The Folk High School Movement in Denmark: Founding Philosophy and Social Development

Education in many forms is the theme of this double issue of the Forum newsletter. We are pleased to begin with this excerpt on life-long education in Denmark, part of the address given by Finn Jorgensen to the annual meeting in December. We are grateful to Mr. Jorgensen for permission to extract from his speech. (Eds.)

What sunshine is for the good black earth, is true enlightenment for its people.
Much more than gold, it has real worth to know one's God and to know one's self.
While darkness scolds us, light ever holds us.
The joy is here.

This stanza, which N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783-1872) wrote for the inauguration of the first folk high school in Denmark, sets the scene for the foundation of the Danish folk high school movement.

In his writings Grundtvig stated three basic ideas concerning the folk high school:

1. Youth, not childhood, is the proper time for education.

2. The living word of the native tongue is to be preferred to book language, the elaborate academic style based on Latin and German grammar.

3. Conditions in the native country are to be the main topic of instruction. By this Grundtvig meant to establish a national popular culture which sought its inspiration in, for example, Nordic mythology and Nordic history.

The purpose of the folk high school, Grundtvig said, was to enlighten the general adult population in Denmark so it would be able to take a share in democracy, which was instituted in the Constitution of 1849.

First folk high schools

Kristen Kold was the first person to translate these ideas into practice, as he designed the practical framework of the folk high school. Most of the Grundtvigian folk high schools were founded between 1850 and 1870. (At the end of the first twenty years of the existence of the folk high school, fifteen schools were still in business.) They admitted young men during the winter and young women during the summer. Instruction comprised such subjects as reading, writing, arithmetic, singing, gymnastics, and lectures on Nordic mythology and Nordic history. Proceedings always began and ended with singing. Still today singing is an important factor in the folk high school. The students lived at the school, and great importance was attached to discussions and dialogue that took place between teachers and students—another feature that has been preserved in today’s folk high school.

The cost of an ordinary five-month folk high school course was on the order of what the individual student was able to earn in a year. This is probably the reason that the majority of the students were the sons and daughters of the more well-to-do farmers. The students had to bear the full costs for teaching. Around 1900 the State began to contribute with a little financial support. Today the State reimburses seventy-five

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President's Message

Observations on Education
Robert F. Thimmesh

I have been a member of the Minnesota Independent Scholar’s Forum from the initial organizing meetings (1983) and have served on the Board of Directors a total of five non-consecutive years under three different presidents. I am presently involved in real estate and securities investments, real estate management, an art gallery, and various writing efforts; real estate management is winding down in favor of an increased focus on writing.

Education, the theme of this newsletter, has been of longstanding interest to me. Education seems to me to be one of the most discussed, least understood, most idealized, and most maligned endeavors of civilization. Most agree that education is both important and valuable. Beyond this cliché, little is agreed upon. Arguments typically generate more heat than light. Most of us feel we are experts, having experienced education personally, and being convinced that our knowledge and experience are either true, or at least of greater truth than most others’ experience and knowledge.

Such a condition seems to be particularly pronounced for those of us who have also been formally educated about education.

Throughout the dialogue, fundamental differences arise about the value and significance of knowledge and/or theory vis-à-vis experience. Passion is added to the cauldron in unlimited amounts, when it’s my child being educated or when the fate of our civilization seems to be contin-

gent on my child’s education, your child’s education, or the national educational establishment. Adding spice to the educational cauldron are issues of personal identity, self-esteem, personal power, power structures, societal norms and the expectations of parents, friends, teachers—indeed, the expectations of civilization.

Education holds our dreams, our hopes for the future, our remedies for past transgressions...a modern alchemy to mitigate or eliminate the dark side of the human condition. Lack of education becomes synonymous with fear of the future, self-doubt, and anxiety about our identities.

Education is most honored by those who have it or transmit it, just as wealth tends to be most honored by the wealthy. Honor is bestowed as a reaffirmation of our own identities, to bolster and acknowledge our self-esteem. Thus it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Certain types of education become a mark of the new elite, replacing the Mayflower as a new talisman.

Root questions seem insusceptible to common agreement among major elements of our society, over and above the widely accepted feeling that education is good and ignorance is bad. Perhaps this should not be surprising, given the intimate relationship between education and our identities.

As Forum members we generally place a high value on education, as it is a significant aspect of our status as independent scholars. We tend to give credence, however, to a wider range of education and educational values than does the educational establishment. We are not anti-establishment; we simply recognize that education is broader than the establishment’s view. We acknowledge the legitimacy (for the most part) of the educational establishment’s view, but we also insist that such a view is but one chapter in the educational story—a story noted for its constant changes in plots, characters, and even endings. The story changes from culture to culture and from generation to generation, but its questions and issues continue to fascinate us. Perhaps it is the ultimate bedtime story.

At its January meeting, The Board adopted the following brief Statement of Purpose. Please feel free to use it whenever you are describing the Forum.

The Minnesota Independent Scholars’ Forum is a non-profit organization formed to encourage and promote inquiry, research, discussion, writing, and publication by independent scholars.

The Forum is a quarterly publication of the Minnesota Independent Scholars’ Forum

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A New Member Reviews
MISF December 30 Program
by June Dale

How wonderful to view history, as a mature person, from the modern perspective—to be able to study and analyze, judge and think. December 30 provided such an occasion, when MISF presented the program “Oblique Perspectives on 1492.” This three-part program was designed to whet an appetite for history. Christopher Columbus and his contemporaries may not have understood the significance of their journey; in modern times we are still discovering that significance, and therein lies the fascination.

Dr. John Parker, Curator Emeritus of the James Ford Bell Library at the U of MN (1953-91) talked about his book, A Great Sign of Land, a study and interpretation of the birds encountered and recorded in Columbus’s journals. If Linus has his security blanket, Chris had his birds. Columbus and his crew believed they were never far from land (or islands), as evidenced by their sightings of birds. So in his bird-sightings, Columbus took comfort in “knowing” that they were passing many islands in the large Atlantic sea in their serendipitous, he thought, quest for India.

David Wiggins gave a fine reading of a 25-year-old paper by Lionel Davis, M.A., “1892: A Time for Myth-Making” (originally written as a MA paper for Prof. David Noble’s class at the U of MN). Davis tells of the casting of Columbus in a hero’s role by the popular “myth-makers” of 1892; Columbus was made larger than life, and the making of a hero was too tempting to resist. If Columbus’s personal qualities had not been so obnoxious, the clergy in 1892 might have sainted him, so caught up were they in the hysterical spirit of the celebration and their righteousness as the “elect nation of God.” There were dissenting opinions that cast Columbus in a malevolent role, and notice was taken of pre-Columbian explorations in the New World, but the massive hoopla generated by collective belief in a hero overshadowed these.

Rhoda Gilman, M.A., Research Associate of the Minnesota Historical Society (retired), presented a paper about pre-Columbian Viking explorations of North America. (Her paper will be published in the Spring 1993 issue of the MN Historical Society’s Roots magazine.) What, she asks, is historical truth and how is it proven? Minnesotans learn about the Kensington Runestone in grade school, and there are probably several readers old enough to have

Living North: Panel Discussion
with Kevin Crossley-Holland
A Rebuttal of Sorts
by Ginny Hansen

“Living North: A Discussion with Kevin Crossley-Holland” was one event during the annual “Week in Winter” sponsored by the Minnesota Center for the Book and MISF in association with Metronet. The panel for this discussion consisted of individuals with a broad range of professions and experiences: Daniel Gabriel, writer; Ginny Hansen, editor; Ann and Chuck Heymann, Irish mythologists; Finn Jorgensen, Danish educator; Dave Juncker, medical psychologist; Gita Kar, Indian writer; Lengchay Kay Lor, Hmong community leader; Marty Rykle, naturalist; Wendy Ward, Celtic folk singer; Dave Wiggins, historian; and Orin and Carolyn Yost, theater owners. A superb luncheon featuring Minnesota foods was provided by Film Food caterers. Discussion summaries were filmed for later release on local cable stations. What follows here is a reflection by one of the panel participants on the discussion.

To begin on Mr. Crossley-Holland’s list of topics, I would say that trustworthiness is crucial in a climate in which a wrong turn in November can result in your freezing or starving. I take issue, however, with his idea that we suffer an increased “brevity of life expectation”—on the contrary, Minnesota is second only to Hawaii in the advanced average age of its residents, and I think the Scandinavian countries are also longer-lived. It sure isn’t because people retire TO Minnesota! I have always secretly thought it might be because we are unable to avoid exercise—it is such an effort to go to the grocery store from November to April and getting to the office can require two hours of shoveling some mornings.

I also beg to differ with Crossley-Holland’s assertion that we are a “closed community.” My clientele reside in Manitoba, Illinois, Colorado, and Denmark. Because it is so difficult to trek to my clients at Riverside in Minneapolis, I have had to devise systems, and thus it is as easy for me to “trek” farther, even out of the state. If I were in Atlanta, I would not need to avoid personal visits to their offices, and I might have no system set up for serving people at a distance—any distance. Northerners, in fact, hunger for information, and are used to looking far afield for it. I think, in comparison to the sleepy villages of Mississippi, even Croquet MN is open to input from some distance, is perhaps closer to the

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percent of running costs and teachers' salaries.

At this early period of the folk high school it is important to note the political-ideological level. The folk high schools were focal points of a Danish nationality and, in a sense, of a Nordic identity. This mobilized resistance against German upper-class cultural dominance in the southern part of Denmark bordering Germany. In this connection it is important to note that the first folk high school started in 1844 in Rodding, a town/province in the Danish-speaking part of North Schleswig.

Schools increase

After 1864 there was an explosive increase in the number of folk high schools. In just over five years, more than thirty-five new folk high schools were established, and at the turn of the century there were more than eighty folk high schools in Denmark. During the same period the number of students grew from just over five hundred a year before 1864, to more than five thousand a year at the turn of the century. The reason for this large increase in the number of schools and students is to be sought first in the fact that any new thought or initiative requires a certain period of time to ripen. Secondly the especially large increase during this period was also related to the year 1864, when Denmark lost the war against Germany, or rather the German confederation, and a new border was drawn at Kongeåen. Denmark lost almost a third of its land and a third of its population. However the crushing military and political defeat, symbolized by the defeat at Dybbøl, evoked a tremendous national feeling in the population. The popularity of the folk high school benefited enormously in this respect, with its emphasis on Danish nationality and Nordic identity.

The next phase in the history of the folk high school was World War I and its aftermath. What had started in the 1880s and 1890s could be said to be complete in the sense that in lectures on history, mythical subjects were only sagas now. Instead subjects included current world history and international politics. A new idealism had to be mobilized in the 1920s on account of a completely new world order.

Schools come of age

Then came the world crisis, mass unemployment, and German Nazism at the beginning of the 1930s. All of this hit the folk high school at its weakest point: social commitment. Real knowledge of economic and social forces was conspicuous by its absence. The concentration camps, atomic bombs, and other atrocities of World War II had to be experienced before the shocks were transformed into a completely changed awareness. It could be said that the final break with the Grundtvigian concept of cultural unity did not occur until after World War II.

After the war, subjects like angst, existentialism, and modern poetry were finally included in the curriculum.

From a sociological point of view, during the 1960s the folk high school took leave of the social class that until then had been its mainstay. The reason that students from the rural areas more or less disappeared from the folk high school was partly because their parents would no longer recommend that they go to the folk high school, since the teachers were supportive of liberal ideas. (It was quite common that teachers had affiliations with the Socialist People’s Party and the Left Wing Socialists.) Another important factor in the decrease of students from rural areas was the decrease/decline of the population in the countryside.

Most of the young people attending the folk high school in the 1970s came from urban areas, and this is still the case today. They were young people on their way to a new life situation, on their way to an education, in the process of changing jobs, or in need of a new social environment. This new group of students had almost no relationship with the old folk high school tradition.

Conflicts in 1970s

The folk high school of the 1970s was very political. The conflicts were many. For instance, teachers and principals frequently came into conflict with each other because the goals of the school were not always clear.

The political element in the folk high school continues to exist. In the 1980s groups administered their own affairs, in movements for peace, the environment, and human rights. In this way the political element in the folk high school was channeled into some very positive aspects, which is also the situation of the folk high school today.
A short history of MISF

Forum's tenth anniversary coming or going, depending...

By Brian Mulhern

Amid the annual succession of Independent Scholars’ Forum book discussion groups and program presentations, we often lose sight of the broad outlines of the Forum’s past. Recent efforts to assemble the Forum archives yield an abbreviated history of the organization.

The Forum began in 1982 as the “Independent Scholar Project” of the Minnesota Humanities Commission. Under Humanities Commission sponsorship, the Project sought and received a $60,000 grant from the Northwest Area Foundation. Foundation funding, first awarded in 1984, facilitated a three-part program that operated for the next five years, 1984-1988. The year 1984 also marked the formal emergence of the Independent Scholar’s Forum from the MHO Independent Scholar Project. John Butts served as the first president of the independent organization.

The Forum’s grant provided significant financial aid ($3000/year) to exemplary individuals through the Independent Scholar of the Year Awards. A second facet of the grant program permitted substantial subsidies ($7000/year) of publications by independent scholars through the Title Subsidy Awards Program. Finally, a third subsidy ($4,000/year) was allocated to facilitate short-term academic teaching stints for independent scholars through the Visiting Fellow Lecturer Awards.

Paradoxically, the major project outcome was deemed to be refinement of the notion of independent scholarship. Through matching-fund requirements the Northwest Area Foundation funding marshalled over $200,000 of resources for individuals engaged in significant scholarly work without benefit of full-time support from academic institutions.

Forum presidents during this period included Rhoda G. Lewin (1984), Jim Casebolt (1985), Sandra Sandell (1986-1987), and Susan M. Smith (1988-1990). The group obtained tax-deductible status (501, C-3) and a regular newsletter was begun under the editorship of Susan Milnor in 1989.

Meanwhile the Forum was networking with similar groups elsewhere in the country in an attempt to gain wider recognition for the problems faced by independent scholars throughout the United States. Similarly, Forum study groups sought to network independent scholars through shared intellectual interests in a wide variety of topics. A wide array of program presentations was developed to showcase individual research-in-progress.

More recently, the Forum board assumed more decentralized responsibility for the broad range of Forum functions. Long-standing group openness to the library community was reaffirmed as MISF forged program ties with Metronet, a regional library network. These overtures ultimately issued in National Book Foundation-sponsored “satellite grants” to Forum programs.

The organization risked involvement in such current cultural “issues” as the Columbian quincentenary and the American presence in the Persian Gulf. Presidents David Wiggins (1991-1992) and Robert Thimmesh (1993- ) have brought the Forum to the present day with ever-broader programming and a renewed emphasis on multi-cultural understanding.

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followed this controversy for many years. The rune-stone controversy, however, continues, as does the question of the existence of pre-Columbian Vikings in Minnesota. Interesting “evidence” of “boat-mooring” stones has been found in Becker County and an “altar-stone” in Stearns County. Ms. Gilman told the story and raised the question “Is this history?” In trying to answer, she had to ask the larger question: “What is history?” Her answers were thought-provoking.

Personally I was delighted and amused by the new (to me) perspectives presented in this triple program. I had always blamed the discovery of America on Mrs. Columbus’s sending Chris out to play in the ocean because she was tired of his watching sports all day; as he would go out the door she could call after him. “By the way, Chris, if you find anything to sack and loot, I could use a new pair of Gucci’s.”

June Dale recently joined MISF and was elected to the Board at the annual meeting in December.
Op-Ed Page

From what (or whom) have we declared our independence? Just for the sake of discussion... Is it possible "to belong" to independent scholars? Doesn't belonging assume some sort of relationship and aren't relationships connections? If we are connected, can we really be independent? Independent means free from influence, control or determination of another or others. What or whose influence do we want to be free from? It is foolish to join an organization to which you do not want to belong. And none of us is foolish, so obviously we are not adverse to influence from each other. But there are many kinds of influence... what kind of influence will we accept?

Are we willing to be influenced by the systematized knowledge of learned persons, exhibiting accuracy, critical ability, and thoroughness? We can know independently, but since none of us can perceive all reality, doesn't learning have to be a collaborative process? Aren't we really a community of scholars who independently pursue what we care most to know, yet interactively peruse what there is to know and how it can be known? Shouldn't we all try to attend the MISF program and study groups more often... Just for the sake of discussion?

Donna DeWitt McGarry

Living North (continued from page 3)

openness of Chicago than the receptiveness of Caracas.

I do, however, agree that the North can be a place of escape. Although it is not impossible to foist Prudhomme Bays on the world, nonetheless there is some hope that a landscape covered in three feet of snow and minus 80 degrees of windchill except for those times when it is covered with clouds of stinging insects and uninviable peatbogs may yet survive as a sanctuary for the caribou and the wolf. One of the attractions of Newfoundlend and the Yukon Territory—and of Siberia—is that when a terrain survives there more or less unspoiled unto 1993, it may actually reflect not a fallow field, but a field that looks just as it did in 3000 B.C. I cannot think of a spot equator-ward of temperate zones that can come anywhere near that claim.

Concerning the outsiders' experience of North, however, we get the bad rap from those who do not make the personal shift in outlook necessary to survive here. They come unprepared for the physical hardships of windchill, and in their discomfort they expect us to provide the preparation for both ourselves and for them: they take our failure to teach them as reticence, while we would merely not presume to judge that they are not competent to take care of themselves, unless they ask for help—which we're more than ready to give, as anyone knows, visitor or not, who has needed a jump-start after a storm. If we don't do things in expansive strokes and booming tones, perhaps it is because he who strides boldly on an icy walk may go boom in a big hurry.
Member News And Notes

Laura Weber received a Travel and Study Grant from the Center for Arts Criticism in December. Her project was to attend "Klez Kamp," the YIVO Folk Arts Program held annually at the end of December in the Catskill Mountains of New York. "Klez Kamp" consists of classes, workshops, concerts, and general immersion into Yiddish culture and klezmer music.

Stowe-Day Foundation in Hartford, Connecticut, has named Jo Blatti as executive director. Blatti had worked as an independent scholar in agricultural history. She helped MISF formulate policies regarding fiscal agency in the early 1990s.

Rhoda Lewin spoke on "From Interviews to Book Reviews" at the annual meeting of the Oral History Association in Cleveland in October.

The Library at the University of Minnesota is looking for "photogenic" research projects undertaken by MISF scholars that use the facilities of the University libraries. If you think you might have such a project, which would be videotaped for publicity, call Lucy Brusic (612) 646-2970.

The Critics' Travel Grants Program, administered by the Center for Arts Criticism, offers Twin Cities freelance and staff arts critics the opportunity to enrich their knowledge of the arts of North America. For more information contact Center for Arts Criticism at (612) 644-5501. Next deadline for grant application is May 17, 1993. ■

Board Notes

At the annual meeting in December, the following persons were elected to the Board: June Dale, Leah Lowe, Donna McGarry, Gloria Morris-Grothe, Lucy Smith, and Robert Thimmesh. Thimmesh was elected president and McGarry, vice-president. Lucy Brusic, Ginny Hansen, David Juncker, and treasurer David Megarry continue on the Board.

The Board meets regularly on the second Tuesday of the month. Recent conversation has evolved around "getting more members involved." There are two areas where help is very much needed:

1. Help is needed with the "phone tree." We have found it worthwhile to call members before every meeting. About six more people are needed to help with the calling. This is not a hard task; it can be done at the convenience of the caller. Please call Ginny Hansen (374-5505) if you can help with this important connection for MISF.

2. Also needed are persons to help with "hospitality" at meetings. This is a way to become acquainted with members of the Forum. Please call June Dale (881-0990) if you can help either once or on a continuing basis.

In addition, the editors would like to involve some more people in the production of the Forum newsletter. If you would like to know more about this aspect of MISF, please contact Lucy Brusic (646-2970) or David Juncker (824-2317.) ■

Membership Application to the
Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum

Regular

- $15.00 (under/unemployed)
- between $15.00 and $36.00
- $36.00 (regularly employed)

Household

- $18.00 (under/unemployed)
- between $18.00 and $40.00
- $40.00 (regularly employed)

Sustaining

- $50.00 or more

Donor

- $75.00 or more

Benefactor

- $100.00 or more

Name

Address

City

State Zip

Telephone: (home) (work)

Mail to: Curt Hillstrom
715 E. 57th St.
Minneapolis MN 55417
Educational Programs with a Built-in Error

Minneapolis Public School Programs are currently undergoing severe questioning. One sad truth is that most of the programs are very good indeed: they were carefully designed, addressed multiple interlocking and sometimes conflicting pressures, and have demonstrated repeatedly their efficacy. So why the hassle?!

No one bothered to make sure the public understood the product. Educators assumed that a well-designed, though complex, system would sell itself. There would be no need for that ugly pseudo-art, "marketing". What a mistake! Most parents are in the system for two or three years before they realize the value and opportunities available, although the decision to join is made before the first day of school.

The beauty of the Minneapolis system has been the fantastic set of educational choices available to parents, students, and staff, to create educational environments that suit individual children's learning styles. The establishment of this system meant extensive busing, which went a long way toward ameliorating racial and income-level imbalances. In addition, the closing of many school buildings meant money was available to increase the number of teachers and teachers' salaries.

The downside has been an almost total lack of successful marketing of the opportunities available, and an emphasis on busing costs and the loss of "the neighborhood school." It was evident, very early, that each child's school chums could, and would, come from most every corner of the city, and that parties of any kind (team sport, birthday, sleepovers, etc.) would necessitate extensive parental travel—no different from any private school, but new to most parents in the Minneapolis system. In parts of South Minneapolis, the desire for renewed neighborhood focus has been addressed by augmenting local park programs, local church-based (but open) Boy Scout, Girl Scout, Indian Guide, etc., programs, and the establishment of a few annual block party programs.

Today, it is probable that many near-inner-city neighborhoods, due to continued pressures from road expansion, housing developments, airplane noise, drug dealing, etc...will not be helped enough by local block and park groupings, but will need something like a school building to help stabilize, and reverse, neighborhood degradation. It might be the time to re-consider local K-3, or K-x programs in almost every neighborhood; with the older children having the full range of program choices through select program/site combinations and busing similar to those that are now in existence.

Whatever happens, I greatly fear professional educators' and school boards' seeming blindness to the ongoing need for creative marketing of educational programs to each year's new parents, and their demonstrated proclivity toward throwing babies out with the bath water.