

Serving the
Danish Sisterhood of America Since 1947

Danish Sisterhood News

FEBRUARY 2026



In This Issue:

- ♦ Rest in Peace to several amazing Sisters.
- ♦ Lodge #15 reports on Julefest 2025.
- ♦ Danish Church Service 2025 by Lodge #4.
- ♦ Ellen Lodge #21 was very busy during the last quarter of 2025.
- ♦ Viking Runes.
- ♦ Wonderful Danish items to buy: Marketplace-Butikken.
- ♦ A word from Nealna, National President.



President's Corner



Greetings:

As I write this at the beginning of January, my heart is sad for the two great ladies we lost toward the end of 2025: Aase Hansen and Benedickte Ehlers Olesen.

Aase Hansen's Resolution is in this newsletter. Aase was an active member of the Danish Sisterhood for over 60 years. Almost single-handedly she revitalized the Los Angeles Lodge #68. She held offices at the national, district and local levels. I always remember discussions with her on how to make the Sisterhood better.

Benedicte was the Denmark trip leader from 2014 through 2022. She didn't lead the 2024 trip but spent a couple of days on the bus with the participants. Although she wasn't a member of the Sisterhood, she was a great supporter of the organization. Both of these amazing women will be greatly missed by the Sisterhood.

February is the time the Danes celebrate Fastelavn. Many of the lodges have parties knocking the "cat out of the barrel" and enjoying Danish hot dogs and other foods. I remember doing this as a child and what fun it was. If your lodge doesn't celebrate in that way, it is still a great topic for a February program to learn about the history of the event and how it is celebrated.

February also has some deadlines to remember:

- Lodge reports and updates are due February 28th.
- Your 990 e-postcard needs to be filed with the IRS. Directions can be found in the "member login section" of the Danish Sisterhood website.
- March 1st is the postmark deadline for Danish Sisterhood Scholarships.

That's all for now. As always, let us know how we can help you. We are here for you.

Nealna

Nealna Gylling, National President

Danish Sisterhood News

www.danishsisterhood.com
Volume 79, Number 2

**Honorary Member Her Majesty
Queen Margrethe II of Denmark**

Published by the Supreme Lodge of the Danish Sisterhood of America (Dansk Søster Samfund) as its Official Publication.

DANISH SISTERHOOD NEWS (USPS 148-200) is published monthly by the Supreme Lodge of the Danish Sisterhood of America. Office of publication at 1610 Birch Dr, Solvang, CA 93463. Periodicals Postage Paid at Rochester, MN.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to DANISH SISTERHOOD NEWS, 1610 Birch Dr, Solvang, CA 93463.

EDITOR: Charlene Jensen, (503) 956-4353
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Articles for publication in the Danish Sisterhood News must arrive to the Editor no later than the 1st day of each month previous to publication.

Subscription: Members \$12 (US) Non-Members \$20 (US)

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Dear Sisters and Mister Sisters:

Velkommen



Charlene M. Jensen,
Editor

As February 14th approaches, I think about what Valentine's Day is like in Denmark. The research I did online reveals that cards are a very special Valentine's Day tradition in Denmark. At one point in time, these Valentine's Day cards were prepared in the form of transparent cards which had a photo of the lover presenting his/her beloved a romantic gift. Nowadays, any card which has the love message is called 'Lovers' card'. Denmark shops are flooded yearly with greeting cards on Valentine's Day. Denmark loves to celebrate great parties on Valentine's Day. Valentine's Day is considered as a get-together day for everyone in Denmark. People exchange different flowers, gift baskets, and cards to their near and dear ones. Restaurants arrange special Valentine's Day dinner parties for groups or couples. Tivoli amusement park is a very special place for people to attend on Valentine's Day. As we in the USA celebrate Valentine's Day, remember that it is a special holiday fully loved by the Danes, also!

—Charlene Jensen, Editor of *Danish Sisterhood News*
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IN THIS ISSUE:

President's Corner.....	P 2
Velkommen from the Editor.....	P 3
News from the Lodges.....	P 4
Membership Corner.....	P 4
In Memory of Aase Hansen.....	P 5
Lodge #15.....	P 6, 7
RIP Jean Baxter.....	P 8
RIP Joan Segune LeVine.....	P 8
Dagmar Lodge 4.....	P 9, 10
Ellen Lodge #21.....	P 11, 12
Viking Runes.....	P 13, 14, 15
Danish Sisterhood Butikken.....	P 15
Annual Rebild Convention.....	P 16



ON THE COVER: Two beached fishing vessels at sunset at Nørre Vorupør, Denmark. Photo is found at: [File:Two beached fishing vessels, Nørre Vorupør, Denmark, 2015-07-09-5588 upscaled.jpg - Wikimedia Commons](#).

The fishing industry in Denmark operates around the coastline, from western Jutland to Bornholm. Denmark is ranked fifth in the world in exports of fish and fish products.

The fishing industry in Denmark is a main source of income to households. While fishing is a practice noted from the Medieval times, particularly in the coastal area of Denmark for eel fishing with woven traps, the earliest innovation in fisheries wasn't recorded until 1849 when the Danish seine or anchor seine technique of fishing was introduced resulting in unprecedented quantities of fish catch from the Limfjord.

The Danish seine or anchor seine technique of fishing is a method that involves deploying a net around a large area of the sea bed to catch fish. The technique is particularly effective for targeting flatfish and other bottom dwelling species. Here is a brief overview of the process:

- **Deployment:** The gear is set out from an anchored buoy, which is the marker for the operation. The ropes are deployed, sinking to the bottom, and the net is towed in a circle around the fish.
- **Hauling:** After the gear is deployed, it is hauled back to the anchor buoy using winches where the ropes come together.
- **Catching:** The net is then winched back onto the vessel, scooping up fish that have been herded into its path by the ropes coming together on the bottom. This technique is known for its minimal environmental impact and is considered more fuel-efficient compared to other mobile gears.



WHAT DOES "RUNES" MEAN? Runes are the letters in a set of related alphabets, known as runic rows, runic alphabets or futharks (also, see *futhark* vs *runic alphabet*), native to the Germanic peoples. Norse runes are a writing system first developed by the Germanic people of Scandinavia. Runic symbols were believed to have mystical powers. Runes evolved as they were shared from culture to culture. The runic alphabet even influenced English letters. Fehu, Othila, Sowilo, and Tiwaz became F, O, S, and T respectively. Norse runes are an important part of Norse mythology. These magic symbols appeared from the depths of the Well of Urd, also known as the Well of Fate. In Denmark, runic symbols were written with longer lines, known as long-branch form. Sweden and Norway tended to stick with shorter lines, called short-twig form.

NEWS FROM THE LODGES

IN MEMORIAM—For February 2026

NAME	Cert #	Lodge #	Location	Birth Date	Birth Place	Initiated	Died	Benefit
Minta Beth Larsen	23432	117	Spokane WA	6.6.46	Los Angeles, CA	3.4.76	1.24.25	125.00

MEMBERSHIP EXPANSION for February 2026

LODGE	NEW MEMBER	SPONSOR
126	Scott Miller	Joyce Miller
300	Richard Dempsey	Online
21	Lauren Nagata	Inge Nagata
68	Christiana Mohr	Tove Olafsen

Youth Birthdays—February 2026

Name	Lodge	Age
Cameron Curtis	184	7



SCHOLARSHIPS ARE AVAILABLE! It is scholarship application time. The Danish Sisterhood of America is proud of its scholarship program. We have 10 scholarships available to members and their children (regardless of age) who are attending a post secondary school in 2026-2027. To find out more about these scholarships, go to the website: www.danishsisterhood.org . Look under the pull down menu "What we do" or contact Nealna Gylling at president@danishsisterhood.com. **Applications must be postmarked by March 1, 2026, so get yours in soon.**

MEMBERSHIP CORNER

January is such a busy time for the Secretaries of the Lodges, what with all the reports due and dues collected. It is always an exciting time, as well. It feels so new and refreshed with the beginning of a new year. Many Lodges do their elections of new officers and then the installations. Everything seems fresh.

On that note, I want to remind you that Marilyn and I are both here to help with membership questions. We had a question about youth memberships last month and I thought it would probably be helpful to mention the youth memberships again. According to our Constitution and By-laws, a youth membership is from birth until the year **following** the youth's fourteenth birthday. If your child/grandchild is fourteen right now, they are still provided with a youth membership for no cost. The following year is the year they begin paying for an Amber membership. This has always been confusing. I hope this clarification helps.

If you have any other questions, please don't hesitate to ask. You can email me at trustee1@danishsisterhood.com or call me at 515-971-5997. Marilyn Dore can be reached at trustee2@danishsisterhood.com or 518-692-3304. We are here to help, and if we don't know the answer, we will find out.

Have a wonderful year! ~~Carol Rudisill, Trustee



IN MEMORY OF AASE HANSEN OF PRINCESS MARIE LODGE #68

Aase Hansen passed away at her residence in Burbank on September 16th at the age of 89. Aase Hansen, born Carlsen, was born on December 21st, 1935, in Kastrup, a suburb of Copenhagen located on the eastern coast of the small island of Amager. A few years later, her family relocated to a house built by her father in Dragør, a fishing village situated further south along the same island's coast. Following her high school education and an apprenticeship, she began her career as a clerk at the local Amager Bank and spent a year working at a bank in Switzerland. However, driven by her adventurous nature, she accepted a position as an au pair with a family in Encino and departed for California in October of 1959. Two years later, Aase married Alvin Hansen, the American son of Danish immigrants. Together, they had two children: Christian and Lisbeth (current member of Tivoli and Princess Marie Lodges) and by 1968 Aase had attained American citizenship.

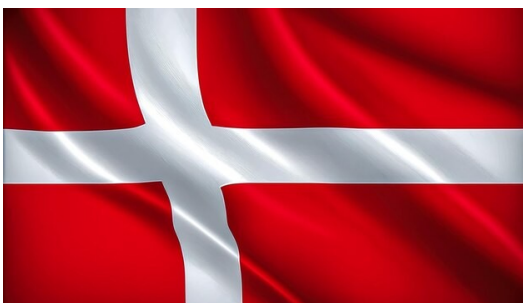
Her husband's passion for bagpipe music inspired Aase to take up Scottish country dancing (SCD) lessons in South Pasadena in 1969. Twenty years later, in 1989, on becoming a certified SCD teacher, she started teaching weekly classes in the San Fernando Valley. "I decided it was time to give back the fun and pleasure I had those 20 years" she said to Burbank Leader in 2006. She continued to teach till October 2024. Discovering SCD transformed Aase's life, and she wanted everyone to experience the joy of SCD, the music, and the sense of community and social bonds that accompanied it. For several years, Aase held the position of chairman on the management committee of The Royal Scottish Country Dance Society (RSCDS) Los Angeles Branch.

Aase established a deep and meaningful connection with the Danish Sisterhood (DSS) of America, eventually becoming the president of the Princess Marie Lodge #68 in Los Angeles and a member of the National DSS board. She enjoyed hosting meetings at her residence and participating in Sisterhood activities, outings, picnics, conventions, raffles, special events, and more. Aase was an extrovert in every sense, relishing the opportunity to meet new people, forge friendships, and help those who needed a boost in any way she could. She exhibited a sincere interest in, and compassion for, everyone she encountered that fostered a supportive sisterhood in our lodge. Proud of her Danish heritage, she delighted in sharing Danish customs and her own life experiences.

Princess Marie Lodge #68 has survived because of Aase's dedication to building the core membership and ensuring that everyone felt included and valued. Her inquisitive spirit, curiosity, and enthusiasm sparked a greater interest in Denmark and its culture among all. Additionally, her extensive knowledge of the Danish Sisterhood was remarkable, making her a living encyclopedia.

Aase's extraordinary spirit, humor and vibrant energy will be forever remembered and greatly missed. We are deeply saddened by her passing, but filled with immense gratitude for the time shared with her.

From the Sisters in Princess Marie Lodge #68



OH, WHAT FUN! JULEFEST 2025

By Sabrina Nelson, Lodge #15 Dronning Margrethe (Milwaukee, Wisconsin)

Saturday, December 6th was a blustery winter day in Milwaukee, Wisconsin but thanks to JULEFEST, members of Dronning Margrethe Lodge #15 were warm and cozy! Held at Christ the Victor Lutheran Church, Sisters and Misters gathered for food, fun and other holiday festivities. A full Danish luncheon was served, lovingly prepared by lodge members and included a fish course, several varieties of Smørrebrød, a meat course with frikadeller and medisterpølse, and a cheese and desert course. And there was also Aquavit, Carlsberg and the lodge's own specially crafted J-Dag beer.

A Very Special Gathering: Nearly 50 guests were in attendance including several friends and family members, as well as three fellow Sisters from Chicago Lodge #4 who came to our J-Dag launch party in November, and decided to come back for Julefest. Thanks to Elizabeth and Linda Steffensen and their mom, Elsa, for making the drive up from the Windy City! Julefest is particularly special to Lodge #15 as it is the one and only event that many of our Sisters and Mr. Sisters are able to attend in-person. While we love seeing each other's smiling faces each month on our Zoom meetings, nothing beats sharing a warm Danish Sisterhood hug!

Prior to lunch, guests were serenaded by lodge musician and Mr. Sister, Lou Nielsen, who performed on the autoharp (similar to a zither). His merry melodies put everyone in the holiday shopping mood, too. The silent auction competition was fierce and raffle ticket sales were brisk. At the party, \$595 was raised toward the lodge's annual donations fund, and this amount was added to funds raised from online raffles and auctions held prior to Julefest.

Christmas Is about giving, friendship and food! New this year was a toy drive for Children's Hospital of Wisconsin. Sisters were asked to bring new, unwrapped toys, books, games and crafts for these kids, ages infant to 18, who are spending the holidays in the hospital. For each item donated, Sisters were given a raffle ticket for one of two gift baskets of goodies. Additional tickets could also be purchased with a cash donation to Children's Hospital. A total of \$115 was raised and 70 items were donated – we had barbies, books, crayons, puzzles and more. And, of course, there were Legos, singing and skåling and more.

During lunch, guests shared stories of their favorite Nisse, which they had brought to help decorate the tables. A get-to-know-you Hygge card game was also played and Lodge history books from 2009 – 2024 were available for a 'skip down memory lane'. There were numerous rounds of skåling and joyous (and loud) singing of songs including 'The Schnaps Song', 'High Upon My Christmas Tree' and of course, 'Han Skal Leve'. There was also a delightful desert course of homemade cookies galore, including Apelsinsnitter, Brunkager and Pebernødder. In addition, a special Bogermester pastry (braided Danish ring) was brought from a Danish bakery in Racine, WI.

Next on the day's agenda was a short business meeting for the Lodge which included a nomination vote for the 2026 Board Members. All current board members will be returning and we are delighted to have a candidate for the currently vacant role of Vice-President. And as 2025 comes to a close, Lodge Trustees Janet Dahlman and Cleo Glassenapp helped us take a look back and recognize a number of Sisters for specific contributions to the Lodge over the past year.

As the afternoon came to a close, Sisters gathered their raffle/auction winnings, as well as to-go containers with leftovers. Exchanging final hugs and holiday wishes, everyone left with happy hearts and full bellies!



One of the baskets to be won by donating to the hospital.



A cheese and dessert course, of course!

Julefest 2026: We all know that Danish women are not ones to rest on their laurels and so a date has already been set for Julefest 2026. Mark your calendars and plan to join us on Saturday, December 5, 2026!

Continued on next page

OH, WHAT FUN! JULEFEST 2025 (continued)



Toys, books & crafts were donated to the kids at Children's Hospital of Wisconsin



Delicious Danish foods included a variety of open-face sandwiches, medisterpølse, and red cabbage.



Lodge President Cathy Jones welcoming everyone to JULEFEST



Gifts for the kids at Children's Hospital of Wisconsin



A lovely table was set for all to enjoy



Raffle prizes



Competition was fierce as Sisters got a jump on their holiday shopping lists!

REST IN PEACE JEAN C. BAXTER AND JOAN SEGUINE LeVINE

Resolution—A Life Remembered: Jean C. Baxter

The Sisters of DSS Freja Lodge #36 are saddened by the loss of our dear Sister, Jean Baxter, who passed away on December 26, 2025 in Suffolk, Virginia. Jean was born on October 14, 1931 in Perth Amboy, New Jersey. She lived in Hopelawn, New Jersey for over 35 years.

Jean graduated from Perth Amboy High School in 1950. Jean married the love of her life, Edward G. Baxter, with whom she had 4 Children: Barbara Baxter Yulick (who passed away in 2018), Ellen Baxter Franke, Scott Baxter and Wayne Baxter. She is also survived by her Grandchildren: Eric, Robert, Ian, Danielle, Winter, Dana, and Peter. She is also survived by her Great-Grandchildren: Jeremy, and Zakary. Jean's husband, Edward, passed away in 2018.

Jean was a member of St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Perth Amboy, and the Emmaus Chapter #183 of the Order of The Eastern Star. Jean worked at Macy's in Edison before retiring. Jean loved camping and traveling around the country. Jean was very active in The Danish Sisterhood of America. She was Past President of Freja Lodge #36, and Past District EGC President in 1983. She was initiated into the Sisterhood on November 19, 1959. She was a valued member for over 66 years.

The Sisters of Freja Lodge # 36 will greatly miss our Sister Jean. We will drape our Charter in her memory at our meeting in January, and we will conduct a Memorial Service.

~~**Carole E. Pierorazio, President Lodge #36**



Resolution—A Life Remembered: Joan Seguine LeVine

The Sisters of DSS Freja Lodge #36 are saddened by the loss of our dear member, Joan Seguine LeVine. Joan was born on October 26, 1937 in Perth Amboy, New Jersey. Her parents were Florence M. Larson, and Joseph H Seguine. Joan attended school in Perth Amboy through high school. Joan had a passion for learning and education. At this point in her life, Joan married her first husband Charles A. More and moved to Matawan, New Jersey. The family welcomed three children: Charles in 1954, Cynthia Joan in 1958, and Christopher in 1960. The family established their first home in Plainfield, New Jersey, and eventually Rocky Hill, New Jersey. Joan was a devoted and loving Mother.

In the 1970's there was profound changes marked by separation, divorce and remarriage. In 1972 Joan married Newton Nathan Levine. Joan went back to school and earned a Bachelor of Arts in English, and a Master of Science in Educational Media. In 1972, Joan began a full time position at Newark State College. Joan became a creative writer, publisher and art director. She authored several books, documenting and chronicling the history of Perth Amboy focusing on the history, industries and commerce of the Jewish and Danish communities. Joan became a member of the Danish Sisterhood of America and was initiated on April 20, 2001. She was an active member of Lodge #36. Joan was predeceased by her daughter, Cynthia, in 2017. She is survived by her son, Christopher and Daughter-in-law Lisa Moore, and her son Charles N. Moore, and four Grandchildren and five Great Grandchildren. Joan was loved and admired by all those who knew her.

The Sisters of Freja Lodge #36 will greatly miss our Sister Joan. We will drape our Charter in her memory at our meeting in January, and we will conduct a Memorial service.

~~**Carole E. Pierorazio, President Lodge #36**



DANISH CHURCH SERVICE 2025—NEWS FROM DAGMAR LODGE 4

Chicago Danish Church Service at Edison Park Lutheran Church 2025

Respectfully Submitted, TLC Nielsen of Dagmar Lodge 4

As a member of the Danish Sisterhood's Dagmar Lodge 4 of Chicago, my husband Paul and I have enjoyed attending the yearly all Danish Christmas Service held at the beautiful Edison Park Lutheran Church. Paul sings with the Chicago Norsemen choir under the direction of Ed Kramer, who passed away earlier this year.

Dr. Paul Nielsen put together the remaining Norsemen combined with some of the men and women singers from Normennenes Singing Society—a Norwegian choir originally formed in 1870. The result was an amazing group who sang Dejlig er den Himmel Blå (arr. Hansen), Nu Tennes Tusen Julelys (arr. Ed Kramer), God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen/We Three Kings (arr. Page), and O Holy Night (arr. Adam/Spies) at the Danish service held at Edison Park Lutheran Church. Ken Michaels, now 93, was the spine-tingling soloist on O Holy Night and had received an award for his solos with the Chicago Norsemen at Sangerfest, a Midwest choral festival, in 2023. Dr. Nielsen gave a moving tribute to Ed Kramer between songs and thanked the singers for keeping the music alive: Kevin Zehme, Ken Michaels, Shirley Trettenback, Kurt Meyer, Dave Petersen, Dan Boyle, Frank Potempa, and Richard Klein.

Rev. Dr. Karen Knutson, who officiated the 31st annual church service, had worked with Ed Kramer at previous churches throughout their careers when he was an organist. She led the congregation in worship, with the help of singer Tina Winthers and organist Kevin Zehme. We were so blessed to have Tina as our song leader since she's recuperating from some serious health challenges.

Rev. Knutson gave a wonderful message in Danish which focused on how often God used angels when He took "an unusual and great risk, when He chose to enter the world as an ordinary person, born like us all . . ." She went on to discuss the different reactions to Jesus' birth—fear and awe, belief or disbelief, and hatred. Angels were even involved in all the prophecies before Christ's birth as well as visiting Elizabeth and Zechariah, young Mary and her fiancé Joseph, the wise men and the shepherds. The sermon ended with an important question for when Christmas is over: Are there still angels among us who give us daily messages from God, that He loves us as much as He did the night His son was born and that He continues to love us until the end of the world, when He comes again?

After the sermon, a wonderfully organized reception was provided by Bente Rasmussen and the members of Dagmar Lodge 4; we continued celebrating Christmas together. Perhaps there were angels amongst us!



To see more photos or find out more information about the participating organizations, please check out these web-sites:

Normennenes Singing Society website and Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/p/NORMENNENES-SINGING-SOCIETY-100030412466129/> and <https://www.nnleague.org/normennenes.html>

Danish Sisterhood Dagmar Lodge 4, Chicago on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/danishhomechicago/posts/the-danish-home-of-chicago-residents-enjoyed-participating-in-the-31st-annual-da/1456388626497483/>
Edison Park Lutheran Church website: <https://www.edisonparkchurch.com/about-us>

PHOTO ABOVE: Dr. Paul plays guitar on God Rest Ye Merry Gentleman/We Three Kings: L-R Richard Klein, Ken Michaels, Frank Potempa, Shirley Trettenback, Kurt Meyer, Dan Boyle, Dave Petersen, and Paul. **Photography by Tracey Nielsen.**

Continued on next page

DANISH CHURCH SERVICE 2025—NEWS FROM DAGMAR LODGE 4 (continued)



PHOTO ABOVE: Forsanger (song leader) Tina Winther (R) leads the congregational songs and Læser Bjarne Kristensen (L) assists Rev. Karen Knutson with the service.



PHOTO ABOVE: Dr. Paul Nielsen leads Ed Kramer's Chicago Norsemen at the 31st Annual Danish Christmas Service: L-R Frank Potempa, Shirley Trettenback, Kurt Meyer, Dan Boyle, Dave Petersen, not pictured Kevin Zehme on piano.

Photography by Tracey Nielsen



PHOTO LEFT: The full Chicago Norsemen choir including members of the Normennenes Singing Society and organist/pianist Kevin Zehme (L) and Rev. Karen Knutson (R). Two of the beautiful Edison Park Lutheran Church's stained glass windows provided a beautiful backdrop for the Christmas service.

PHOTO BELOW: Dagmar Lodge 4 Danish Fellowship Reception after the 31st annual Danish Christmas Service with food and coffee for all, plus baked goods and crafts for sale.



PHOTO LEFT: Rev. Karen Knutson gives a wonderful Christmas sermon in Danish at the 31st Danish Christmas Service.



ELLEN LODGE #21 WAS BUSY DURING THE LAST QUARTER OF 2025

HAPPY NEW YEAR! I hope you all had time to enjoy the holidays with friends and family, revisiting old traditions and creating new. Now it's time to bring in the New Year and all its possibilities.

Ellen Lodge stayed pretty busy during the last quarter of 2025. In September, we celebrated our 133rd birthday at the home of Pia Edgar. When Pia and Emily Edgar along with Birgitte Jappe Ross host, you know the day is going to be outstanding. And they did not disappoint. Pia gave a presentation on the Elder Tree - Hylde træ. Then everyone enjoyed an elderflower drink and Emily Edgar introduced everyone to fresh edible flowers. Pia did another presentation on "Nutidens Smørrebrød" – introducing some of the new creative ways smørrebrød has been updated to reflect today's culinary traditions, while respecting the classic traditions of the past. They played Bingo and played a memory game, both using Ellen Lodge artifacts. Gitte won getting 8 out of 10 correct. And of course, the wonderful display of open-faced sandwiches and yummy desserts: almond raspberry bites, flødeboller and heart shaped cheesecakes.

We had a great presentation from Ever and Scott Johnson (Petaluma, CA) on the history of the Danish Folk Costumes from 1750 – 1850. He discussed the differences in the materials used, the cloth patterns, city versus country designs, etc. If you would like to learn more, just google Danish Folk Costumes.

We said goodbye to Margrethe Cymanski who passed away in July and welcomed Nikki Nagata to Ellen Lodge as our newest member in October. Nikki is the granddaughter of our oldest member Inge Nagata (102 years young).

In November we elected our new Board members for 2026: President – Katrina Riggs, Vice President – Marie Grunst, Secretary – Joanna Dubisher, Treasurer – Mindy Brown, Trustees – Kristin Habicht, Krista Johnsen and Nikki Nagata. We are so excited! They are young, enthusiastic, and are willing to get involved in all aspects of the Sisterhood.

We finished the year with our Danish Luncheon. A big thank you to our hostesses who did a great job coordinating all the food and entertainment. Joanna Dubisher led us in paper weaving Danish hearts and Krista Johnsen supervised the White Elephant gift exchange. As always, a big thank you to Mindy Brown and friends for always making Nissebo look so festive and inviting.

Wishing you all the happiest of New Years!

—Chris Hix, Ellen Lodge #21



PHOTO ABOVE: Lucille Fredericksen: First one to finish her heart!

PHOTO RIGHT: Annette Straus won a "White Elephant" during the White Elephant Exchange.



PHOTO LEFT: Elder Tree: The elderberry tree (*Sambucus nigra*) is a member of the same genus, *Sambucus*, which includes various species commonly known as elder. The term "elderberry" is commonly known as elder. The term elderberry is often used interchangeably with "elder tree" in culinary and/or botanical contexts.

ELLEN LODGE #21 WAS BUSY DURING THE LAST QUARTER OF 2025 (continued)



PHOTO ABOVE: 2026 Board: Joanna Christensen, Marie Grunst, Krista Johnson, Mindy Brown, Katrina Riggs, Joanna Dubisher. Missing: Kristin Habicht and Nikki Nagata.



PHOTOS ABOVE AND RIGHT: Open-faced sandwiches, edible flowers and Desserts!!



PHOTO ABOVE: Hostesses for 133rd Birthday: Gitte, Emily, Pia.



PHOTO ABOVE: Initiation of Nicole (Nikki) Nagata.



PHOTO RIGHT: Ever and Scott Johnson (Danish Folk Costumes)



RACHEL MORGAN REPORTS ON VIKING RUNES

Published: Aug 22, 2025, written by Rachel Morgan, MA Medieval Archaeology, BA History & Anthropology. Story partially printed; to completely read *Revelations from Viking Runes*, go to: 9 Revelations From Viking Runes | TheCollector

The Vikings erected thousands of monumental runestones around the Viking world. What can they tell us about life in the Viking Age? The Vikings were not prolific writers. They have left behind no written historical treatises, religious texts, or even administrative documents. The Norse sagas and mythologies were written down in the post-Viking age, when the spread of Christianity saw Latin script adapted to produce Old Norse prose. But the Vikings do seem to have been widely literate, using a runic text known as Futhark to create highly visible monumental inscriptions and to inscribe personal objects. What do these surviving inscriptions tell us about life in the Viking Age? Read on to discover several revelations from the Viking runes.

1. The Runes Were an Ancient Scandinavian Tradition

In 2021, archaeologists working with the University of Oslo trekked to a field in eastern Norway, where they found graves and a runestone. Known as the Svingerund Runestone, the reddish-brown sandstone carried the inscription: "*Idibera*." The meaning is unclear; it may be the name of one of the people buried nearby, but scholars are uncertain if it is a first or last name.

Radiocarbon dating of associated grave materials suggests the stone was inscribed around 1-250 CE, making it the oldest dated runestone. The inscription is written in Elder Futhark, the Germanic runic text that predated the Young Futhark runes used in the Viking Age.

2. The Runes Had Magical Applications

According to Norse myth, the god Odin learned the power of the runes by hanging himself from the world tree Yggdrasil for nine days and nights, pierced by his spear, until their secrets were revealed. He shared those secrets with mankind, giving them the runes both as an alphabet, but also as a magical toolkit. Many of the sagas describe heroes performing rune magic. Getting it right was important, and one Viking poet admonished: "*Let no man carve runes to cast a spell, save first he learns to read them well.*"

The Stentoften Runestone was found at Blekinge, Sweden. Dating to 500-700 CE, it also used Elder Futhark and appears to contain a curse. It says that the master of the runes concealed here nine bucks, nine stallions, and runes of power to result in insidious death to whoever breaks, presumably, the entrance to a nearby burial mound. It was also found on the ground with the inscription facing downwards and surrounded by five sharp, larger stones forming a pentagram.

3. Runemasters Created Monumental Inscriptions

Runestones have been found in many shapes and sizes. Inscriptions vary in length and content. A variety of geometric and animal designs adorn these stones. Time has taken its toll on many. The most dramatic impact of the centuries has been the loss of color. Remnants of paint sometimes survive, indicating that they were once brightly colored.

Vikings gave credit where it was due. Most runestones start by telling the reader who commissioned the runestone, and also credit the rune carver. For example, a stone from Skälby reads: "*Björn and Igulfast and Jon had this bridge built in memory of Torsten, their brother. Öpir cut the runes.*" A study of runestones from the Mälär Valley reveals that a person (likely persons) by the name of Öpir received credit for some fifty surviving runic inscriptions. Rune carving could have been a family profession and was probably carried out in workshops with multiple craftsmen.

Advances in technology provide archaeologists with high-tech means of assessing similarities and differences in carving techniques on different runestones. Using 3D-scanning and multivariate statistical methods, scholars assessed runestones from Denmark. They found that specific rune carvers were associated with specific families.

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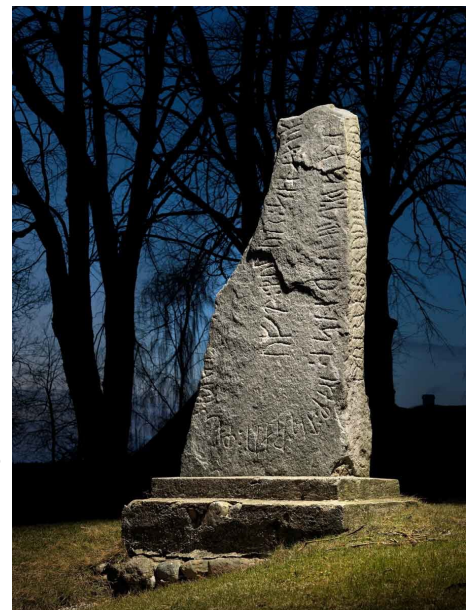


PHOTO ABOVE: The Rimsø Stone. Source: National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen

RACHEL MORGAN REPORTS ON VIKING RUNES (continued)

4. Harald Bluetooth Was a Rune Trendsetter

Around 950 CE, Gorm the Old raised a small stone memorial to his wife, Queen Thyra. The stone was carved with several lines of runes and two snake heads. The runes read: *"King Gorm made these runes in honor of his wife Thyra, the pride of Denmark."*

Around 970 CE, Gorm's son Harald Bluetooth decided to continue the memorial tradition. At Jelling, he had an elaborate runestone erected in memory of his father and mother. The inscription on the larger stone also contains a bit of bragging from the king: *"King Harald ordered these monuments made in memory of Gorm, his father, and in memory of Thyra, his mother; that Harald who won for himself all of Denmark and Norway and made the Danes Christian."* Most Danish runestones date to between 975-1025 CE, so Gorm and Harald are often credited with getting runestones trending in Viking Age Denmark.

5. Cultural Transitions Are Reflected in the Rines

While most Viking runestones were erected during the pagan period, they continued to be erected as the Vikings started to convert to Christianity. A runestone from Sweden known as Unna's stone reads: *"Unna had this stone erected for her son Östen, who died in christening clothes. God help his soul."* Another runestone from Denmark reads: *"Svæinn...raised this stone in memory of Bølsi, his son...who was killed in battle at Ütlengia. May Lord God and Saint Michael help his spirit."* Saint Michael was an archangel frequently depicted as a warrior, which may have explained his appeal in the Viking world.

6. Inscription Celebrated the Raiding Lifestyle

While we refer to Vikings today, Medieval Scandinavians would have called themselves Danes, Swedes, or Norsemen. Viking means "pirate" and refers to the Viking practice of raiding other communities for wealth and slaves. A runestone erected in Upland, Sweden, provides an example of the treasure and bragging rights associated with the Viking lifestyle: *"Ulv took three gelds in England. The first was that which Tostig paid. Then Thorkell paid. Then Cnut paid."*

But sailing and traveling abroad were dangerous endeavors in the medieval world. Runestones show that many died abroad. In Gripsholm, a mother named Tola had a stone made for her son, Harald. The stone read: *"They went gallantly far for gold and in the east fed the eagle. They died in the south in Saracenland."*

Two sisters in Fagerlöt lost their father in a similar manner. They commissioned a stone for their father, Eskil, that read: *"He offered battle on the eastern route before the war-fierce one had to fall."* A runestone raised by Sassurr for his father, Hallvarðr, reports that the man *"drowned abroad with all the seamen...May this stone stand in memory."* Those left behind in Scandinavia ensured that the Vikings who fell in battle abroad would be remembered as fierce, brave warriors for generations to come.

7. Runes Could Also Record Official Business

Vikings often traveled to raid, trade, and conquer. Inscriptions on runestones provide anecdotes of other official voyages. In Sweden, brothers Skúli and Folki had a runestone erected for their brother Húsbjörn. The runestone reveals that Húsbjörn traveled to Gotland to collect taxes from the island. He fell ill while away, but was not forgotten by his family.

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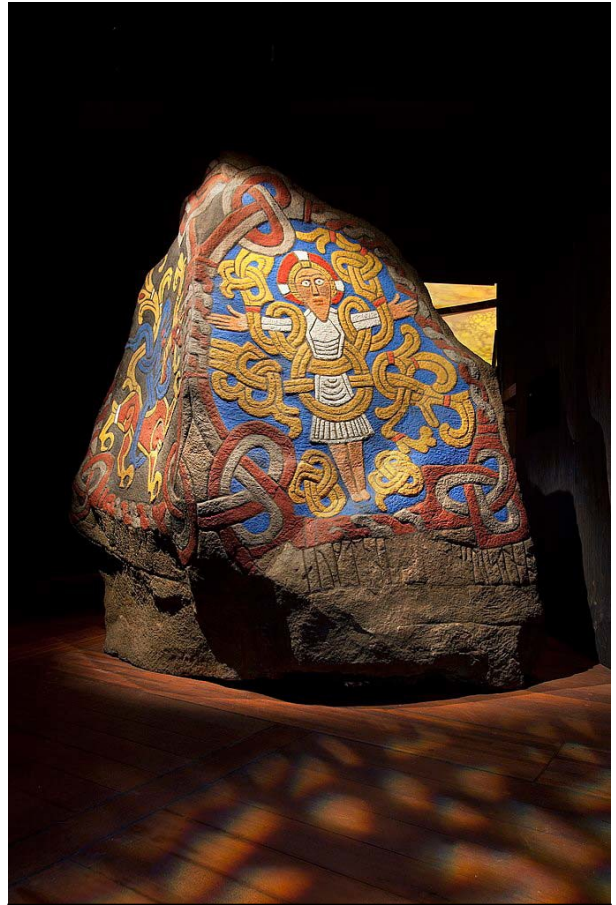


PHOTO ABOVE: Colorized version of a runestone raised by Harald Bluetooth at Jelling, c. 970 CE. Source: UNESCO

RACHEL MORGAN REPORTS ON VIKING RUNES (continued)

Runestones also recorded property transfers. A particularly long runestone from Hillersjö, Sweden, records the traumatic relationships and losses of a woman named Geirlaug and how they impacted her inheritance. The runestone notes that her first husband drowned, then her first son died. She lost several other children during her second marriage, except for a daughter, named Inga. Inga's husband and child died, so when Inga died, Geirlaug inherited her property.



PHOTO LEFT:
The Glavendrup Stone, Denmark, c. 10th century.
Source: National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen.



PHOTO ABOVE: Jelling Stone, Denmark, c. 970.
Source: Wikimedia Commons

Citation: Morgan, Rachel. "9 Revelations From Viking Runes" TheCollector.com, August 22, 2025, <https://www.thecollector.com/viking-rune-revelations/>

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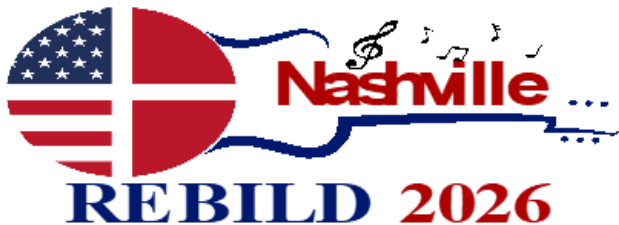
Danish Sisterhood News

Periodical Postage
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Published by the Supreme Lodge of the
Danish Sisterhood of America

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Annual Rebuild Convention
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Published by:
**Supreme Lodge of the
Danish Sisterhood of America**
National Secretary: Glenda Madrid
1610 Birch Dr, Solvang, CA 93463

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