

DANEVANG, A 2008 SPRING TOUR STOP

In 1894, 100 Danish families left their original immigrant settlement in the Midwest, moved to Wharton County and established the community of Danevang. Finding that Midwest crops weren't suited to South Texas, they soon discovered King Cotton and later added other crops. Following the Danish tradition, the farmers started a coop in 1920 to process, market crops and purchase supplies needed by the members. The Danish Farmers Coop is the oldest active chartered agriculture coop in Texas. Continuing the Danish State Church tradition, a Lutheran church was organized in the first year. The farmers financed the building with a percentage of their cotton crop. It was dedicated in 1907. A hurricane destroyed it in 1945. News came that the army chapel building at Camp Hulen in Palacios was available because the camp was being deactivated at the end of WWII. The building was acquired, moved in parts and set up near the original church building. It was dedicated in 1947 and is being used today. In 1993 the Danish Heritage Preservation Society was formed. A 6000 sq. ft. museum was built to resemble a Danish barn with a red roof. An 1898 settler's home was moved to the museum grounds to reflect early Danish life styles. In 1895 a community hall was built to house reunions, meetings, celebrations, etc. The museum displays a century of yearly Christmas plates by Bing and Grondahl from 1895 to 1996—one of the very few complete collections in the U.S. In 1995, the Texas Legislature proclaimed Danevang the Danish capitol of Texas.

WHARTON COUNTY COURTHOUSE, ANOTHER STOP ON OUR TOUR

The old 1852 wooden courthouse needed replacing. The famed architect from Houston, Eugene Heiner, founding member of the Texas Society of Architects, was chosen for the job. Heiner's forte was the blending of architecture styles to produce designs that were unique—attested to by his 19 courthouses and 17 jails of the era. The Wharton County Courthouse was a blend of second empire which reflected the Victorian era and Italian Renaissance/Roman Empire, complete with mansard roof and a clock tower. To save money, bricks were made from clay from the nearby Colorado River bank.

The proud new courthouse was the center of events: parades, baby shows, dances, fiddlers' contests, Red Cross shelter and a place to gather to see the Colorado River rise. Boys and girls played in, around and on the courthouse, jumping out the second or third story windows and sliding down the fire escape slides.

In the 1930's-40's, the need to add space and modernize was perceived. "Modus modernness" can be a plus but there are negatives in the balance. The mansard roof and bell tower came down flattening the roof. The beautiful salmon colored bricks and white trim were slathered in yellow stucco: grandeur lost. A generic sanitarium resulted and was referred to as "denatured" by the citizens. The courthouse clock was sorely missed even though the clock gave a different time on each side. Life was scheduled around that bell.

By the late 1990's the building had slipped into disrepair. Many were ready to junk it and rebuild. However, the old timers remembered what "used to be". After years of debate, restoration gained traction instead of demolition. Work started May, 2003. Efforts were sweetened by the \$4 million offered by the State Legislature under the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program. The old bell was found, brick cleaned of stucco and the clock tower replaced. The old/new courthouse was re-dedicated August 4, 2007, at 10 a.m., again the pride of the county.

Both articles above written by Karen Clark.

A MORE DETAILED ITINERARY WILL BE INCLUDED IN THE MARCH/APRIL *HUBCAP!*

