

The Danish Lutheran Publishing House of Blair, Nebraska

The Danish Lutheran Publishing House has been gone for over half a century. Yet for sixty-seven years, the LPH, as it was informally known, was a prolific and persuasive presence in the world of Danish American Lutherans. It was founded in 1893 at the convention of the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church Association in Racine, Wisconsin. This decision was an outgrowth of efforts going back as far as 1872 to establish some form of Danish Lutheran publishing activity on this side of the Atlantic. The periodical *Kirkelig Samler* (Church Gatherer) was begun in 1872 and a mail order book selling business made an appearance in 1886.

Financial difficulties loomed large in the early years. Since organized financial support was minimal, the LPH at the outset had no choice but to borrow the necessary capital. This resulted in an initial debt of \$2,500, which progressively grew to a daunting \$36,000. A subscription campaign by the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1917 wiped out that debt and set the LPH on the road to financial stability. Despite the Depression years and notwithstanding the 1953 fire that destroyed all the records and much of its equipment, the LPH was able to thrive right up to the time of its merger with Augsburg Press of Minneapolis in 1960.

In the beginning the LPH was a house without a home. Initially it occupied space on the first and third floors of Trinity Seminary in the building that eventually was to become Dana College's Old Main. In the mid-1890's it rented quarters at the southeast corner of Washington and 17th Streets in downtown Blair. In 1898 the LPH had sufficient resources to purchase land and buildings near Front and 17th Streets for \$3,600. Additions were made in 1927 and 1947, and fires in 1909 and 1953 forced further changes, but 17th and Front remained the LPH's permanent home.

During its first two decades the LPH focused exclusively on materials in the Danish language. Its first efforts were directed toward the publication of *Sangeren* (“the singer”) which was initially printed in Denmark. Its first English language publication, *The Little Lutheran*, appeared in 1915. Hymnbooks, Sunday School materials, Luther’s catechism, and church periodicals all appeared first as exclusively Danish publications, but gradually they were all replaced, or at least paralleled, by English counterparts. One notable exception to the English-only trend was *Luthersk Ugeblad* (“Lutheran Weekly Paper”) which, even though its readership steadily diminished, continued to be published alongside the *Ansgar Lutheran* right up to the close of the Lutheran Publishing House in 1960. The otherwise relentless preference for English led to the decision in 1943 to drop the word Danish from the name and become simply the Lutheran Publishing House.

This name, “Lutheran Publishing House,” would seem a trifle grand for the publishing arm of a small Lutheran synod headquartered in an eastern Nebraska town. However, from the beginning it had a vision that extended well beyond that of a marginal sectarian press. Up until 1920 it published *Danskeren* (“The Dane”), a weekly newspaper that brought news of Denmark and the world into the homes of Danish immigrants. The LPH published a variety of hymnbooks for both Lutheran synods founded by Danish Americans. It was also the publisher of the *Rural Lutheran*, a monthly periodical that was the joint product of several Lutheran groups.

The variety of publications that the LPH produced was astonishing. Hymnbooks were fashioned for both formal and informal settings, as with the Danish *Psalmebog for Kirke og Hjem* and its English successor *Hymnal for Church and Home*. Other musical niches were filled with *Sangeren* and with the *Junior Hymnal*. Christmas, always a central

Danish holiday, was marked with three publications, *Christmas Chimes*, *Child's Christmas Chimes*, and *Dansk Almanak* (later *Dansk Nytaar*). The *Ansgar Lutheran* was first published in 1927, and then carefully and persistently nurtured, despite considerable opposition to receiving church news in English. Conversely, the LPH supported periodicals in Danish even when interest in Danish was flagging. The *Dansk Ungdomsblad i Amerika* ("Paper for Danish Youth in America") periodical was begun in 1924 and lasted but three years in what turned out to be a fruitless effort to revive interest in Danish among the American born children of immigrants.

The Danish American Archive and Library is fortunate have an extensive collection of LPH publications—novels, memoirs, devotional materials, periodicals, hymnbooks, synodical yearbooks, Danish grammars, and much more. However, since all the LPH records were destroyed in the 1953 fire, it is impossible to know if the Archive's collection is complete. The Archive staff and volunteers are continually on alert for as yet undiscovered items published either in English or in Danish by the Danish Lutheran Publishing House.

Not only does the Archive house a large number of LPH publications, it also contains several collections that aid in understanding these materials and the publishing house that produced them. These include the 68 boxes of the collection of P.C. Jensen, (the long serving editor of the *Luthersk Ugeblad*), the collection of former synodical president N.C. Carlsen, and a collection dealing specifically with the Lutheran Publishing House itself. Most of the materials published by the LPH are housed in the library section of the Danish American Archive and Library.