer to children who led a nomadic life on the streets. Some were immigrants from the Middle East, many not.

While working as a police reporter for the *New-York Tribune*, Riis became acquainted with the President of the New York City Board of Police Commissioners by the name of Theodore Roosevelt, who began to accompany Jacob on his nightly investigations in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. There TR was surprised to find that 90% of the police officers assigned to duty were not at their posts. He soon remedied that. Roosevelt and Riis developed a close friendship through their mutual interest in the reform movement that they had helped to found in the late 1800s. Each wrote and made statements in support of the other, and Riis was a frequent guest at the White House and Roosevelt's Oyster Bay home, Sagamore Hill, on Long Island.

The two men did have some areas of disagreement, however. For example, *The New York Times* reported in September of 1906 that Riis

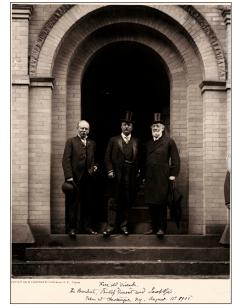
"strongly objected" to Roosevelt's support for reforming the spelling of some five hundred English words: "clapt" instead of "clapped", "clipt" for "clipped" and so on. Just why Riis preferred the the traditional "neighbour" to Roosevelt's proposed "neighbor" is unclear. Riis made the tongue-in-cheek comment that "[t]he President is ten years younger than I am, and he has not yet reached the age of conservatism."

In 1904, the Riis family visited family and friends in Denmark, an event he describes in *The Old Town*. There they were surprised by an invitation for all to dine with Crown Prince Frederik and Crown Princess Louise and their children, which meant that they spent the evening with two future kings of Denmark,

Frederik (VIII) and his sons Christian (X) and Carl (Haakon VII of Norway).

During Riis's later years, the press in New York and throughout the United States reported on his faltering health. Such interest was a measure of the esteem in which he was held following many years of identifying serious social problems and working for their solutions. *The New York Times* reported on his death at Barre, Massachusetts, on May 26, 1914, recounting his social work and quoting a tribute from Theodore Roosevelt upon hearing of the death, "I am grieved more than I can express.... Jake's friendship has meant more for me than I can say.... When I was Police Commissioner for New York, I felt that Jacob Riis was the most useful citizen of New York. In all the United States, I never knew a more useful man nor a stauncher citizen." Not a bad epitaph for the young Dane who had arrived in America with just \$40 in his pocket.

Various parks, schools and housing projects bear the name of Jacob Riis. One not named for him, but an early direct result of his work and one about which he could be justifiably proud, was the conversion in 1897 of Mulberry Bend to Mulberry Park (now Columbus Park), the one-time site of the infamous tenement houses about which he had reported.



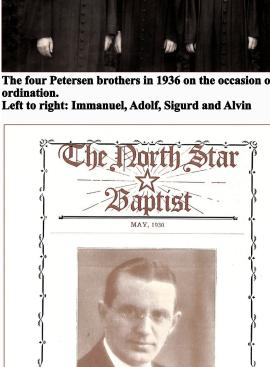
"Three Old Friends" Jacob Riis, President Roosevelt and Bishop John Vincent at the New York State Chautauqua, 1905.

Executive Director's Report

Within the family histories and documents the DAAL preserves, we often find a strong connection to a church.

Although the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church (UDELC) had already merged with other churches before I was born, I still feel like it was part of my heritage.

The four Petersen brothers in 1936 on the occasion of Alvin's ordination.



The Rev. Aage W. Warren, a Danish immigrant, is memorialized in this May 1930 issue of The North Star Baptist, a publication of the Minnesota Baptist Convention.

REV. A. W. WARREN First Baptist Church, Clark's Grove Died March 30th, 1930

I was born in Racine, Wisconsin and my family attended Emmaus Lutheran Church. My grandfather, Rev. Sigurd Petersen, was a former pastor of Emmaus and he came back to

baptize me there – in the same church he had confirmed my mother. Three of Sigurd's brothers (Immanuel, Adolf and Alvin) were also pastors in the UDELC, as was their uncle Niels Damskov.

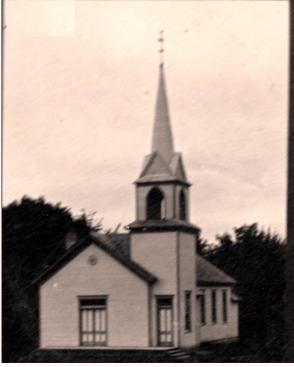
In 1975, my family moved to Poy Sippi, Wisconsin where we attended First Lutheran Church, the church of my father's boyhood. My great-great grandfather, Anders Jorgensen, was one of the charter members of that congregation. When we arrived, about a third of the congregation was related to Anders and his wife

Ane Marie, so each Sunday was a minifamily reunion. Their grandson Rev. Sidney Jorgensen and greatgrandson Rev. Jerome Godson became pastors (see "Parting Shot" on the last page).

Executive Director

Jill Hennick

The DAAL seeks to preserve the religious heritage of all Danish Americans. Over 330 of our archival boxes contain church information. Although most of our church collection is about the two Danish Lutheran synods, we also have information on Danish Adventists, Baptists, Methodists and others.



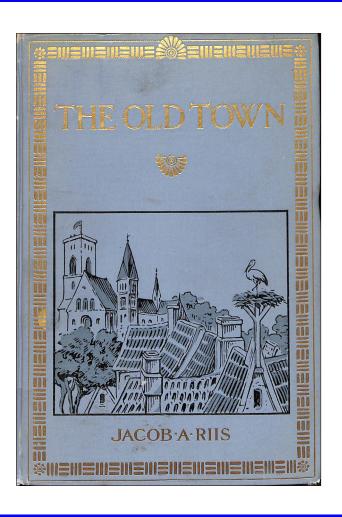
First Lutheran Church, Poy Sippi, Wisconsin in 1880 (when it known as Lazarus Lutheran) The original building was incorporated into a new church in 1955.





Jill Hennick, Executive Director 1738 Washington Street, Blair, Nebraska 68008 Telephone: (402) 426-7910 E-mail: info@danishamericanarchive.com Hours: 8am-3 pm, Monday-Friday

Old Book On The Shelf



Jacob Riis is perhaps the most wellknown of Danish Americans. His photographs of the poor in the squalid tenements and back alleys of New York City are classics in the history of American photography. He also wrote books on the subject such as How the Other Half Lives and The Battle with the Slum. His pride in achieving a measure of success in the New World is reflected in the title of his autobiography The Making of an American. In 1909, his sixtieth year, Riis wrote a book that was entitled simply *The Old Town*. The old town is Ribe, Jacob's hometown, the oldest town in Denmark. The work is both a reminiscence of his youth and a description of his family's trip to Denmark in 1904. It gives the reader a pleasing portrait of the social life and customs of this southern Jutland community in the middle to late 19th century.

From The Dana Room







DID YOU KNOW...Dana College had a commuter bus service? Beginning in 1935, Dana started a commuter bus service in Nebraska that ran between Blair and Tekamah. It expanded to include Craig, Herman and additional stops in Blair. At the time, Dana's commuter bus service was the only one of its kind in the United States.

When Betty Korshoj stepped off the corner in Herman, Nebraska, and boarded the bus for her first day of school, she had no idea how it would change her life. Even though they lived 7 miles apart, she had never met the driver, Gene Megrue, until that morning. Once they arrived on campus he showed her around. That evening she wrote in her diary that she "really liked him". Their first date was in 1942 and they were able to celebrate their 70th wedding anniversary together in 2016. •

Archive Report November 2024 - February 2025

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Facebook.

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50/100 Club:

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Richard & Delores Jorgensen, Poy Sippi, WI
Charles & Janet Kahn, Gulf Breeze, FL
Marty & Linda Koefoed, Missouri Valley, IA
Nancy Lindblad, Blair, NE Kent & Ann Lynch, Edwards, IL Gary & Diane Madsen, Omaha, NE Lowell & Sue Madsen, Fresno, CA Leon & Alice Neve, St. Paul, MN Karen Nielsen, Racine, WI Liz Olney, Yakima, WA Dixie Petersen, Wichita, KS Sandy Sonderup, Blair, NE Nick Temali, Mahtomedi, MN Mark L. Thomsen, Milwaukee, WI Washington County Community Foundation, Blair,

LeRoy Wigdahl, Blair, NE

\$500 - \$999 Jean Barry, Kearney, NE Schwab Charitable Fund by Keith & Paula Anderson Dennis Barten, Manning, IA
Patricia Bentsen, Blair, NE
Becky & Phil Bryant, East Dubuque, IL Danish Brotherhood Lodge #35, Chicago, IL Danish Sisterhood Ellen Lodge #21, Littleton, CO William E. & Rose Marie Davis Foundation, Bennington, NE Cheryl & Kevin Dunbar, Wahoo, NE Jon & Beth Fredlund, Anoka, MN Stuart Hansen & Erica Eddy, Mount Pleasant, WI Erik & Sara Jensen, Omaha, NE Vibeke Jensen, Bennington, NE Chuck & Joyce Jorgensen, Blair, NE Carol Knutson, Preston, MN Bill Krause, Columbia, MO Lorene Larsen, Omaha, NE Toni Lawson, Green Bay, WI Peter Mathiasen, BC, Canada Barbara Meduna, Monument, CO
Donald Nelson, Cedar Rapids, IA
Vordyn Nelson, Marshall, TX
Roger & Marilyn Nichols, Tucson, AZ
Beth Paulsen-Olmstead, Westbrook, ME Collyn Peterson, Overland Park, KS Jay Planalp, Loveland, CO Scott & Colleen Rasmussen, Omaha, NE Bill & Margaret Rodenburg, Centerville, OH Deb Schou Wood, Bloomington, MN Sandy Wunder, Eaton, CO

\$250 - \$499

Al & Fran Anderson, Omaha, NE Assured Life Association, Englewood, CO Mark Bondo, Freehold, NJ Barbara & Dennis Garrett, Blair, NE Scott & Shelly Grorud, Hutchinson, MN Julie Huetteman, Lafayette, IN Rudi & Jean Jaspersen-Naegle, Germany Lorraine Jensen, Bloomington, MN Jim & Linda Jorgensen, Blair, NE Lee Anne & Eugene Lack, Montrose, MN Keith & Lori Larsen, Blair, NE Liz Larsen, Cupertino, CA Carl L.M. & Nancy Rasmussen, Sugar Grove, IL Kathryn Ryan, Beaver Dam, WI Jens & Eileen Simonsen, Oakdale, NE Ron & Vicki Vig, Holdrege, NE

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Frida Brewer, Lampasas, TX
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Lois Carter, Shreveport, LA
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Esther Grindberg, Circle Pines, MN
Sylvia & Bill Hamilton, Tucson, AZ
Joe H. & Rose Jean Hansen, Des Moines, IA Kay Hansen, Pleasant Ridge, MI Lucy Hansen, Tipton, IA David Hendee (Northfield, MN)

ENDOWMENT FUND

The endowment fund is an investment in the future of the Archive. Some named funds have been established in memory of loved ones. The balance in the endowment follows. Figures are rounded to the nearest \$500 and are listed at historic cost.

Ada Stokes Jeppesen Memorial Fund	\$123,000
Deloris Hansen Bengtson Memorial Fund	96,500
Oscar & Dody Johnson Memorial Fund	16,000
Bernhard & Marilyn Erling Memorial Fund	12,500
Rev. Aster & Ruth Neve Family Memorial Fund	10,000
Dagmar Vasby Memorial Fund	10,000
John T. & Virginia (Lippincott) Beck Memorial Fund	9,000
Martin & Else Andersen Memorial Fund	7,000
Earl Jensen Family Memorial Fund	5,000
Rev. Sigurd D. & Dorothy M. Petersen Memorial Fund	5,000
Maryann & Jerry Lund Memorial Fund	3,500
Myrvin & Anne Christopherson Fund	<u> </u>
Subtotal of named funds with balances over \$1,000	299,000
General Endowment Fund	<u>95,000</u>
Total Endowment Funds	\$394,000

NOTE: The figures above include realized earnings accumulated in each fund since the original donation. Although not reflected above, the DAAL board also monitors the market value. With the fluctuating economy, the DAAL is fortunate that it hasn't had to use any of the earnings of our endowment fund for yearly expenses. The fund continues to build equity. Ideally, we would grow the endowment to a minimum of \$2.5 million before beginning to draw upon earnings.

Mark Hennick/Plum Design (Kansas City, MO) Mary Henriksen & Alan Hanson, Omaha, NE Sue & Charles Hettinger, Omaha, NE Beverly Horning, Omaha, NE Suellen Hudson, Pensacola, FL Frederik & Dawn Jensen, Minnetonka, MN Ken & Bonnie Jensen, Albert Lea, MN Paul & Jayne Jensen, Cresco, IA Sharon Jensen, Omaha, NE Lynda Jeppesen, Oak Park, IL Dorothy Jepson, Onawa, IA Clifford Jessen, Apple Valley, CA Marjorie Johnson, Blair, NE David & Michele Johnson, Council Bluffs, IA
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Gregory Mickells, Madison, WI Gregory Mickells, Madison, WI Linda Karen Miller, Henderson, NV Norma Mitchell, Lincoln, NE NE Dist. Danish Sisterhood, Ceresco, NE Chevenne & David Nordquist, Atlantic, IA Cheyenne & David Nordquist, Atlantic, Folmer & Vera Nyby, Michigan City, IN Dwayne Olsen, Prior Lake, MN Jim & Sue Olsen, Blair, NE Lois Olson, Shakopee, MN Philip Panum, Englewood, CO Agnes Paulsen, Tucson, AZ Ted Pedersen, Duluth, MN John E. Peterson, Pottstown, PA John E. Peterson, Pottstown, PA
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Nancy Kay, Omana, NE
Gladys Kempe, Tustin, CA
Ramona Klaasmeyer, Omaha, NE
Martin O. Kuhr, Jr., Blair, NE
Tom & Janice Lippincott Fund of the Washington
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Ruth & Dale Mortensen, North Olmsted, OH

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\$49 and Under Connie Andersen, Blair, NE

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JOTTINGS FLASHBACK - OCTOBER 2002

Phenomenal Growth: When in 1988 the first small group of archive volunteers gave new life to the Danish Immigrant Archive,* it consisted of 31 collections of letters and documents besides an impressive array of books and a number of unexamined boxes of items. In the intervening years the corps of volunteers has expanded... and the number of collections has expanded to 279! In addition to these added collections there has been a significant increase in the book holdings. Besides all this, the archive has become the official repository for The Danish Brotherhood in America...and The Danish

American Heritage Society. During the past year the archive has received the periodical holdings of Danebod Folk High School in Tyler, Minnesota. A further indication of growth and interest is the quarterly publication of these *Jottings*. Currently about 360 people are on our mailing list.** To remain active recipients make a financial donation, a gift of material or both during the course of the year. •



The Danish Immigrant Archive at Dana in 2002 Seated left to right: Luella Nielsen, Norman Bansen and Bee Krantz.

*In 2002 the DAAL was known as the Danish Immigrant Archive at Dana College

**Since this writing the number of boxed collections has increased to over 650 and the number of *Jottings* recipients to over 1300!

The current and all past issues of the Jottings are available on our main website (https://danishamericanarchive.com) and in our Digital Archive (http://archive.danishamericanarchive.net).

Linda Pedersen, Omaha, NE
Carol Petersen, Lincoln, NE
Eric Petersen, Mission, KS
Nita Richards, Omaha, NE
Gary & Karen Riddle, Blair, NE
Eldon & Nancy Rowlett, Lodgepole, NE
Cindy Schou, Bloomington, MN
Anna & Pete Speiser, Emerson, NE
Rob Stone, Omaha, NE
Nina Strain, Modale, IA
Paul Swanson, Omaha, NE
Rita Wilcox, Blair, NE
■

News From The Archive

Volunteers

In 2024, we had 24 new volunteers – the most ever! They:

- identified photographs from Dana College
- sorted and organized documents
- alphabetized
- did computer entry
- scanned materials to make digital copies
- Added new files to the Digital Archive's Collections
- Resurrected and archived data from ancient floppy discs from numerous collections and Dana College files
- Helped to produce this edition of the Jottings
- Consumed a lot of coffee, a moderate amount of tea and an immoderate number of calories.

Even greeting guests or working on Facebook posts or being a hostess at morning coffee breaks or dusting the shelves are a great help to the staff. There's no end to the possibilities of how individuals can use their talents at the DAAL. And, there's no requirement to read or translate Danish (though it is certainly welcome).

Upcoming Volunteer Events:

Dana Work Days - June 17-19, 2025 Fall Volunteer Week - October 6-10, 2025

Additions to the Digital Archive

List of books read in the Dana College Liberal Arts Reading Program (LARP)

List of Danish Brotherhood Society 79,303 members (PDF, 1,587 pages, 9.2 MB)

List of DAAL's Collections in the stacks and of the Family Collections (PDFs)

Several Collections in the stacks and one Special Collection have been made available for public viewing •

of the Jottings nev	ation ur interest in the Danish American Archive and Library. All members enjoy three issues was expected by the service fees. The newsletter is mailed in Marcer. Please keep your contact information current.
OLD ADDRESS: Nome(s)	·
	dress
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Name(s)	
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City	State Zip
If not perma	anent:Temporary from/(month/year) to/(month/year)Seasonal (repeat every year) from(month) to(month)
Phone	Email (send Jottings via email)
	tion

Featured Danish American Commemorative Wall Panel

https://danishamericanarchive.com/danish-american-commemorative-wall-gallery/



Bollerup Jensen (1879-1949) and his brother Mourids Martinus Jensen (1877-1955) immigrated to America in 1902. Bollerup became a successful businessman in Chicago. He started two businesses, the Inglewood Dairy Company and the Englewood Trucking Company. His first wife, Christine Nielsen Jensen, died in childbirth in 1911. In 1944 he married Frances Knudsen of Boston. Bollerup was a second father to his nephew, Rev. Anker Morris Jensen (son of Mourids), whose higher education he paid for and whom he mentored. He was well-known for his generosity and his involvement in the United Evangelical Lutheran Church and with his fellow Danish Americans.



The Commemorative Wall at the DAAL was created to honor and remember Danish-American individuals, families and institutions.

The Wall continues to grow. A limited number of panels are still available.

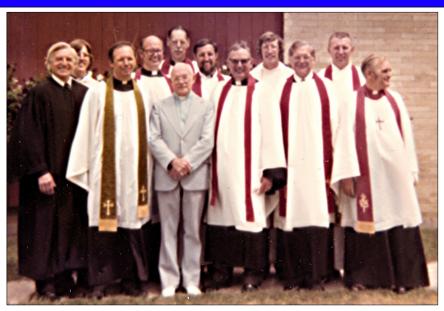
We will continue to feature a panel in each issue of the newsletter.

To see all of the panels, you have two options. The first is to stop by and view the exhibit in person. The second is to visit the Commemorative Wall Gallery on our website. \blacksquare



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

PARTING SHOT



This photograph was taken in 1975 at the 100th anniversary of First Lutheran Church in Poy Sippi, Wisconsin. Pictured are six pastors who served the congregation and six pastors who grew up in the church. The latter are known as "sons of the congregation". This year the congregation will celebrate their 150th anniversary.

Front row: Rev. Sidney Jorgensen, Dr. Mark Thomsen, Rev. J. H. Thomsen, Rev. Stanley Hansen, Rev. Raymond Paulsen, Rev. Norman Freund

Back row: Rev. Jerome Godson, Rev. C. R. Becker, Dr. R. E. Morton, Rev. C. D. Harrison, Rev. James Carpenter, Rev. F. Schroeder ■