Dedicated to Jes's wife Adelheid and his son Erik Smidt.

Without their commitment, sacrifice and hard work, Jes would never have been able to spend the long hours carving works of art still enjoyed by his descendants and congregations throughout the country.
About the Author

Edwin Smidt Pedersen grew up on a farm at the end of Main St. in Luck, Wisconsin, with the church community of West Denmark playing an integral role in his life. He enlisted in the Navy during WW II and served in the Pacific. He earned a two-year degree from Grand View College in Des Moines, Iowa, and graduated with a BA in History and an MA in English Literature from Macalesier College in St. Paul, Minnesota. In addition to a successful career as a high school English teacher, Edwin has devoted much time to his community and has a keen, active interest in politics. With a passion for woodworking, writing, and history, this biography of his grandfather was a labor of love.

He and Donna, his wife of 61 years, live in Luck.
According to legend, Ozymandias, an ancient ruler, commissioned a sculptor to create a giant statue of himself, and into the pedestal he had the sculptor cut these words: “Look on my work, ye mighty, and despair.”

In time all that was left of his mighty work was the boast itself and the statue tumbled into the desolation stretching mile on mile that he had created through his ambition. The only positive legacy left to posterity was the work of the nameless sculptor. Through his artistry and craftsmanship, one could still read the ambition and cruel contempt on the face of the mighty Ozymandias.

And so it seems often the case. The mighty men of history leave a legacy of cemeteries, burned out cities, and destroyed lives. It is the men and women who serve as fuel for their ambitions who leave a lasting contribution to the future. It is they, when the price of ambition has been paid, who recreate order out of chaos, bury the dead, bind up the wounds, rebuild the shattered cities, and regenerate the ravaged earth. It is they who begin to restore the treasures of civilization, the literature, art, music, sculpture, and architecture. So long as the Bismarcks, the Napoleons, and the Hitlers of the world lay their plans for their kind of world, the hopes and dreams of the common people become correspondingly less possible to fulfill.

The century between the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815 and the beginning of World War I in 1914 is known as the “Century of Peace.” And though there were no great wars in Europe during this time, the struggle for power among the ambitious leaders changed the lives of ordinary men and women as much as the Napoleonic wars that preceded and the World War that ended the century. The little brush fire wars that burned here and there throughout this “peaceful century” were just as devastating to individuals involved as the great wars. Their soldiers and fathers were just as dead, the conquered just as crushed and humiliated, and the victors just as arrogant and oppressive as in the wars that preceded and ended the “Century of Peace.”

One of the festering sores in Europe was the Slesvig-Holstein question. This dispute concerning succession, the clash of Danish and German nationalism, the threat to international balance of power, and the problems of minorities had kept these two duchies in turmoil as early as the 12th century. In more modern times, the first crisis had come in the period from 1846 to 1852 culminating in the War of 1848-1850. An unsteady peace was finally brought about as much by the pressure of other European countries against further Prussian expansions as by Danish victory at Idstedt.

In 1862 when Bismarck came to power the question of control was still open, and a second crisis developed, due perhaps as much to Bismarck’s drive toward German unification as any other cause. This time Denmark stood alone against the growing Prussian might and after a brief spell of fighting from June to July 1864, the question of control became academic. After the Seven Weeks War between Austria and Prussia in which the Austrians were utterly routed, the Peace of Prague in 1866 ceded the Duchies of Holstein and Slesvig to Prussia, including North Slesvig which was predominantly Danish.
It was into this land of contention that Jes Petersen Smidt was born on May 5, 1855 in the little village of Faurvraa, Tyrstrup Sogn (Parish) in the Province of North Slesvig, Denmark. His ancestors on both his father’s and mother’s side had lived in the region for many generations. (A family tree is included at the end of this book.) Many of them had been blacksmiths. His father was a blacksmith; both of his grandfathers had been blacksmiths, as were several of his uncles. His father’s father, Therkild Petersen, a blacksmith in Uhurmark, Lejerskov Sogn, had died when his father was very young, but his grandmother, Kirsten Nielsdatter Schmidt, had lived into her eighties. From her he learned much of the history and of the people of his hometown of Faurvraa. Of her, he writes, “Between Egholdt—there she lived in her later years with a daughter—and Faurvraa there were approximately four Danish miles.* I visited my grandmother a couple of times a year. It was an experience for me to be in her presence and talk with her. She had learned much in the school of life, and she had a healthy outlook on many things. Author Jakob Knudsen’s father was her pastor, and they had many good intellectual visits together. From what I heard, he held her in high esteem.”

Jes writes further of her description of Faurvraa as it was in her childhood. She had, as a young girl, helped to harvest the buckwheat in the fields across from Jes’s boyhood home. In Jes’s own youth these fields had already grown into stands of linden, beech and other species of trees. In her childhood, she said, the streams were full of fish. A large estate belonging to the nobility, with magnificent buildings now fallen into ruin, had bordered her childhood home. There her father, also a blacksmith, had gone from time to time to shoe horses on the estate, and “fik hver gang foruden betaling en daler i drikkepenge.” each time got a dollar in drinking money in addition to his pay, a tip. All these things, the important and the trivial of the everyday life of his people, Jes learned and remembered.

As required of all Danish men, Jes’s father, Arendt Smidt, had to serve for a time in the army. At the time of his conscription, however, there was no need for all of the men. Lots were drawn and those with a high number were free from service, among them Arendt. But then came the Danish-Prussian War of 1848-50, and he was again called. He served, for a time, in a company called the Jegere or Hunters, and then in 1849 he was among twelve men selected from the ranks of the right wing to serve with the marines. It was while serving on a warship, the Geiser, in the Battle of Helgoland that this story well could have come to an end. A piece of grapeshot, an inch in diameter, fired from an enemy cannon grazed his temple, slammed into the funnel of his ship behind him, and fell spent to the deck. Arendt picked it up and kept it for many years as a souvenir of his brush with death. The next year he returned to his original company and took part in the Battle of Idstedt where a great number of Danes fell, especially from his company.

*Four old Danish miles equal about 18 3/4 U.S. miles
After the war Arendt settled in Faurvraa as a blacksmith in the same smithy that his grandfather had had. In 1854 he married Anne Eleonore Grau, the daughter of Jes Grau. Anne's mother had died when Anne was four years old and Jes Grau had married Dorethea Ravn. Of her, Jes Smidt writes years later, "My step-grandmother was one of those who do not think of themselves, but give themselves for others. We children have an endless amount to thank her for. She was painstaking in all that she did. She did all the work in the kitchen and the housework. My mother had enough to do with the spinning and sewing to make clothes for all of us in the family."

Jes was the oldest child of a large family; there were never fewer than ten to be fed and clothed, including his maternal grandparents Jes and Dorethea Grau. They had given his parents the little farm of eleven acres (8 tonde) on the condition they should live with them for the rest of their lives. Arendt worked in the smithy and cared for the farm. They generally had four or five cows and sometimes a horse, or they would hire the plowing and sowing done. Of this time, Jes writes, "We were never in need of food or clothing, but at the same time it was difficult for my parents to get money for taxes and rent and from time to time we had a great deal of sickness. Several of my siblings died of diphtheria and my mother, at one time, had a long siege of illness brought on by this same disease."

It was during this time that the brief war that was to place Jes's part of Denmark under the domination of Germany took place, the new border being just a couple miles north of Faurvraa. Of this he did not write. It could be that this was too traumatic an event to voice. From other accounts of the effect this had on young school age children one senses the anger and the attempts by youngsters to fight against their German masters in school and at play. School lessons and content were now all German; church services were conducted in German with German pastors. Occasional comments over the years would register the bitterness he felt. According to his grammar school notebooks, still in existence, it is during this time that he again began to sign his name Jes P. Smidt, leaving out the Germanic "ch." The real effect of the German occupation would come in a few years.

In the future, stories of the occupation would be told to her children by Adelheid Raben, a young girl also growing up in Faurvraa at this time, and destined to marry Jes. Her father had been forced into hiding for some cause. She remembered Prussian soldiers stabbing bayonets into haystacks and bedding, and of their being billeted in her home.

Several notebooks kept by Jes and still in existence give some indication of the education he received as a boy and later in folk school. One mathematics assignment in his last year of Grammar school was the making of a complete interest table. Other problems dealt with weights and measures—gross, tare, and net weights. A notebook from Vinding Folk School shows work in finding square roots out to fourteen digits and problems in trigonometry. Another notebook shows comprehensive notes of soil chemistry and the geology of Denmark including explanations of the formation of the chalk cliff, shore lines, and geological land formations of various parts of Denmark. There are drawings of how lakes were gradually transformed into the many peat bogs found in Denmark.
Further notes contain information on the fundamentals of veterinary medicine for the care of horses and other domestic animals. There are very complete notes naming the body parts of the animal, problems associated with the various parts, and the possible means of relieving the difficulty. Another notebook is devoted entirely to surveying and land measurement with many illustrations and tables, plus notes on actual measurements of specific farms in the vicinity of Vinding Folk School. One small notebook is a bound together series of short stories, vignettes, and fables written by Jes, along with the corrections of spelling and other errors made probably by the instructor.

In addition to giving a good indication of his educational background, the illustrations and his doodling as early as the age of fourteen show an interest in design and drawing. Unfortunately, notes written in both his and other hands, and which appear to be greetings and comments by him and his friends have been cut out, showing only the first words or parts of words. These, if available, would have given an interesting insight into the everyday interests of him and his friends. His school notebooks seem to indicate that he finished his grammar school education in 1869.

Confirmation generally coincided with the conclusion of formal education and the beginning of apprenticeship for the children of farmers and tradesmen. After his confirmation in April of 1871 Jes would have preferred to have been apprenticed as a joiner and cabinetmaker (snedker), but his father convinced him that he should apprentice as a wooden shoe maker. His father’s reasoning was that after a relatively short time he could return home, work in the home and help support the family. Looking at it from this distance, it is possible that Arendt felt that Jes as the oldest son had first claim to the property and so should remain at home. It is also possible that the six foot tall blacksmith believed that Jes, who was relatively small should not follow the family trade, nor any trade requiring physical strength, but rather should seek an occupation more in keeping with his physique. Whatever the reasoning, it was evidently thoroughly discussed. Jes was apprenticed to a wooden shoe maker named Niels Faaborg in the nearby village of Hejls. After an apprenticeship of six months, he returned home and worked at his newly acquired trade. He was perhaps sixteen at the time.

How long he remained a wooden shoe maker is not certain. From a statement made years later to a friend, we do know that he found the long rows of half finished blocks of wood depressing. As he himself writes concerning this period of his life, “In one way it went well enough, but my spirit really was not in it, and I could not see that I could create a future for myself in this manner; furthermore, I was not helping my parents.”

The upshot of this was that after a couple of years he left Faurvraa for Copenhagen where he attended the Central Vocational Training School for a time. Upon returning home he again writes, “I then taught manual training during the winter for several years in Frerup and Stepping, and in Bogeskov and Tyrstrup where I taught all types of crafts in the evening.”

The Danish word for manual training is husflid, or literally cottage industry. But it is not the cottage industry in the sense of the small family industries of the pre-industrial revolution period. Husflid was more the skills and crafts for making both useful and decorative articles for home and small farm. A reference book, Vejledning i Landbohusflid, which, as evidenced by a notation on the flyleaf, may have been awarded to Jes for excellence in school, explains and illustrates nearly one hundred skills and projects that a competent young man might learn in order to best manage his life and property.

First shown are the types of hand tools, their home manufacture, and their use and care: saws, planes, chisels, drawknives, and the like. Next come the simple projects of shelves, stools, benches, ironing boards, a combination chair and step ladder, clothes racks, and much else. For
the farm it shows how to make wooden hay rakes, harrows, wooden shovels and hay forks, grain flails, wheelbarrows, gates, wooden tubs and pails, and even a simple vogles— a light-weight little thatched framed hut that little boys who herded sheep and cattle could easily carry about to shelter themselves from the elements. Shown are directions for joining with dovetails, making nature furniture of rough bent tree branches, and even directions for making and using a turning lathe powered by a foot treadle. There are also the skills of soldering, rope making, paint making, and the making of brushes and brooms. In short husfjæld covered all the useful and decorative arts needed by a small landowner in a rural economy. As a young manual training teacher Jes doubtless knew and taught many of these skills.

On March 26, 1880 his mother died after a lingering illness, quite possibly tuberculosis. After having a series of housekeepers, all of whom proved unsatisfactory, his father remarried. Jes again journeyed to Copenhagen where he worked in a number of places and then applied for and received a scholarship to attend Vinding Folk School, where, as Jes was careful to note, Hans Rosendahl was headmaster. As previously mentioned, his notebooks from this period show that he received a very thorough education in a number of subjects.

The decision to emigrate to America must have come quite suddenly, because he had no more than finished the winter session at Vinding than he decided to accompany his brother Peter to America. Two of his brothers, Therkild and Theodor, were already in Clinton, Iowa, and they had sent Peter a ticket to travel to the United States. Before Jes could leave, however, he must get a certificate from the Prussian rulers allowing him to emigrate. This certificate grants him permission to leave because, as it says, he is too small and stvig (weak) to serve in the Prussian army. It seems likely that one of the reasons the other brothers chose to leave is that they anticipated having to serve in the armies of their hated Prussian master. It was at this time that Prussia decreed that all Danish men must register for their army at age twenty.

There exist two letters from this period written by Jes and fortunately for one reason or another not sent. Perhaps it was that the writing is so small and cramped that the letter was rewritten before being sent. However it is, the one is almost a journal of his trip to America. Both letters reveal a young man on an adventure, observant of everything around him and with both a humorous and serious outlook on life. The first is written to his friends at Karlberg and dated May 9, 1882.

Jes writes: “Before I went aboard the Gjøser I had made the same decision as do so many, to keep a journal of events. But as is often the case this came to nothing for a number of reasons. However I wish to give a short account of things of which there is no lack. On Thursday after leaving Copenhagen the ship came to Kristians Harbor in Norway. It was really enjoyable for me in that last winter we discussed Norway a good deal. We got the impression that Norway is one large rock. The entrance is very beautiful.” Jes then describes in good detail the fjord, the steep hillsides of fir trees, the comfortable small homes along the way, and the beautiful sunset as seen from the ship. He writes of the beauty of the city of Kristiania, and then in some detail
of the ship from the upper deck down to third class where there are 60 Danish men and three Swedes. The food is very good and plentiful, but for the most part they must stand up while eating, holding their bowls in the one hand. There is soup and peas and *sowiedruppe* (sweetsoup or fruit soup). In the morning there is coffee, which is not good and in the afternoon wheat bread. They can have as much rye bread as they want, as well as salted herring. Many of the passengers become seasick and those on the top bunk throw up on the neck of those below. A little child dies.

He writes, “We can all converse in Danish and for entertainment we dance, walk on the deck with the ladies, read, some play cards, some sing, and complain that it is becoming boring. Among so many there are always a couple of comedians, and we have two dapper fellows. One is a dairymen and was formerly a second lieutenant. The other has worked for an attorney. They are a pair of witty men who call each other Klestrup and Knastrup. Their tricks and repartee are really entertaining for theirs are truly delightful witticisms, not the crude and coarse humor. The poor Klestrup becomes sea sick and every morning stood and threw up and hollered ‘I want land,’ which of course is not yet in sight.” He writes of a couple of good-looking girls on board, and is somewhat smitten by one. But then he writes that that fire is soon put out when she spends most of her time with another man with more appeal.

The ship encounters a couple of storms. “During the night there is a terrible noise up on deck. The sailors are busy getting the sails furled, and the ship’s course changed.” He continues, “Yesterday it blew so the ship rolled from side to side so the bulwarks were under water. At midday we received our sweetsoup, which is our favorite dish. We stood and spilled on each other and fell. The servants had not gotten enough so we had to go up to the galley to get more. When I had gotten my bowl filled and came out on the deck I fell and stumbled from one side of the ship to the other. I was so unlucky as to spill half of my good sweetsoup. Our steward stood up on the deck and dealt out salt herring, potatoes, and mustard. He set these on the sill that goes down to the hold, but to our great exasperation he slid with all those good things out against the bulwark and spilled it all. Another steward fell with a large pail of sweetsoup, and so it happened to all the food. It was not possible to go along the deck for it stood at all times like the roof of a house. The captain has remarked, so they say, that it has been more than just a storm that night, but one cannot listen to loose rumors, for of those there are many here, because we passengers don’t know much of what goes on. During the night there was a terrible confusion in our quarters. Our trunks were not tied down and flew from one side to the other. Our bowls and plates were mixed up with each other. Our servant had some cases of beer that went on a dangerous trip. When he heard that he went after them and was hit on the head three or four times. He fortunately came back unhurt. It was amazing he didn’t get killed. In spite of the fortunate voyage we have had, I have nevertheless seen what a sailor must often suffer.”

With that he closes with greetings to his friends and with instructions that the letter be sent on to two others in Copenhagen. It seems that the original, written as it was under the difficulties encountered on board a ship, may have been rewritten before being sent.
The foregoing letter was dated May 9, 1882 aboard the Geiser. November of that year finds him in Clinton, Iowa, looking for work. In a second letter, after preliminary greetings and telling of his arrival in Clinton, Jes goes on to tell of the difficulties of finding work. He finds occasional work as a carpenter, but the jobs don't last long. He tries to work as a drayman, but discovers he is not stout enough for the work after only two hours. Finally he gets work on a large farm, and in his own words these are some of his experiences:

In spite of all of America's wealth, both the farmers and businessmen, an American farmer does not appear wealthy when he comes into the city, and the one who hired me did not appear very rich. I thought he probably had a small farm that did not have much work to do, and that I had found a good place. But I thought wrong, he had a large farm with a lot of work. In addition to that he is a hard man to work for. The farm I work on has 200 cattle and 200 pigs, and ten horses.

That first time he asked if I could drink a beer, which you of course know I can as a young man. We each got seven beers for starters. I did not do my share, he on the other hand became drunk, which was not the first time. He drives into town three times a week and always comes home drunk, but that makes no difference, because he has money enough. When he came here he had five dollars.

When we came home to his house I saw all the people I was to live together with, and did not forget to look especially at his daughters, of which he has four, all of them beautiful, one eighteen, and one twenty years old. The other two are not yet confirmed. One is named Elli, the other Mary. Elli I could like best. You must not think, dear friend, that I suddenly fell in love, or anything like that, but as I said, I could best like Elli. I came here on a Saturday evening and on Sunday I had to perform my first job, namely to help the daughters milk, which was mighty unpleasant work because I could not milk. Yes indeed, that Sunday evening I will never forget, my dear friend. I only milked one cow, but only got half done. And I sweat so the sweat ran off me, and in the middle of that situation Elli milked a stream of milk in my face and the cow put its foot in the pail. But that was not the worst of it; no the worst was that the many young girls gathered and they laughed over my milking. Eight days went by and I had not gotten better at milking and Elli had been a little rude to me one evening which I could not forget. Then the farmer came home from town one evening and he was absolutely drunk. He and the missus got into an argument and Elli wanted to say a word on her Mother's behalf. Then the farmer took hold of her hair and slapped her good and also spanked her. I sat and quietly looked on and thought, 'That is very good for you, Elli, now you will be more courteous another time'.

Then it was the Fourth of July. I was going to go to work as usual. I had a tiresome job of hoeing the corn alone. But Elli said I should stay home for it was the Fourth of July. They wanted me along to a picnic and I went though I could not speak an English word. But then Ellie came over and said there was a lady that could converse with me. I saw the lady mentioned and saw that she was not pretty, but just the opposite. But I thought to myself, if she could speak Danish she was like an angel from heaven. But that didn't turn out. She spoke German.

Of his first months in the Clinton area Jes writes, "My first work was with a carpenter out in the country for a couple of weeks. Then I worked on a farm for an Irishman. I was there until nearly Christmas when I moved into town for the winter. Therkild and I got work building
on to the church and raising it so there was room for a children’s school underneath. The addition to the church that had served as a school was moved and added on to so that it became the parsonage. In the meantime I began work at the Disbrown Factory as a wood carver and cabinet maker.”

In his own words again, “A few years after I came to Clinton, F. L. Grundtvig became pastor in Clinton, and I came to know him well and to experience many good hours in his home. I have much to thank him and his wife for. When my wife came here, she stayed with them until we were married.”

He continues, “This was a good and delightful time during Grundtvig’s stay here. Many came to Clinton during this time, both from Denmark and from other Danish colonies, and all came to Grundtvig’s home. After Adelheid and I were married and made our home, many also came to stay in our home.”

One who came was L. Henningsen. In an article “Jes P. Smidt: En Dansk-Americansk Billedskærer” written by Henningsen for the 1925 Julegræn, which can be found in this book on page 41, Henningsen tells of coming to Clinton in the same summer as Jes. They met frequently and soon discovered they shared many common interests. Henningsen, an artist, rented a studio on 5th Avenue, and when they were done with their day’s work would meet and accompany each other to one or the other’s lodgings. And as he writes, “We discussed many good things.”

At his studio Henningsen painted a picture for the altar in the Elk Horn, Iowa, church and Jes carved the altar and frame. They also collaborated on pictures and altars and frames for the Clinton and the Hutchinson, Minnesota, churches. Then in Henningsen’s words, “In the fall of 1884 I moved to Ashland (Michigan) Folk School, and during the winter session of 1884-85 he was my finest art student. He drew the design for the Ashland church.”

An anecdote from their times together relates that they agreed to teach each other their respective skills; Henningsen to teach Jes to paint and Jes to teach Henningsen to carve. The success of each as both teacher and student is attested to by the many pictures that Jes was to paint over the years and by the delightful pipe carved by Henningsen, still in the author’s possession. The pipe is carved out of hard light-colored

~10~
boxwood. The whole long stem is intricately carved with snakes coiled about the stem. The bowl of the pipe is a perfect little bust of Jes in finest detail.

When it was finished, Henningsen fitted it with the customary metal cap. When Jes saw it he shouted, “Tag den hure af! Saan en Tysk hjelm vel a aldrig ha au.” (Take that cap off! Such a German helmet I’ll never have on.) The author still keeps the two separated.

Of his wife Adelheid, Jes writes, “My wife’s name is Adelheid Magdalene Raben, born in Faurvraa the 13th of April 1854. Her father’s father’s name was Jens Raben. He had a little farm in Fakjar, and in addition to being a landowner, hauled freight between Christiansfeld and Flensburg, a distance of forty English miles. Her father’s name was Erik Raben.”

August Raben, one of Adelheid’s brothers was also, as Jes continues, “one of my best friends in my youth, and I therefore came into my future in-law’s home many times. It was a good home to visit. My wife’s mother was interesting to talk with.

“After my future wife was grown up, she was seldom home. First she worked for a druggist in Christiansfeld, and later a merchant in Aabenraa, and after that for a ship owner named Raben. But she came home from time to time. One time when she was home, I was there for the evening. Her mother was not at home. Her father was having some difficulty with a lamp, and she was helping him. The way she spoke to him made such an impression on me that at that moment I fell completely in love with her. But I knew it was hopeless to propose to her as I had no prospects of acquiring a position so I could support a wife. I therefore had to wait several years before I proposed to her and received a ‘Yes’. I had been in America for about three years when I journeyed back home, and she, quite by accident came home the same evening as I arrived. She was working in Flensburg at the time. She was only home for Christmas Day and then returned to Flensburg where I visited her several times. She then came to Clinton about a year later. She was in her youth well liked by all with whom she came in contact.”

Jes returned to Clinton and immediately began to build a house in north Clinton on the road to Lyons. When Adelheid arrived the house was not quite complete so she lived with the Grundtvig family until they were married by Pastor Grundtvig on November 14, 1888, and moved into their new home. The house had been built with the help of Therkild, a skilled carpenter, and had many little extras that made it unique.

Three children were born to Adelheid and Jes: Erik, Eleonora, and Augusta. Their home was always open to the many who came to Clinton to work, to teach in the Danish parochial school, to get a start in this new country, and sometimes to go to school (as did some children of Danes who lived in neighboring towns in Iowa and Illinois). Among the people who stayed in their home, sometimes for extended periods of time, were Jes’s future sister-in-law Marie Hovgaard, and Marie Rodholm, Karen Birgaar, and Marta Petersen. His brother Peter lived with them for a while as did Marie Hovgaard’s father. This gave Adelheid much additional work, but she had the ability to do a lot of work very efficiently, and it added a little to the income.

Jes worked as a woodcarver and cabinetmaker at the Dishbrown Factory and for a half year worked as a woodcarver at a shop where several large altars for catholic churches were being made. In times when there was no work in the factories he kept busy in his shop in the small barn behind the house.

~11~
The barn served four purposes. In one corner there were stalls for Adelheid’s two Jersey cows; in another corner was the toilet. In the room nearest the house, wood for the kitchen cook stove was stored, and finally, in the major part of the north side, Jes had built his studio with a window placed high on the north wall in order to diffuse the light for the best conditions for painting and carving. It was here that Jes made many pieces of furniture: sideboards, buffets, shelves, library tables and other pieces commissioned by the wealthy lumber barons who lived on the bluffs to the west. During one period of economic depression he carved a very ornate shelf and placed it in the grocery store of a friend with the hope of selling it. Fortunately it did not sell and has become a highly treasured heirloom. Jes also made a number of violins, a couple of them for the sons of Martin Holst, then editor of The Danish newspaper “Dannebøge,” as well as one for his son Erik. One quaint little violin with a little dog’s head on the finger board could possibly have been made in Denmark.

For Jes and Adelheid and their children life in Clinton was idyllic. Their home was located on the northern edge of the city, the church and Danish parochial school a matter of a few blocks away. Within a block the city gave way on both the north and west to open land. Here their two cows grazed on land that Jes rented. After milking time morning and evening the cows were staked on another part of the field. A couple of times during the summer Jes would cut the hay with a scythe on that part of the field that was not grazed. When the hay was dry, Adelheid raked it together and cocked it into hay cocks. When the hay was cured Jes and Adelheid carried it several blocks from the field to the little barn. The hay was carried between them on long poles with slats laid across them, and then pitched into the haymow above the barn. The corner walled off for the cows had a manger and trap door to the haymow. There was a door and a window. The manure was pitched through the window and periodically carted away by neighbors for use in their gardens. In the corner opposite the stalls was the toilet. For the children, going to the toilet on a dark night was an adventure undertaken with some preparation and a good deal of trepidation. It meant leaving the safety of the family circle, crossing the dark back yard, passing between the ranks of stored wood, and coming finally to the far corner of the dark little barn. Most often Adelheid would accompany the children part way with a lamp.
one of the milk produced by the cows was drunk by the family. It was delivered to other families by the children on their way to school. Any milk left over was saved and skimmed. The cream Adelheid churned into butter in a tall crock with a dasher, the skim milk was made into cheese, the buttermilk was drunk by the family or used in cooking. The cows were well cared for and gave a good deal of milk. In addition to pasture and hay, they received bran and middlings at each milking time. The bran and middlings was delivered several bags at a time by the Grumstrup Feed and Seed Store.

Making the strong cheese that Jes enjoyed so much on his sourdough rye bread was an extensive, time consuming project. There was, of course, no problem in getting the skimmed milk to sour. It was then heated in a kettle on the stove in the basement until it curdled, then it was dipped into a piece of cheese cloth and placed in a strainer. The whey was saved for cooking and the curds were wrung tight in the cloth and then put into a square wooden box with holes in the bottom. A wooden block was placed on top of the form and it was placed in a homemade wine press and pressed down with a jack screw. After a couple of hours the mass was as hard and solid as a block of rubber. This block was then grated and put in a crock behind the stove where it filled the kitchen with a strong, not unpleasant odor. When it had fermented into a yellow, sticky mass it was heated in an iron kettle with salt, caraway seeds and a little butter and then pressed into glass jars and stored away. It was a little rubbery at first but softened as it mellowed. This cheese spread on sour rye bread went each day with Jes and the children for their noon meal.

The land beyond the field rented for pasture and hay lay empty, for the most part, except for that wonderful time each summer when the circus came to town. To the west beyond the open fields were the bluffs, and on top of them lay the estates of the lumber barons—the Lambs, the Gates, the McCoy’s, the Heresy’s, and others—many whose names were already written on section after section of land in northern Wisconsin where Jes and his family would in a few years live. For the children there were rare and wonderful visits to these magnificent homes when Adelheid visited friends who worked there as maids, cooks, and housekeepers. An occasional commission for a buffet or sideboard or carved panel might come to Jes from one of the owners of these fine homes. Even from among the businessmen who lived in the same neighborhood there were occasional commissions. They also lived in fine houses and felt a little superior, for after all they worked in offices, and they were not foreigners. There were, for example, the McMann’s whose house front was decorated by a large lion’s head. It was the second one that Jes had made for them. The first had been rejected because its open mouth made it look too ferocious and scared the children.

Smitd family, standing, Eleonora and Erik; seated, Adelheid, Augusta, and Jes, taken about 1900 in Clinton, Iowa.
To the east lay the broad Mississippi. Below the hills bordering the river lay the river flats, the railroads, the saw mills, and the homes of the poor people whose homes were flooded regularly by the river.

Several times during the summer the Dansk Folkesamfund Danish Folk Society would take excursions by steamboat down the river, to be let off on an island or river bank, to have dinner that was brought along, and to enjoy an afternoon of visiting, lectures, singing and playing games. Or the congregation, for the two were made up of nearly the same people, would have its annual Fourth of July celebration in a park on the bluffs north of Lyons. Again in the Grundtvigian tradition there would be lectures, the singing of Danish and American songs, dinner, visiting, and finally coffee and cake before boarding the street car for the ride back into town. For the young men and women it was a time for courtship, strolling along the paths, or the men pushing the girls on swings. For the children it was a time to experience the heritage of their elders in song, in story, and in folk games and dances. On several occasions during the year the Danish Folk Society would sponsor an evening of social dancing in the society’s hall. Jes and Adelheid enjoyed dancing.

With all these enjoyable events, with the security of stable and loving parents, with a warm and pleasant home where food, clothing and shelter were not things to be worried about, at least not by the children, and living at a time when the people of the world had finally become too intelligent to ever have major wars again, it is understandable that Augusta would years later, when the world seemed ready to tear itself apart for the second time in less than a generation, tell one of her children that she wished that all children could experience the childhood she had had.

True, periodic depressions from time to time threatened the livelihood that Jes was able to earn for his family, but they were frugal people and good managers of what they had. And they were fortunate that Jes was a skilled craftsman whose work was generally in demand. Also they were fortunate that they experienced no serious calamities of accident or illness. Not all were so fortunate.

It was the nature of both Jes and Adelheid to build warm and lasting friendships. Among the many families they came to know were the E. F. Madsens who in time would move to West Denmark and then on to Dagmar, Montana, where they helped found the Danish colony there. From his time in West Denmark he would write the novel “Fra de Stille Skove” which was popular reading among Danes for many years. There were the Christian Dixons who would help found the Danish colony in Askov, Minnesota. He was a leader in gymnastics in both Clinton and Askov. Other families that Jes mentioned specifically were the Thuesens, the Jorgen Nielsens, the Hans Juhls, the Faaborgs, and of course the Grundtvig family and L. Henningsen. The many letters he received, and which still exist, show that a steady correspondence continued between Jes and Adelheid and these many families for years after they had all left Clinton for their final homes throughout the United States and Denmark.

It was the Peter Knudsen family, however, that became their closest neighbors and friends. Erik and their son Alfred were inseparable. Peter Knudsen and Jes had come to know each other when Jes first came to Clinton and had boarded with them. Mrs. Knudsen had come as a young girl and spoke English without an accent. They helped many of the Danish families as they arrived in Clinton, attempted to find work, and built homes in this new and foreign country. Among the families they helped was the Niels Hansen family who in time would also move to West Denmark and whose descendants would intermarry with many West Denmark families including the Smidts’ daughter, Augusta.
The Knudsen family had twelve children, but one after another eight had died of diphtheria or pneumonia. In time Peter would gradually gain back his natural good humor, but the death of each child took its toll on Mrs. Knudsen. Peter was a good business man, shrewd in his buying, careful and good with the meat products that he made and sold, and generous with his customers. He favored the fellowship of the “Dansk Broder Samfund” Danish Brotherhood Society where they got together to visit, play cards and drink beer. Jes, on the other hand, favored the Danish Folk Society which Grundtvig had established. They enjoyed arguing the separate merits of the two and remained close friends. And the children of these two families were as much at home in each other’s home as in their own.

In the well ordered life of Adelheid’s family, each afternoon one of the children would be sent to Knudsen’s butcher shop for a pound of round steak. The child who carried out this errand was always treated to a wiener that Peter would flick off with his thumb from the long links of wieners and sausages that he had made and smoked himself. This pound of round steak was served for supper to the family and whoever else might be making their home there at the time. There might be enough left over for a sandwich for Jes’s lunch box the next day.

Erik was a joyful boy, a boy who loved to tease and laugh, and he was a good boy. However, one evening upon answering a knock at the door, Adelheid found Erik’s Irish school teacher at the door. Adelheid was instantly apprehensive—what could Erik have done to deserve this visit? Her fears were quickly quieted when the teacher explained that Erik was such a joy to have in school that she had decided that she must meet his parents.

At one time Erik was seriously ill. He had been working for Peter Knudsen at his butcher shop with either rabbits or chickens and had become infected by one of the diseases that they carry. He was finally on the mend but weak and very bored. One evening his sister Augusta came with a little chunk of resin about the size of a walnut for him to chew on, thinking this would cheer him up. Adelheid’s immediate question was, “Where did that come from?” Augusta had to explain that they were putting a roof on a warehouse down across the railroad tracks and that all the youngsters in the area were now chewing a bit of this resin or tar. It is the nature of this roofing material that when it is cool it is brittle and when hit shatters like glass, but when brought to body temperature it becomes quite chewable, though an almost tasteless joy to chew on. In the strict code of conduct that Jes and Adelheid lived by it was wrong to take this bit of resin without permission. Augusta was ordered to take this little lump back to where she had gotten it though it was now already dark. On remembering this incident years later she said she had thought to throw it into some bushes along the way, but she knew that her mother would also know this. So the resin was returned though it meant walking into that dark warehouse area. If only that could be a safe thing to do today; and perhaps this could be the case if all parents were that much aware of what their children were doing and taught by that same simple code of conduct.

There was a gentle old woman the children knew only as Metta’s Mor (Metta’s mother). Some of the old people were too close to call Mrs., and she had a daughter named Metta, so naturally she became Metta’s Mor. She would baby-sit for Jes and Adelheid’s children when the parents went to the “ball,” a dance at the Danish Hall. Metta’s Mor was like a grandmother to the children. She and her husband Hans lived in a neat little house on the other side of the railroad tracks on the river’s edge. A few steps from their back door was a wall, actually a part of the levee. Each spring the river would creep up and up until it threatened to come over the wall. Metta’s Mor would watch carefully to see if they would have to move out of their home. Gammel (Old) Hans was crippled and could hardly breathe, so life was meager. This frail old
lady had a boat in which she would row out on the river and salvage any wood that came floating by. There was a saw mill a few hundred yards above their home, and a number of logs, slabs and boards would escape and float by. These she would capture, tow to her shed that stood close on the river and saw into stove wood by hand. Her old age became more pleasant when she went to live with her daughter Metta who had married a wealthy widower.

And there was Gammel Mrs. Juul. In those days before Social Security, many old people existed as best they could. Some had children who could help a little, others did not. Sometimes their grown children lived the same hand-to-mouth existence as their parents. Gammel Mrs. Juul had a daughter who perhaps could have helped a little, but didn’t, so she, as they said in those days, had a Lysted til hverdag. That is to say, that each day she had a different home to visit—a haven for each day. One day each week she walked the long walk to visit in Adelheid’s home. On this day Adelheid cooked sago velling (sago cooked in milk). This was Gammel Mrs. Juul’s favorite, for she had no teeth, and so she could sit and happily slurp velling in complete bliss. The poor woman. Everyone knew why she visited, but no one ever said anything of it. She was also, in a way, a weekly newspaper, carrying news and tidbits of gossip from one home to the next.

Gammel Stinne was another dear old friend of Adelheid. She had worked on a farm across from Adelheid’s home in Denmark. She was perhaps eighteen or twenty years older than Adelheid, and so they had not actually known each other, but she had known and held in deep respect Erik Raben, Adelheid’s father. Now she was a toil worn, squat little old woman with brown, wrinkled skin, and wattles of loose skin under her chin that felt soft to the touch when Adelheid’s youngest child sat on her lap. She was the nearest thing to a grandmother that the Smidt children knew. Her husband was dead. One of the things that the little ears of children had picked up was that he drank too much, and it was that that had caused Gammel Stinne’s youngest child to be slightly retarded. Ung (Young) Stinne was perhaps twenty, very pretty, very quiet, and always neat. A son also lived at home in the little house a block west of the church on Elm Street, but it was said that he was not very ambitious. Two more sons farmed out in western Iowa. Both had lost their wives, and both had many children.

Ung Stinne could help her mother around the house and run errands to the nearby meat market and grocery store. They were all of a close, friendly family community so Gammel Stinne generally got good measure at Knudsen’s meat market. One day a large dog attacked Ung Stinne on her way home. Whether it was attracted by what she was carrying or just overly friendly is not known, but it jumped on her and tore her clothes, and from that moment on she was completely out of her mind. Adelheid and Mrs. Knudsen were both there but were not strong enough to hold her as she screamed and tore her clothes in her terror-stricken state. Ung Stinne finally had to be taken to an institution in Independence, Iowa, where she spent the rest of her life. She had been such a kind and gentle person. Gammel Stinne stayed with Adelheid for a time until she regained some of her spirit and resolution. Eventually, however, she moved out to be with one of her sons, but her sad life finally overwhelmed her and she took her own life.

Though these little stories of neighbors and friends of the Smidt family may not seem to be of concern in a biography of Jes Smidt, it does tell of the lives and events around him at the turn of the century in the little Danish community in Clinton, and of the care that they had for each other. They are taken from the rather extensive writing of the younger Smidt daughter Augusta as she writes of family life in Clinton and West Denmark. Excerpts will illustrate the close relationships within the family, the closeness and open expression of love between Adelheid and her children, and the reserved almost shy relationship between Jes and his children. Jes was not unfeeling or ungentle, yet when it came to children, whether his own or his grandchildren, he was never quite at ease.
Augusta writes: “In reading *The Fighting Angel* and *The Exile*, books by Pearl Buck, I think of Mother and Father. We were so close to Mother and we really didn’t understand or appreciate Father until after he was gone. How often I have regretted that I didn’t spend time in his old age to talk and ask and to communicate. We don’t realize until it is too late what we miss, but we just don’t seem to have time. With mother it was different. I was just at her side for so many years, and I don’t think a day went by that she wasn’t told that I loved her. How could I look at her without loving her and telling her. She was unusual, for I don’t think she was ever cranky, nor have I heard her nag. She could get sad, but she was a cheerful person and always had so many cute sayings from her childhood. Mother was always there, and home was mother. Her word was law, but not in the sense that we were afraid. Once when Erik was big enough to crawl up on the table he had set his teeth in all of her six teaspoons. They were very thin sterling and they were really chewed. She spanked him so hard and then cried because she had spanked him and vowed that she would never spank him again. I don’t think she ever did, nor can I remember that she ever laid a hand on any of us. Her eyes were enough to put us to shame when we did something we shouldn’t, though I can’t remember Erik ever getting out of line. One day, before I started school, I can remember hiding a little red pocket book that Nora had. I think she had a penny in it. She was in a hurry and couldn’t find it. I said I hadn’t see it, and of course it was all in fun as far as I was concerned, but when Mother saw that I had lied, it wasn’t fun anymore. I can still remember her eyes. Or the time I had gotten five cents to buy a big pencil tablet. Nora talked me into buying a penny tablet and then some candy. It didn’t take long before I needed another tablet, and then I had to confess. No need to put the blame on ‘Eve,’ I was to blame. There was no scolding, just disappointment in me.”

Augusta told of a number of other incidents; the one concerning the resin has already been related. She continues her description of life in Clinton.

“Mother’s day started early. The fire had to be started in the kitchen stove; the kindling had been made ready the night before. We had pine slabs, and she would select a thin dry slab, take a bread knife and make shavings along one side. It took but a match to start a fire in that. The coffee and the oatmeal were made in a few minutes; the saucepan was set down on the flames. They were always black on the bottom, but there was no waiting until you could cook on top of the stove; that took too much time and fuel. Father had to be at work at seven a.m., and there was a long way to go by the streetcar which ran on the next street. Father had to swallow his oatmeal in a hurry, and mother could make sandwiches in no time. They consisted of rye bread and maybe a little leftover steak from the night before, or else cheese, probably homemade. We did get the best Swiss or brick cheese in those days. And then there was a jug of coffee and maybe a piece of apple pie if it was in apple season. That was about all Father had for all day. No coffee break morning or afternoon, and I suppose after a ten hour day and a long ride home he was tired and not up to much nonsense from kids. He never scolded though, but we didn’t get much attention either; however, I often ran out to meet him and took his hand when I saw his head bobbing above the fence. I know he loved us, and in his way did things to make us happy. When I was sick and had a fever, which seemed to be so often, he was the only one who gave me comfort, though I don’t remember that he ever held me or comforted me in any way; it was just knowing he was there and head of the house, I guess.

“It seemed that most of the playing went on in our yard always. We had a good stoop where we could make mud pies and wine by the quart out of beet stalks. We had the swing and the “elevator,” a loop in a rope with a board fastened into it. The rope was thrown over the big limb of the maple tree and the strong ones could hoist themselves up to the first limb of the
tree. Then there was the barn with the trapeze from the ceiling where we hung by our arms and legs and toes. That came to an abrupt end one day. The bar was an old broom handle and rather slippery, but I could hang by my toes on it. I didn’t weigh much so I was the only one who could do it and was rather proud. I asked my mother to come and see my stunt and that was the time my shoes slipped, and I fell flat on my back. I can still see Mother; I don’t think I got much pity, but she grabbed a hammer from the work bench and the biggest spike she could find, and the rope really got nailed to the two by four on the ceiling.

“On Erik’s birthday there were always the usual boys: Alfred Knudsen, Soren Juhl, Mathias Thuesen, and Soren Nelson. They played in the hayloft and slid down the rope into the alley, all those daring things. It burned their hands, but they dared each other. Mother baked æbleskiver in the basement, and Soren always came to the window to get a handout. Nora’s birthday was always quite a big affair, many girl friends and many little gifts of pretty little cups, etc. She had lemonade and cake. We didn’t splurge with so many kinds of food or cookies. My birthday was a quiet affair. I had Enok and Sophie Faber (Faber, their father, was minister in Clinton in these years.) and little Fefe Knudsen, but little Fefe lived only a few years.”

Of some of the neighbors Augusta writes: “When we went past the Hansens there was a block of a little higher class of people. The fathers were office workers, so Father in his office was a little more than Father going to a factory, and we felt it. We were also foreigners; they had probably come over on the Mayflower. Also we didn’t go to the same school at that time, we going to the Danish parochial school.

“Next to the Hansens lived Heidi Luebler and her old mother. We only knew that she was engaged to a man who lived in Lyons, but her mother would not let him come to the house, nor let her marry him and leave her. So every evening we saw her take a walk north to see him. She was quite old even then, and I hope her mother didn’t live too long. Next came the Cee’s. They had two boys. The youngest, Alan, was a real prig, walked with his nose in the air as though he owned the whole world. Then there were the Walters. Charlotte was Nora’s age, and they did play together. They had quite a large yard and some heavenly apple trees. They also had the most gorgeous outhouse, a large square house with four seats built on four sides of a square ventilator. There were four sizes from Papa Bear to Little Baby Bear and all had covers that were hinged on. It was made of clear pine and always smelled clean and good. I can imagine that the poor German washer woman who could make such good noodle soup, could also give the outhouse a good scrubbing in the same deal.

“On the corner in the next block where we could scoot through the alley were the Crawfords. They had to have a pint of milk morning and night. The first thing they did was pour a saucer of milk for the cat. They were an old couple, and the cat was probably the only thing they had to lavish love on. We had many places to deliver milk according to how much the cows would produce. People liked that rich Jersey milk. One place was a little farther away, and Erik usually went there. I don’t remember if it was on the other side of the tracks, but it was in the poorer district and near the saw mill and paper mill. They were Danish. She was a frail, kind woman and evidently had TB. I have often wondered that Mother would let us go near the place, but in those days TB was everywhere and I’m sure some of the children in school had it and we all drank out of the same dipper and what we didn’t drink went back into the pail. However, I can remember how this lady would hold a corner of her apron over her mouth and cough and cough and then, kind as she was, would hand us each a large frosted creme cookie.”

There were other little stories from the childhood of the Smidt children. For example, near the Danish church and parochial school was the Catholic parochial school. A certain amount
of bantering took place between the two diverse cultures. The Catholic boys would holler, "Dane Pups, Dane Pups," as they passed the school grounds. And the Danes would retort, "Cat lickitups, Cat lickitups." Nothing worse than that seems ever to have happened.

This then is a brief anecdotal account of one family’s life and experiences in the Danish community in Clinton, Iowa, at the turn of the century. Through it we can share the joys and sorrows of the Danish immigrants as they seek to find a life in this new country, know a bit of the everyday life of Jes Smidt and his family, and get a feeling for the class society that existed in an earlier America, as it perhaps still does today.

The Move From Clinton

The question could be asked, why would a man fifty-one years of age, living in a comfortable home, in a community of close friends and acquaintances, and having a skilled trade that assured him of a continued good income, move to a farm in the semi-wilderness of northern Wisconsin? Certainly the move from Clinton was not taken lightly, nor was West Denmark chosen on a whim. Of the several reasons, one firsthand explanation may be found in the words of Augusta, the youngest child who was eleven years old in 1906 when the family moved from Clinton. She writes: "We knew a change was coming. Father was dissatisfied with conditions where he worked. Often they were laid off, or there was a strike. Unions were being started, and Father didn’t seem to like them. Finally the first step was taken to try something else. Mother and Father took a trip to Ringsted (Iowa) and to Tyler (Minnesota) to look for farms in those places. Well settled and prosperous places were beyond our reach. Mother didn’t want to live on the prairie, she had Wisconsin woods in her mind. Nothing was settled, but we had a buyer for our house. I can remember Nora and I were home alone when the agent and the buyer came. They went through the house and felt of the woodwork and pounded on the walls. They were solid, and I hated to see them touch and feel; it was

Smidt home in Clinton. At left, north wall of living room with a portrait of Jes’s father, and at right, south wall with a portrait of N.F.S. Grundtvig and portraits of Adelheid’s parents.
our body and soul, our haven against the whole world. I can remember Mother sitting on the front step and stroking the banister. She had tears in her eyes, and it hurt. It was a necessity, and you had to have a stout heart.”

Another reason is given by L. Henningsen in an article written for *Julegragen* in 1925 to celebrate Jes Smidt’s seventieth birthday. He writes: “Jes Smidt and his wife are of the solid *Sønderjyder* (Southern Jutlanders), who are not blown here and there by every wind. Therefore when the children were growing up, they agreed that they should move from the city out in a Danish colony where they more easily could give their children a sound Danish, *folkelig* and Christian upbringing, free from the city life’s difficult and often harmful influences. It has certainly been at considerable sacrifice these two have made for their children. They owned an unusually beautiful home, and they were esteemed as few others are. He held a distinguished place as woodcarver where he had worked for many years, and was respected for his work. And now to sell their home, and leave their friends, work, and all else to move out into the country…”

In the basic philosophy of that period of history was the concept that the land was good, the agrarian society was good, and life in and of the city was not. It is found in the writings of Jefferson, of which Jes was perhaps not aware, but is also inherent in much of what N. F. S. Grundtvig wrote and strove for. The purpose of his folk school was to educate rural youth to be more active participants in the total life around them, to give them skills and broader interests, but yet remain farmers.

One of the effects of this philosophy was that in many of the colonies settled by Danes most of the early settlers came with two things: one, a skilled trade such as carpenter, blacksmith, veterinarian, cabinet maker, butter maker, malt maker, harness maker, shoemaker, and any one of the various trades necessary to life in the 19th century. This was also Jes’s background from Denmark with his father as blacksmith yet owner of a small farm, and Jes as wooden shoemaker with prospect of owning the farm, and even Adelheid with her several cows and small barn right on the edge of a city.

The second was the wish for land. If one may draw a basic premise from one specific example, the area settled by Danes in the West Denmark, Luck, Milltown, Bone Lake, and Cushing communities could prove the rule. Most craftsmen, and tradesmen also owned and lived on small farms, or began their careers as banker, shopkeeper, or tradesman first on a farm. Even the pastor was expected to have a cow or two and his own chickens. Quite possibly this could have been a style of living that both Jes and Adelheid had inherited and retained.

A third less compelling reason may have been that many of their old friends of earlier years had moved on or were contemplating moving to other Danish colonies, or in some cases even starting new colonies in other parts of the country. Among the old friends who had left Clinton were E. L. Grundtvig and family who had moved back to Denmark. E. F. Madsen was starting a new colony in Dagmar, Montana. The Christian Dixon family had moved several times and would eventually settle permanently in Askov, Minnesota. Other friends in the *Danske Folkesamfund* were establishing colonies in Danevang, Texas, and Withee, Wisconsin, among other places. Though many friends remained, especially those of Adelheid’s, the glorious years of the 1890s seemed to have ended. It was now time to move.

As indicated above, a new home was not lightly chosen. At the annual synod convention in 1905, Jes discussed his wish to move with several delegates, among them Anders Ravnsholt of West Denmark. He informed Jes that a neighboring farm was for sale. The land, though somewhat stony, was fertile, and the buildings, though small, were sound.

*The word folkelig is difficult to translate. It means a folk life founded equally on the spiritual, intellectual, physical, and joyful aspects of human existence—to live as a complete human being among like human beings.*

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After a trip to West Denmark by Jes and Erik, now sixteen years old, the decision was made to move there and begin a new life. It was a momentous decision for the whole family, but especially for Erik. It is impossible to say what that move cost Erik. From that time until nearly the end of his life in 1966, that farm was his life. Intelligent, witty, an avid reader and student of almost every field of learning, from science to literature, history and philosophy, he could under other circumstances as well have been a teacher, college professor, doctor, or have become an engineer as did his best friend Alfred Knudsen.

Without Erik's discipline and devotion and loyalty to family and farm, it is not likely that Jes could have found the opportunity to create the many works of art for which he became so well known in the old Danish Evangelical Church. At his funeral, Pastor Harald Petersen spoke of him as a man of discipline. Erik never married.

Jes and Adelheid's youngest daughter Augusta has written quite extensively about the actual move, and that story can best be told through the eyes of an eleven-year-old girl. And it is perhaps worthwhile to include quite a bit of the details, the humor, and the difficulty of a city family as they struggle to become farmers.

"The 30th of May we left Clinton. That day stands quite clear in my memory. What went before that, the packing of all our belongings, I can't quite remember. I know our good friends Peter and Marie Knudsen were there to help. The railroad car had been ordered, I suppose, and it had to be loaded so they must have had a drayman come and haul furniture, stove, barrels, and boxes, and trunks. It all went along, nothing was sold nor given away except the cradle and baby buggy, which may have been given away long ago. But the doll buggy we just couldn't take nor my two dolls with china heads, Lisa and Margrethe, one had light hair and one dark. Antiques they would have been now and the doll buggy had been Marie Grundtig's and had been given to us when they went to Denmark. But such was the law, who got them I don't know. Then there were the two cows, Bossie and Kibbies, and maybe a calf and six brown leghorn hens, a gift from a friend who had chickens, and also at least a couple of cats. That all went in the car and Father had to go along as caretaker plus Erik as stowaway. They had built a little corner in the car where they could sleep and have their provisions. They must have left on the 29th. Mother, Nora and I stayed at the Knudsen's overnight, and as it was Decoration Day we were going out to the cemetery. Mother, Mrs. Knudsen and I went to a little old lady who had plants for sale, and they bought some to take out to plant. I had a nickel and I saw a rose bush that I wanted to put on Grandfather's grave. I don't know if she was reluctant to sell it for five cents but I got it. Mother said I shouldn't have asked for it, but it was just an ordinary rose bush ready to bloom. We were invited to M. Thuesen's for dinner and had new potatoes from the garden and strawberry shortcake. Strawberries also from their own garden. We, Mrs. Knudsen, Mother and I walked out to the cemetery to plant the flowers. We stopped first at the Knudsen grave. So many little boys were buried there, one, my little friend Fefe, who died from pneumonia. Some had died from diphtheria and some probably as new born babies. I think they had had about 12 children in all and at that time there were four living. I'm not so sure I didn't put my rose on little Fefe's grave. My grandfather's grave was on a newer site toward the south and on a hill. It was probably the last time that flowers were planted there. There was no monument there at the time, but Uncle Terkikli put one there later. When Einar and I were in Clinton years later we had no difficulty in finding it, and I took a picture there.
“Evening came and our train was leaving sometime during the evening. We arrived in St. Paul in early morning and we had to change trains for Dresser Junction, and again there a train to Luck. Anders Ravnholt was there to haul all our belongings to our new home.” (Jes and Erik were not due until the next day with the cows and other belongings.) Mother and we two girls stayed at the Ravnholts.

“The next day was the day we were to take over the farm. On the way to the farm we met Erik walking from Milltown.” (It seems that while he had gotten off the train to stretch his legs the car with the cattle had been shunted to another place. Erik had then bought a ticket to Milltown and arrived the day before the car with Jes with the cows and all the belongings.)

“It must not have taken Mother long to get things organized. I’m sure we slept in our new home that night. It was quite a change from our spacious home in Clinton to this little house. It was solid and not too old. A kitchen of perhaps 8 by 10 feet had been added to one side.”

The first Sunday in church was described years later by Eleonora. It was to leave different impressions on the separate members of the family. They came early dressed in their Clinton finery riding an old farm wagon behind the recently purchased pair of ill-tempered horses. Together Jes and Erik got the pair quartered in the church horse barn, and then the family filed in by the side door of the cross shaped church and took a pew that faced toward the center of the church. Seated there they were conspicuously the focus of every pair of eyes of the rest of the congregation who entered by the more usual front door and were seated facing the front of the church. Jes and Augusta were completely oblivious to this, but the other three members of the family were to varying degrees uncomfortable, especially Erik. Eleonora was fascinated by the decorative designs on the high vaulted ceiling, Erik sat stiff and uncomfortable and left with the last “amen” to hitch up the horses. Jes would have preferred to stay to visit and become acquainted with the members of the congregation, but the team, if such they could be called, needed both men to get them hitched to the wagon. From that day on, Erik attended church only rarely and Adelheid generally stayed home to help him with the last of the morning chores. For the two girls the church and associated activities became the center of their lives, and the two mile walk became a regular part of their days and nights.

It did not take long for Adelheid to make the new home cozy and livable. And Jes, of course, was very capable in adding a full kitchen here, moving a door to another location, or changing a window, that with the addition of a new kitchen, now became a useless opening, into a cupboard that opened into both the dining room and the kitchen, with paneled doors to the kitchen and framed glass doors to the dining room.

Augusta described the first years on the farm: “The barn wasn’t quite finished here and there. The main part was divided, one part for horse stalls which had a ceiling with a hay loft on top the other was for hay from bottom to top. There was a cow shed to the East. There must have been board floor or dirt. At least we soon got cement put in, though I’m sure it took a couple of years as there was much to do. Haying soon came on and Father went to many auction sales to buy what we needed. People weren’t too honest then either and I think often thought it a joke to fool an innocent city man turned farmer.

Father was rather trusting in many ways because he was so honest himself. Ravnholt had helped him buy a team of horses from Louie Sund. We had them for many years. Maud a dark brown we used for single buggy driving, she was cranky. Bill was gray and full of fun. When we had to turn a corner there was no holding him back, he often had the buggy on two wheels. At one auction sale there was a big old binder. A man next to father said ‘You should buy that’ and Father bought it. It was a big old thing and it would take more than our two small horses to
pull it. I don’t think it even had the canvases or at all in running order. It got hauled home and there it stood for many years. We hired someone to cut the grain. We had gotten four cows with the place and we could be sure it was the culls. One red, one yellow, one black and one brown swiss.

“Father bought a cow, and the man said it gave a whole pail of milk. That was just what we needed but the trouble was the milk ran out by itself when it walked home from the pasture so there was very little left for the pail. Then we got two cows at another auction sale. One was small, one was big and got the names Lille Per and Store Per. A cow bought at another place was Mathias. Now we had quite a herd. Of course each calf was kept whether the cow was good or not so there wasn’t too much herd improvement and we weren’t experienced in farming. Haying was quite a chore in those days, it had to be cut, raked and put in kocks. Then stand a while and if it rained had to be split and turned. Finally when dry pitched by fork fulls on a wagon and hauled home. There we had a big fork to stick down in the load and the horses pulled it up with a rope. It was a slow process and it took several years before we got a new track in the barn and got “slings” which went faster. Threshing was quite an experience. Word was sent by kids from place to place and help was exchanged. Erik had to do a man’s work though he was barely sixteen and not fully grown. He had to carry sacks and it was up stairs in a granery. He was all in when he came home but didn’t complain. I know Mother cried a little, he was too young to take a man’s load. Mother never complained either though she took her turn helping in the hay.

“Of course the milking was her job mostly as she was used to it and good at it. I wanted to learn to milk that first summer too. We milked outside in the cow yard. I got a pail and a stool and sat down to Lille Per but it walked away from me. I did learn though. Father seldom tried to milk but when he did the milk usually got squirted up in his sleeve first, he never got foam in the pail.

“The first year of threshing we had Martin Lawson, he had I don’t know how many horses to pull the separator. All the horses that Martin had were fed well and could consume most of our crop of oats. I suppose the engine could pull itself. We had to have a big pile of wood to fire with. The engine spewed sparks all night and was set close to the stacks and the barn so neither Mother nor Erik got much sleep that night. The men slept in the hay and were there for breakfast. How Mother managed in that little house with all those meals, I don’t know but she was never stumped. It was a big crew to feed and we never had too plentiful of supplies. When I read about how some pioneers lived on hams and bacon and pies by the dozens, I wonder if it isn’t exaggerated. At least I don’t think anyone in our neighborhood lived like that. On a little 40-acre farm there was a limit to what it could produce, and we couldn’t eat it all up. Our sole income was from cream and a few pigs to sell and in the spring and summer the chickens had to try to pay for groceries. We didn’t buy beyond what we could get for our eggs and it was pretty well figured out before we made our list and went to town. Eggs and cream weren’t pin money for the wife to spend like it was on a large prairie farm where they had steers and pigs and corn for income. It was our only income. How Father managed I don’t know but I know everyone was paid even if he had to borrow from Peter to pay Paul.

“The second year we were here Father decided to build a silo, there was very little corn grown and no ripe corn. Corn was cut by hand and put into large shocks in the field and hauled home in the winter. Spread in front of the cows at night for them to work with at will. In the morning there were the bare cornstalks to dispose of. There were very few silos at that time and it was a new venture but a few of the neighbors got together to buy a silage cutter. We got
our silo built with the pit set up with stones. The outside was tar paper and Father painted it in many colors to resemble old copper. It must have looked quite realistic because Dixen went over and felt it to see if it was real. Also Father made a weather vane for the top of the barn. It was cut out of tin and painted black. It was a beautiful horse in full gallop and with flying tail and mane painted gold. One of Dixen's boys was so intrigued with it that Father had to make a pattern of it for him so that they could also get one made. While we are on the subject of silo filling, the company couldn't afford the best and got one that had a carrier instead of a blower. It was in different sections and it was quite a job to get that assembled and hoisted up to the top of the silo. Neither could they afford to get an engine so they had to hire someone with an engine. The first one was Thomas Hermansen and Magnus Jeppsen, a little boy of about 4 or 5, called him Thomas Tutkas. The next one was Gasoline Willie. The cutter was mounted on planks a "scoot" we called it and had to be dragged from place to place. We couldn't afford to get wheels. It was always a draw whose horses should pull that heavy thing, no one had very strong horses and it was a long haul out to Niels Petersen's. Our little joke in our family was Uncle Chris. When he came he always said "Fan hjul under." (Get a wheel under it.)"

Though it was surely Jes's intention to become a farmer, it was their son Erik who did the work almost from the beginning though scarcely seventeen years of age. And Adelheid helped with the milking and other chores morning and night until a couple of weeks before she died at age seventy-six.

The whole farm took on an almost Currier and Ives quality with large healthy cattle and horses. It seemed his hay smelled the sweetest, his straw uncured cows the cleanest and brightest. His hogs were large with large litters of healthy little pigs. Erik's hog house had the smell of clean straw and the bran that was mixed with skim milk or water to feed them.
Children could not enter the cow barn as the cows, unused to seeing little people, went completely berserk at the sight of anything but adults. As said, his Holstein cows were large. Each had a name that somehow registered their temperament. Erik’s humor showed in the names given to the cattle. Some were given the names of ladies in the neighborhood, or that he had known in Clinton, whose temperament seemed to match that of the cows. There was nothing mean about this. One particularly large cow with a somewhat ornery disposition was named “Unity” because in Unity there is strength.

Out in the farm yard there was always the peaceful sound of the windmill as it pumped water from a deep well into a cistern with a cement cover over it. The yard was patrolled by several large geese that hissed at all strangers and were particularly frightening for visiting grandchildren. This perhaps added to the relish with which they were eaten for the Christmas Eve meal. Several cats that were not allowed in the house, could join the family circle in the evening by sitting outside and looking in the windows of the dining room. The dog was named “Snap.” It was allowed to join the family until it was time for Erik to give the barn a final check for the evening. A word from Erik and Snap would get up, stretch, and go to his task as guardian of the barn. If anyone else suggested to Snap that it was time to go out they received a low growl and Snap did not move.

On the farm was an old outbuilding in need of repair that Jes soon converted into a shop where he put his workbench and many tools from his work in Clinton. The building was quite simple with a half chimney that started on a shelf half way up the east wall. An old kacheloven, a box stove, sat there with a chimney pipe that ran a little distance to the chimney. Doubtlessly it gave off good heat before losing the rest up the chimney. On the stove stood a double boiler glue pot with water in the bottom and into the top pot were placed long sticks of smelly hide glue to be melted into useable glue. This was applied with a small brush that also stood in the pot.

One unique feature was a window that Jes extended through the ceiling into the loft as high as the eaves. Jes insisted on the diffused light from the north when he painted his pictures. Though the walls were high, there was yet room in the loft where he stored boards and blocks of wood to dry ready for cabinets, or carved figures. Also on the north wall stood his old work bench with windows above it and with shelves for his planes and other tools between them. The bench contained two vises. One vise stuck up above the surface to hold the blocks of wood to be carved into figures of people. The other, an end vise with a dog that could hold boards to be carved, planed, or moulded by a variety of moulding planes against dogs placed along the edge of the bench top.

Einar Pedersen made the following observations of his father-in-law, “He showed much action when anything had to be done, he was especially active in his shop when working on pulpits and other church furniture which had to be finished at a certain time. He had his supply of dry oak stored in the attic of his shop where it was kept dry, it was mostly in the rough, and had to be planed to a perfect thickness with a hand plane, which was hard work, and took strong arms, it also took a keen eye. I have sometimes marveled when he has made dozens of small carved pieces of wood, put them all together, every piece fitting perfectly into their designated place in a pulpit or other work. Smidt knew his wood, it was seldom that he had it kiln dried, and I have never seen him use a moisture gauge. In spite of this he knew when it was ready to use, and even to this day I have not seen any of his work which has parted in the seams.”

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It should probably be mentioned, for the benefit of modern readers, that Jes used only hand tools to create all of his work. Even when electricity finally came to the Smitd farm (sometime in the 1930s) after rural electrification, only a light bulb was added to the workshop, mounted on an extendable arm so that it could be positioned to provide optimal light for his carving or other work.

From this shop came endless altars, altar rails, pulpits, baptismal fonts, chairs and all manner of shelves, tables, and other furnishings.

A few years ago, on hearing that Jes’s old shop was to be torn down by a new owner of the farm, Ann Pedersen Fawver, great-granddaughter of Jes, rescued it and had it moved to her home where it now serves as a studio for her painting, carving, and sculpting. The tall old window survived the move and still casts a gentle light into the shop. The old shop will live on to produce more works of art.

Adelheid died May 10th, 1930. Augusta remembered how Erik sat and stroked his mother’s hands in her last illness and said, “These hands have done so much for us,” Augusta wrote, “Mother couldn’t have had a better son and when they together did chores they shared so much. No wonder he was lonesome when she left us. Yes, such capable hands that seemed to make work so easy. She was a good example in her whole being.”

The Last Years

For Christmas of 1938, in his eighty-fourth year, a number of friends gathered together as many pictures of Jes’s work as were available into a leather-bound book. It contained pictures from churches, folk schools, and private homes together with many letters of praise and thanks. In answer to this gift he wrote the following in the January 16, 1939 edition of Dannevirke.
Some of my friends started a large work and have written a great deal to make me happy. I received as a Christmas gift a book of photographs of a great deal of the work I have accomplished over the years, and letters from congregations and several people with thanks for woodcarvings I have made for churches and homes.

I can not be other than happy that people have been satisfied with my work and are happy with it, but at the same time I feel that it is I that stands in debt to those who have given me the opportunity to accomplish the work than they to me. It has been a joy for me to work at it. That joy has been a great deal of my pay, and I have also received pay for it in money.

I heartily thank all, not alone for the effort they have given to the book, but also that they have given me the opportunity and created the conditions to create the work which they now thank me for.

Who has gotten the idea to send this gift I do not know, but I have suspected Miss Sigrid Østergaard. It is a very beautiful book with leather cover and loose leaf binding. The leather cover is made by Mrs. Alfa Jepsen. The title page drawn by Christian Andersen is very beautiful and artistically made. In the middle is a picture of Mary and Child, and Joseph and the three wise men. The border around the picture is black with white lettering. In the upper left hand corner there are two bells and evergreen branches and stars. On the top it says “Christmas 1938.” Further on it says “Gathered by friends for Jes P. Smidt.” On the first two pages is a beautiful poem to me by August L. Bang. Then there is a life’s story and photograph of me. The biography is written by my old departed friend L. Henningsen on the occasion of my seventieth birthday. L. Henningsen was a painter and had a great imagination so he has smeared it a little thick and it should be viewed from a distance.

The book is full of photographs and letters from congregations and individual people from all over, so it is overwhelming for me to write to all of them. I must be satisfied to send a heartfelt thanks and greeting to all here in Dannewirke.

The picture in the altar in Tystrup Church in Denmark is painted by A. Dorph. It represents “Jesus with Martha and Mary.” As a boy I often sat and admired it, as well as the altar and pulpit, but did not dream at that time that in my old age I should manage to copy it. I have copied two. One is the altar picture in Fresno and the other in Nysted. How well I have succeeded others must judge. On the other hand, I believe I have made altars and pulpits that bear comparison with the one in Tystrup.

I came here to West Denmark in 1906 and thought then that I would spend all my time as a farmer. I then received a letter from Kristian Østergaard with the request to make an altar and pulpit for the church they were building in Hetland, S. Dakota. I undertook that work, and Østergaard wrote something in a newspaper that led to my getting orders from other places, so I have been able to use my time for that kind of work.~Jes P. Smidt

*Ed. note: Jes actually made a third copy in memory of Adelheid that hung in the West Denmark Church. It burned in the 1985 fire that destroyed the rest of his work together with the church which he had designed.
A Danish American Woodcarver

By Kristian Østergaard

His cradle stood "Sønden Aa" in the south. He was born in Tyrstrup Parish in Southern Jutland (Sonder Jylland) in 1855, and he is one of the many talented Danish men which Southern Jutland has had to relinquish to America. An artistic desire lay in him from early youth. He learned to make wooden shoes, but in his spare time he busied himself with wood carving and modeling without training and without seeing much art by which he could train himself. At the age of twenty-three he attended the Central Husflidskolen in Copenhagen, and later taught in Tyrstrup, Stepping and Frorup Parishes Husflid Associations. In the winter of 1881-1882 he was a student at Vinding Folk School, and from there moved to Clinton, Iowa. Here he became acquainted with L. Henningsen who had attended the Art Academy in Copenhagen and gave him some training in painting, of which he later received more at the Ashland Folk School in Michigan where Henningsen was a teacher.

In Clinton where he again took residence, he became a close friend of F. L. Grundtvig, and that has also had meaning in his development.

At Disbrow and later at the Curtis Bros. Factory in Clinton he got work as a carver and cabinet maker. Here he learned, not only from his own work, but worked together with several skilled carvers and cabinet makers. For half a year he worked at the factory where several large altars for Catholic churches were built. However, in the winter when there were times there was not much work at the factory he busied himself with painting and sculpting.

He has produced several portraits in charcoal and some plaster of Paris that show he has good abilities in that direction. In the Danebod Folk School lecture hall there hangs a large, fine copy of Frolick's Queen Thyra at Dannevirka. Both the copy and the artistically produced frame are J. P. Smedt's work.

The most beautiful of his smaller work in woodcarving, however, is a shelf which is pictured here.* It is a delightful work according to all who have seen it. And now he is at work building an altar for the church in Danevang, Texas. That will hold a painting by artist Troels Trier in Denmark. And there is reason to hope that many similar works will gradually come out of his work place.

But I do not wish, and I do not believe he himself wishes that his place of work will become a factory, because just as every carved flower or capital is the work of his own hands, one sees the artist's soul in it as well as the characteristic charm that is distributed through the whole piece of work, first as here in our church in Denmark, South Dakota.

* Ed. note: Shown in this book on page 12.
To introduce pictures and in some cases the approximate year in which Jes created the various church furnishings and private commissions, and to show the esteem and admiration with which he was held throughout the old Danish Evangelical Church, a number of the greetings which the book contains will be translated and included here.

The first entry is a poem by August Bang, editor and publisher of the Danish newspaper Dannevirke.

To Jes P. Smidt

West Denmark's bearded old man
Who lives in the quiet forest,
Here comes your many friends
To press your hands
With thanks, and beg permission
In the sunset radiance of your working days
To offer you a memorial wreath
With flowers from the days
On which you look back

Your long life, your busy life
That first saw light in Favrsvaard.
It's motto was to do one's best
As a man, as a South Jutlander,
The best that in the family lay.
Every talent must be used
In faithfulness toward all good and beautiful,
Join talent and diligence.
How it grows with time.

What do we know of each other
Each has his dream, his battle, his joy.
Fortunate he whose young dreams
A future found in wood,
A future made with plane and chisel.
Fortunate he who is true to daily duty,
Who lives for a deed, a poem,
A blossom among the grasses
In life's quiet garden.

How true you were to memory
In all your behavior it lay in back.
It lay as a coal and warmed.
It sang when life was loud,
Around you, with you, in its haste
It sang, it urged, it begged,
Until quietly you sat in evenings
And carved in oaken timber
Your poem, your thoughts of life.

There is in this world
But few who reach great fame,
But few whose fabled creations
From pole to pole one names
As creator of new beauty
Managed correctly with talent;
Has a richness sent out into the world,
Has spoken to sensitive ears
For generations can hear him.

You quiet old man,
I look into your eyes
and see church steeple and gable,
An altar picture and frame.
They appear in my vision.
You did what you could well,
And therefore in your vision,
Your deeds stand steady in the frame
Of what we owe together.

Accept then these pages
From life's great rich forest,
That are gathered by your friends.
Which life's strong hands
And dreaded times and fiery prey
With artist's hands and sharp knives
Gave dead wood new life.
Thank you for your deeds, your abilities
Like flowers in a garden.
From Danevang, Texas

Dear Jes Smidt:

When we down here in Danevang have heard that there are many congregations in the Danish churches that have a wish to send you a Christmas greeting, we also wish to join.

When we in time got the means to get an altar picture for our church, we got a beautiful picture from Denmark with the help of Kristensen Randers. You know it well. Troels Trier painted it after a picture at Valleklude, The Baptism scene where Ansgar baptizes a child. Actually a copy of Chr. Dalsgaard’s painting. Then of course we should have a frame around it, and that you made for us. Yes, not alone a frame, but also an altar. And that we have had now for nearly thirty years and enjoyed every time we are in church, and it will for many years gladden the children and grandchildren of the old pioneers.

Then thanks for helping us to beautify our church. A happy Christmas and wishes for God’s Peace in the evening of your life from the Danevang Congregation with thanks for all you have done for us.

Sæve Nygaard

- And from Pastor A. E. Frost

The accompanying picture of the complete altar in Ansgar’s Congregation Church in Danevang, Texas, does not show clearly all your work. In the front at the foot of the altar table one finds a lamb at rest carved from oak. That shall remind us of John the Baptist’s words, “See, there is God’s lamb that carries the sins of the world.” It rests peacefully at the foot of the altar.

The lines of the altar frame draw one’s mind upwards. And that is surely what you wanted to help your people do when you in your thoughts saw them gathered together in our land, as you worked in your workplace. If it rightly could happen to have your people to have their eyes look upward as they gathered around the altar, then your greatest wish would be fulfilled.

Therefore we all voice our praise, sent by the congregation now as Christmas approaches with thanks for the loyal service in the Danish Church. You have beautified God’s house by the work of your hands. A Happy Christmas and a Blessed New Year from Ansgar’s Congregation and its pastor.

A. E. Frost
Danevang, Texas
5 December 1938

(Ed. note: The Saint Ansgar’s Danish Church was dedicated March 29, 1909, and Jes’s work was done about two years later. Unfortunately all but the altar table was destroyed in a hurricane in the mid 1940s.)
Greetings from the congregation in Viborg, South Dakota,

Most of us are not as thoughtful as we ought to be. We are so taken up with a great deal that is of questionable worth that we forget other things that should demand our time and energy.

It was with joy I read the letter concerning the thought of a greeting to our old friend Jes Smidt. When on the following Sunday after the service I read the letter for the congregation, I noticed that the thought fell on good soil. My offer to find a suitable picture and to write a greeting on behalf of the congregation was received with thanks. Old Peter Madsen who sat over there to the right, with his hand to his ear that nothing should slip by him, at once exclaimed, “Yes, I remember as though it was yesterday that I sat here in this same pew with Jes Smidt that day the church and the altar and pulpit were dedicated. (June 1911) “This Smidt will also remember if he is reminded of it. I will move that we ask Pastor Jespersen to send Jes Smidt a greeting from the congregation from each one of us individually.” The whole congregation supported that motion.

So we will say a heartfelt congratulations, Jes Smidt on the many years, and thanks for the good and faithful work among your countrymen in this great land. We are reminded of you every time we read those words you have carved on our pulpit, “De Ord som Jesus taler er Aand og Liv.”

A Happy Christmas and Good Cheer in the New Year.
Our Savior’s Danish Lutheran Congregation, Viborg, S. D.
by Harris Jespersen
The Altar and Pulpit in Nysted, Nebraska

The altar and Pulpit for St. Peders Church in Nysted was carved by Jøs Smidt and sent to the congregation in 1919 in time to be used in Christmas festivities that same year. The new church was dedicated in May of 1920. It was Pastor Aage Møller, whose childhood home was West Denmark, who as pastor in Nysted brought about that the new church became beautified with the artistic work of the old pioneer from the forests of his home area. The old altar picture that was installed by Pastor A. Th. Dorf was sent to Mr. Smidt who then painted a new altar picture of the same motif. The new picture is considered by many as the finest of Mr. Smidt's paintings. The old altar and picture and pulpit was later sent to the young (Réplinge) colony in Hay Springs, Nebraska.
The Altar in the United Church, Dannebrog, Nebraska

As far as is known the Altar in Dannebrog was gotten at the instigation of the congregation's minister of many years, Pastor J. Christian Pedersen and a number of the members of the congregation who had been greatly impressed by the beautiful altar in Nysted. When the church in Dannebrog was to be enlarged the altar was procured. It was planned and adapted after the church's old altar picture.

The Hamlet Table

I am not acquainted with the history of the famous Hamlet table's origin and creation, but when I for the first time visited Jes Smidt many years ago the table stood in his home and I became very enthusiastic over the theme and its beautiful execution. I got the opportunity to visit Mr. Smidt several times later. We became good friends, and I began to think a great deal of the old pioneer. I wished to have some of Mr. Smidt's work and told him I would like to buy the Hamlet Table. Mr. Smidt did not wish to get rid of the table in that he considered it some of the best he had created, but he promised me that if that time came when he would sell it, he would offer it to me.

That happened later, and we received the Hamlet Table in the fall of 1932.

The table has become a part of our little family. It has been admired by many, both in the Danish circle as well as Americans and people of other countries. The table remains with us as a memorial to the immigrant and pioneer generation, and tells in its quiet but strong voice about a time and a world we will never forget. We greet you, our dear old friend with a thanks for good company, and for your unique and singular contribution to our folk life.

Arild Olsen

"Hamlet Feigns Madness"

"Hamlet's Avenge"

(Ed note: Arild Olsen was president of Grand View College 1931-1938. The Hamlet table is now in the Grand View College Archives.)
Askov, Minnesota

With this letter we have a picture of Jes Smidt’s artistic work, altar, pulpit, and altar rail found in our church here in Askov, and which happily we have looked at every time we have come into our church in the past 25 years since they were set in place when we built our church in 1914. The altar picture is a copy of Skovgaard’s beautiful art work that symbolizes the lines of the verse under it.

Saaret jeg Flyed fra Utevns Tand,
Mit Blod til hans Fod er rundet.
Selv Han bar mig til Kildens Rand,
Der har jeg Leedom fundet.

Wounded I fled from the tooth of the wolf,
My blood to his feet is flowing.
He carried me to the spring waters,
There my healing I’ve found.

I believe it is a good admonition for us when we come to hear the Gospel that is symbolized by the four Evangelists whose figures are carried on the magnificent pulpit. All that is witness to the fervent love and understanding you, dear friend, have placed in your work. We are many who are thankful to you for that.

A Happy Christmas and a Good New Year,
S. Christian Dixon
From Solvang, California

In the church in Solvang one finds the following of Jes Smith’s beautiful art work: altar, altar rail, baptismal font, kneeling stool, and a plaque that hangs above the door. That bears the inscription, “Be quiet before the Lord.” Most of this was procured for the church’s dedication which took place July 8, 1928. The pulpit was originally meant for a church in Flensborg, Southern Jutland, but was not sent when the people of Flensborg decided on another style. When we in Solvang learned there was an opportunity to buy that pulpit, and for a very reasonable price, there was great happiness, and after a few alterations were made so it could fit in the church, it was brought here.

At the dedication the artist himself was there, and many laudatory and appreciative words were spoken at that occasion about his skillful work, especially on the altar and pulpit which had taken him over a year to complete.

Many guests from different parts of the country have admired Solvang’s beautiful church which Jes has adorned in such a graceful way; and we will gladly join in placing a page in the memorial book, and express our sincere thanks for what he has given us with the work of his hands.
The Lectern at
Grand View College

I can not get tired of looking at the lec-
tern. I see something that reminds me of our
Fedjreav? Let me also say thanks to Jes Smidt.

When we got the lectern, Pastor S. D.
Redholm was president of Grand View College.
In 1930 he wrote an article in Grand View
Echo about how it happened that we got it. I
asked him if it could be used, and he said,
yes. It is given here.

Alfred Nielsen

At Studentfest this year we dedicated a new
lectern in the Lecture hall. The old was
hammered together from an old bed, and that is of
course a very dangerous origin for a lectern. Now
that everything here has become so beautiful and
tasteful with the restoration after the fire, natu-
really the wish arose to get a lectern that fit
the surroundings, a lectern with a Nordic charac-
ter, a lectern that could express some of our thoughts
with the services that should issue from it.

The beginning of the fulfillment
of that wish happened last summer when we were in Denmark. The (Dansk-American Kvindeforening)
Danish-American Women’s Society in Copenhagen gave me 300 dollars which I could use for one or the other
of the school’s furnishings which we would otherwise not get. I decided that they should be used for a new
lectern, and I knew where I should go to get the one we ought to have; but the money, I believed was too little
for him to be paid to do the work. Nevertheless I wrote to Jes Smidt and told him how much money I had and what
thoughts I had on how the lectern should be. To my great joy he answered immediately that for the sake of the
school he would do the work for the money there was. We then got the lectern a few days before Studentfest and
when we got it unpacked we could not but do admiring it. I almost believe it is Jes Smidt’s Masterpiece, and
that is not lightly said.

We owe Jes Smidt and the Ladies Society in Copenhagen thanks for that gift. With that, a little explanation
of what the wood carved work means.

The picture in the middle panel is not a Viking, but the Nordic god Hejmdal. It is what Grundtvig has writ-
ten about Hejmdal that lies behind the representation. Hejmdal’s place on earth is “Himmelbjerget.” (Literally
Heaven Hill, the highest point in Denmark.) There he stands on guard by “Gynghavet,” the bridge that joins
heaven and earth, and it is natural that the bridge should begin or end on earth’s highest point. Hejmdal sees so
far that his horizon is a hundred Danish miles on all sides. It reaches out over Denmark and beyond. His hear-
ing is so sensitive that he hears the grass growing on the meadows and the wool on sheep. In this way Hejmdal
expresses that wish that in this lectern may stand for seeing people, folk with a wide spiritual horizon, and a fine
sense for all that grows. The bur that Hejmdal blows into is called “Gjallarhornet” or “Gjollahornet,” (liter-
ally an echo horn) and it can be heard over the wide world. Hejmdal then becomes the herald that blows in the
bur when the gods come over Gynghavet to visit the world of men. I would believe that in spite of Gjallarhornet
being able to be heard over the whole world, it is only those who have ears to hear. Thereby it fits the words on the panel to the left: Lyksalig! det Folk, der har Ore for Klang Herovensfra! Blessed are that folk who have ears for the sounds from above!

The sword that Hejmdal carries is not a Viking sword. It is not to glorify that power which weapons win. It is a God's sword and is called by Grundtvig Mandheved; the head of man. It is the sword of spirit and reason or wisdom. It symbolizes the power of the word. The meaning finds expression in Grundtvig's words carved on the right: "Only in the word has our earthly kingdom found a pathway to heaven. The people have destiny."

To show the depth of Jes Smidt's knowledge of Grundtvig's hymns and mythology it is necessary to continue Rodholm's understanding of Jes Smidt's inscriptions. Axel Kildegaard's article on Rodholm's interpretation follows.

Writing about this inscription Rodholm distinguishes between the word and speech, between humans and animals. Animals can have a primitive form of speech. They can presumably communicate with each other regarding the weather, where to get food and such matters. But the word which is uniquely human of all creation builds a stairway to heaven. That makes human life more than a stream of events built into a story, a saga, a destiny. This is S.D.'s understanding of the words from Grundtvig's hymn. In the hymn which we sing and will always sing when S.D. is remembered, we sing of the Word which is heaven born—whose secret is the spirit. Only in the word does man ascend beyond the life that ends. In the word he breaks his prisons, soars aloft to higher visions. Comprehends eternity.

On the frieze above Hejmdal we have the inscription, SOL ER OPPE, the sun is up. That phrase may sound arrogant, says S.D., but it does not imply that anyone who speaks here can bring the sun up or create a new dawn. It simply says the sun is up, even if many men can not see it because they are still asleep or wandering in darkness. The sun is up, the light has shone upon our shores. We do not prize clever and contrived enlightenment but the awakening word which in the deepest sense comes with those songs over that rainbow bridge of saga and remembrance.

Axel Kildegaard continues by recalling the many notables who have spoken from this podium, speculating that there were words of nonsense as well as wisdom.
A letter from O. C. Olsen, for many years president of the Association of Young Peoples’ Societies.

It is about twelve years since I was asked by our local Young Peoples’ Society to tell about one of my trips. The meeting was to be held on a Sunday evening. When we came there I was overwhelmed by the large gathering around a festively decorated table.

Instead of my speaking to them, it was they who would speak to me in the form of a greeting from the Young Peoples’ Societies in the D. S. U. with the surprise of a woodcut carved by my old friend, the artist Jes Smidt.

They had asked Smidt to create a picture for me, and he had come to think that on a visit to his home and work place I had spoken of my liking for the legend about the young King Skjold, who on a hunt, separated from his people, was attacked by a bear which he audaciously gave battle and tied up with his belt. That story of the young man who ties up his bear Smidt has produced in a fine illustrated work of art carved in a solid oak plaque.

One sees the young man holding the bound up bear, in the background the late-arriving men and dogs. Above the picture the heading that adorns the societies paper “Ungdom” Youth, and underneath is the name Skjold together with different figures.

Our home is decorated with a good many gifts from the young, but none do I value more than that woodcut. It hangs on the wall above the writing desk and often leads my thoughts to that story, that I also may learn that art that binds my bear.

I am to Smidt the artist as well as the many givers thankful for that beautiful gift.

O. C. Olsen

At right, a relief carving belonging to Pastor P. H. Pedersen. Here Jes Smidt has depicted a scene from the third, in a series of four round, plaster reliefs by Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen. Thorvaldsen’s “Four Seasons” represent the ages of life and the seasons of the year. This is Smidt’s depiction of “Autumn.”
Old friends from his years in Clinton sent greetings.

When we now wish to send our old friend Jes Smidt a greeting from Clinton, we who remain here from that time Mr. and Mrs. Jes Smidt and family lived among us, must make use of memory's source because many years have passed since you moved from here. But we will always remember with joy your good home and the many times we met with you in good gatherings and discussion of problems of mutual interest. Since you left here much, of course, has changed in many ways, and most in the work we were then concerned with: to join together and work for that which was Danish. There was in your home, Jes Smidt, a place where there was talked and discussed of the best, and therefore we owe you thanks.

Of those with whom you most came together, there are only a few left, but there is yet a little flock who remember with joy the time you so faithfully took part and had home and heart open for the best. It is too bad you did not begin your rightful work while you were younger, but that which you in the later years have accomplished will still cause your name to be remembered far into the future. And you also deserve thanks because you especially have worked diligently to please Danish congregations by beautifying their churches with your art. We too have an example of your work which we can enjoy and which will cause your name to be remembered by your countrymen as long as we gather together. We will then wish you God's blessing in your old age and send friendly greetings to you with thanks for years gone by.

From friends in Clinton, Iowa, December 5, 1938.

(Ed. Note: The church in Clinton burned in January of 2009)

At left, a carved relief of Queen Thyra Danebo leading construction of the Dannevirke (the rampart to protect Denmark), which belonged to Martin Holst, editor of the Dannevirke publication.
From the St. Peder's Lutheran Congregation in Minneapolis

Dear Jes Smedt,

Thanks for developing and using your God given talents to in a large way beautify our church so we can take pleasure and have our spirits lifted. Long after you and I are taken home, your beautiful work will speak its language to the coming generations.

With friendly greetings,
Martin Nelson

Another greeting from the St. Peder's Congregation in Minneapolis follows:

Every Sunday we in St. Peder's Church see its beautiful altar, baptismal font, and pulpit and think with thanks for the now grey haired old patriarch up in the Wisconsin forest who has in his many years and his rich ability, all his art and diligence beautified ours and many other immigrant churches. We are happy that he is still sound as the strong oak in which he carves his pictures and stays among us so we can thank him for his art, for his diligence, and for his faithfulness toward people and churches. Our heartfelt wishes are that he yet, as in the past may be permitted to continue to beautify our churches in America.

With thanks and greetings from St. Peder's Congregation,

J. C. Aaberg
Several letters from old friends were written and published in various Danish papers and magazines on the occasion of Jes's 70th birthday. One was by L. Henningsen, already mentioned in Jes’s early days in Clinton. It follows:

**Jes P. Smidt, A Danish-American Woodcarver**  
by L. Henningsen

Jes Smidt is one of those personalities we Danish-Americans can be proud of. His work shows unusual beauty, and in its churchly settings it will stand and give joy through generations. For that he deserves thanks now in his seventieth year. He should know that he is esteemed by more than just those who receive direct good from his work.

(There follows a couple of biographical paragraphs repetitious of information found elsewhere, and then Henningsen continues.)

This writer came to Clinton that same summer as he, and we met frequently. We soon discovered that we had many interests in common. I rented an art studio on 5th Avenue, and when Jes was done with his day's work he came up and every evening we accompanied each other home and discussed all of the best topics. In 1884 Grundtvig came to Clinton and here we received another person of common interests.

At 5th Avenue I painted the altar picture for the Elk Horn Church and Jes Smidt carved the frame. And in 1884 I painted the altar picture for the Clinton Church and Jes made the altar and frame. In the fall of 1884 I moved to the Ashland Folk School, and in the winter of 1884-85 he was one of my best art students. He drew the designs for the Ashland Church. When he returned to Clinton he got work at the Dushans Factory.

For Christmas of 1886 he made a trip back to Southern Jutland to get his bride. Adelheid Raben was from Faarvaa, and in 1887 they were married by Pastor Grundtvig in Clinton and moved into their new beautiful home which Jes Smidt himself had built on the way to North Clinton. Here they lived until 1906 when they moved to West Denmark. Their home always stood open to friends, and it is a large flock that has lived with J. S. and his wife during the different meetings held in Clinton, either for religious gatherings or for Danish Folk meetings. It was always a great joy to visit these exceptionally developed people both in religious and social aspects.

(Here Henningsen lists many of Jes Smidt's work. They will be listed more completely elsewhere. He continues.)

Jes Smidt and his wife have three children: Erik, Eleonora, and Augusta. They all live in West Denmark. Jes Smidt and his wife are of the solid Southern Jutlanders that are not blown about by every wind. Therefore, as their children grew up they agreed in moving from the city out to a Danish colony where they could more easily give their children a sound Danish lifestyle and Christian upbringing free from the difficult and often harmful influences of city life. It has certainly been a meaningful sacrifice these two have made for their children. They owned an extraordinary home, and were popular as few others. He held an unusual position as wood carver where he had worked for years and was treasured—and now to sell their home, leave friends, work, and everything to move into the country.

There are none who come in close contact with Jes Smidt and his wife without they become fond of them. How open and cordial they are so one instantly feels at home with them. I would hate not to have known Jes in those first years we were ever here. Even today I could long to be together with those two.

It is a great blessing to have been able to work for so many years as Jes has, for how good, beautiful, and true his work has been in people’s lives, both our people and for ourselves as well as children, and also for the beautiful, good and true in the lives of all people. When it happens that we are together in God’s congregation of believers in our Savior that makes us His children and brings us home to the place He has prepared for us, then we can with full heart wish Jes and his wife congratulations on the occasion of those 70 years and happiness and blessing in the future.

~41~
An Open Letter to Jes Smidt

It has now first come a message that on Thursday you will be 70 years old. That is short notice! Couldn’t you in all that time have prepared a friend of your youth that such was in the offing. It is soon 25 years since we saw each other, and though I knew you were young in spirit, it did not dawn on me that you were also young in body.

Now though—even if it comes a little late—I will send you a greeting. I could send it by wire or by air, but I prefer to send it through our good old “Dannevirke” where we are at home, because I know that others, friends of your youth in Clinton who still live, are with me in what I wish to say to you.

It was an evening some 40 years ago that our unforgettable friend F. L. Grundtvig came to me and said, “Come over to my room. There is a young man who has just come back from Ashland Folk School whom you should get to know. He is very quiet, but filled with longing and desire to reach out for something in the spiritual world.” I did not let him say two times, and after the passing 40 years I now see that your whole life as it has unfolded lay hidden in those words of Grundtvig.

And I am reminded of something Grundtvig said a few years later. It was after you took Adelheid as your wife. “There will be another true Danish home in Clinton.” And so it happened. There was a home it was a delight to come to. There was common sense and taste for all the best in people, in church and school as well as art and poetry. How interesting it was to come into your home. There was always something beautiful to see—paintings, sketches, books of art, and ideas for future works. And though you have that quietness which is golden, one could always get a lively discussion on the times and peoples’ burning questions. Oh, how refreshing it was.

Out of your youthful longing and out of the commonality in the home you and Adelheid built, your artistic soul unfolded—also away from home—out among the folk. You have not traveled to Paris for the sake of training. To my knowledge you have never had instruction in your art from any other person. Like a wildflower that gains a modest place in the field, you have gained a place not far from the altars of our Father’s churches. What is that strength that lies in some souls that they can press onward in spite of wind and weather, in spite of grass and weeds. Where do they come from, those strengths, that desire. Yes, it can be different among the different people. I know where you have gotten your development. It is when you have gone alone into that most holy place and your soul has bowed before the Lord’s altar, then it is that the desire to beautify the sanctuary has germinated. You have done that, gotten the inspiration for more and more strength to reveal yourself in that soil in which it grows.

Now by this I do not mean to say that your artistry is a wildflower. I have unfortunately not had the opportunity to see your work of the last ten years and can not judge it. But as I know your spirit from your youth on, and as I have understood it has unfolded since, I think quite naturally of a wildflower that inch by inch must win for itself where our Lord has planted it.

I understand dear friend of my youth that you have gotten in all events the best of your youthful dreams fulfilled. I understand that you are still “very quiet” outwardly, but that there are voices in you that speak so loudly that you forget your farm and the entire world over your work. And we say thanks to your wife and your children that they allow you to forget all and care for that work that fills your soul. Tell me then that you have not drunk of life’s sweetest cup.

You surely have your youthful strength that can be gained by our own development but can not be bought with money, but can be gotten with God’s grace. To have found one’s work, won one’s place, and gotten something so great to love is worth an eternity. It has cost you 70 years, but what does the wildflower think about how long it takes to unfold itself and bear fruit—to empty life’s cup.

Congratulations on what you have won.
Your friend of your youth, E. F. Madsen
To Jes Smidt from Halvdan Helweg

In the peace of the Brotherhood congregation
You began to build a bridge
That could to heaven grow
In happy peaceful trust.
In Clinton Grundtvig sermons heard
So the word a new way found
And lit in your mind a spark
That shot forth in flames.
Your artistic spirit must now speak,
And you must leave the city
To where you can quiet find
And you understand yourself
In Wisconsin's silent woods.
At last our Lord gives you permission
To lay hands on artists' tools,
His name to praise and love.

And by your hands now beautifully grow
A baptismal font, an altar,
A pulpit for the Lord's word
For every congregation's hearing,
you painted and carved in wood
A testimony that all souls carry
For hymns on Sunday clear
Up to our Lord and Father
For friendship though the many tears
You have my fervent thanks
You stand always in my thoughts
As last we saw each other yesterday
Now we'll see each for the last time
I believe that through death's narrow door
We shall meet on heaven's field
Amid the songs of angels.

The painting “Leif Ericson Sees America” was commissioned by Pastor Halvdan Helweg and his wife and given to the West Denmark congregation at the dedication of the Gym Hall in 1914.
Altar from Immanuel Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, now at the Danish Immigrant Museum, Elk Horn, Iowa

West Denmark Lutheran Church

When the original West Denmark church burned on the 9th of September, 1937 after being struck by lightning, Jes was appointed to the committee charged with building a new church. Jes, in his 84th year, designed the church in the style of old country churches in Denmark and made the altar, altar rail and pulpit. His paintings, saved from the fire, decorated the walls of the new church.

The second West Denmark Church building, newly completed, 1938.
From Andreas Bennedsen, a close friend and fellow member of the West Denmark Congregation, Jes received this greeting.

Good old Friend

Many years have glided into life's great passage since we met for the first time, and since then we have shared happiness and sorrow together with the West Denmark Congregation. Now that life's evening nears itself, I would be happy to wish you a heartfelt thanks for companionship in church work, and for working together in congregation leadership in years past. Thank you for all your work on the new church. It is first the pulpit where words about sin and grace shall be proclaimed. When one sits and looks upon it, thoughts are set in motion. To me the story of the father and two sons fits so well. The one went away and led a bad life but returned home and received forgiveness and peace in his soul. The other stayed home, but as he sits there with envy in his mind, he has not found peace in spite of the father saying that all I have is yours. I am afraid that we are all too much like the second son.

Bennedsen goes on to thank Jes for the altar and also his work on the church which they together have helped build. He writes,

Let it stand here on the hill by the lake with the altar, pulpit, and lectern speaking to the coming generations.*

A Happy Christmas and a good New Year with thanks for everything good.

Your old friend,

A. Bennedsen

*Ed. note: Unfortunately this was not to be as all was destroyed by fire when this church burned in 1985.
On the last page of the book Jes writes: “This is a list of what I have made for churches and other things that belong with that type of work.

“In 1885 L. Henningsen painted two altar pictures, one for Elk Horn and one for Clinton. I made the altars.

“In 1906 I came up to live in Milltown, Wi. and settled down to be a farmer. Christian Østergaard who was pastor in Hetland, South Dakota, where they were building a new church wrote to me and asked me to make an altar and pulpit for it. Østergaard wrote of what I did in a newspaper and I got work from both the Danish church and the United Church.”

The following is a list in translation just as Jes listed his work:

I have in all made **22 altars.**
- Hetland S.D.
- Viborg S.D.
- Waterloo, Iowa
- Danevang, Tx.
- Nysted, Nebr.
- Dannebrog, Nebr.
- Albert Lee, Mn.
- Fresno, Cal.
- Solvang, Cal.
- Salinas, Cal.
- Askov, Mn.
- St. Peders, Mpls., Mn.
- Immanual Luth. Mpls., Mn. (Now at Danish Immigrant Museum, Elk Horn, Iowa)
- Geneva, Mn.
- Church in? Mn
- Luther memorial Des Moines
- West Denmark
- Newel, Iowa
- Milltown

**10 pulpits**
- Viborg, S.D.
- Hetland, S.D.
- Luther Memorial Des Moines, Iowa
- Askov, Mn.
- Minneapolis St Peders
- Albert Lea, Mn
- Geneva, Mn
- Clinton, Iowa
- Nysted, Nebr.
- West Denmark
- Solvang, Ca (was not listed by Jes)

**8 Altar Railings**
- West Denmark
- Des Moines
- Askov, Mn
- Minneapolis St Peders

- Albert Lea, Mn
- Geneva, Mn
- Bone Lake

**2 Lecterns**
- Lecture Hall G V C Des Moines
- Lecture Hall Tyler

**4 Baptismal Fonts**
- Immanual Lutheran Minneapolis
- St Peders, Minneapolis
- Albert Lea, Mn
- Solvang, Cal.

**4 Church Reading Lecterns**
- Milltown
- West Denmark
- Immanual Lutheran, Mpls
- Baptist Church, Milltown

**Side Chairs for Altars**
- 2 in Tyler Mn
- 2 St. Peders, Mpls
- 2 Immanual Luthern, Mpls
- 2 Milltown Lutheran
- 2 Albert Lea
- 2 Luck Lutheran (now in West Denmark)
- 1 Baptist Church Milltown

**A picture of Thyra Danebo with frame**
- Lecture Hall, Tyler

**Altar pictures**
- Bone Lake
- Brush, Colorado
- Waterloo, Iowa
- Nysted, Nebr.
- Fresno, Cal.
- Viborg, S. D.
- Des Moines, Iowa
- 2 Askov, Mn
- 2 Milltown Lutheran
- 2 West Denmark
June 30, 1942 was a balmy day. In the rural community of West Denmark farmers were busy in their fields planting corn. The oats was already up. Most of the work was still done with horses. Always there were fences to repair. Many of the hired men of former years had already been called into the service. Into this quiet setting the silence was suddenly broken by the tolling of the church bell. Jes Smidt was dead. After a life that had been busy almost to the last of his 87 years the skilled hands now lay quiet, the shop and the many carving knives and hand planes for the various fancy moldings rested in their proper place in his shop gathering dust.

A few days later Jes’s casket was carried into the church he had designed, past the pictures he had painted: a portrait of Den Gamle Smed Soren Pedersen; a painting of Jesus visiting Martha and Mary, a copy of the one Jes had sat and admired as a child in his home church in Christiansfeld and dedicated to the memory of his wife Adelheid; a painting of Christ among the scribes in the temple; up to the lectern that of all his work he once said he favored most; to the altar railing and altar he had carved in his 84th year; and to the pulpit with the story of the prodigal son carved into three panels.

The church was filled with friends, ministers and dignitaries from throughout the Danish Synod. Pastor Jens Andreasen, pastor and friend, conducted the service (in Danish) and ended his funeral sermon with these words, (translated by the author) “How does a person speak so that it becomes truth in his words and in his life? There is only one way of doing it. No one does it except that his life, his work shows it.”