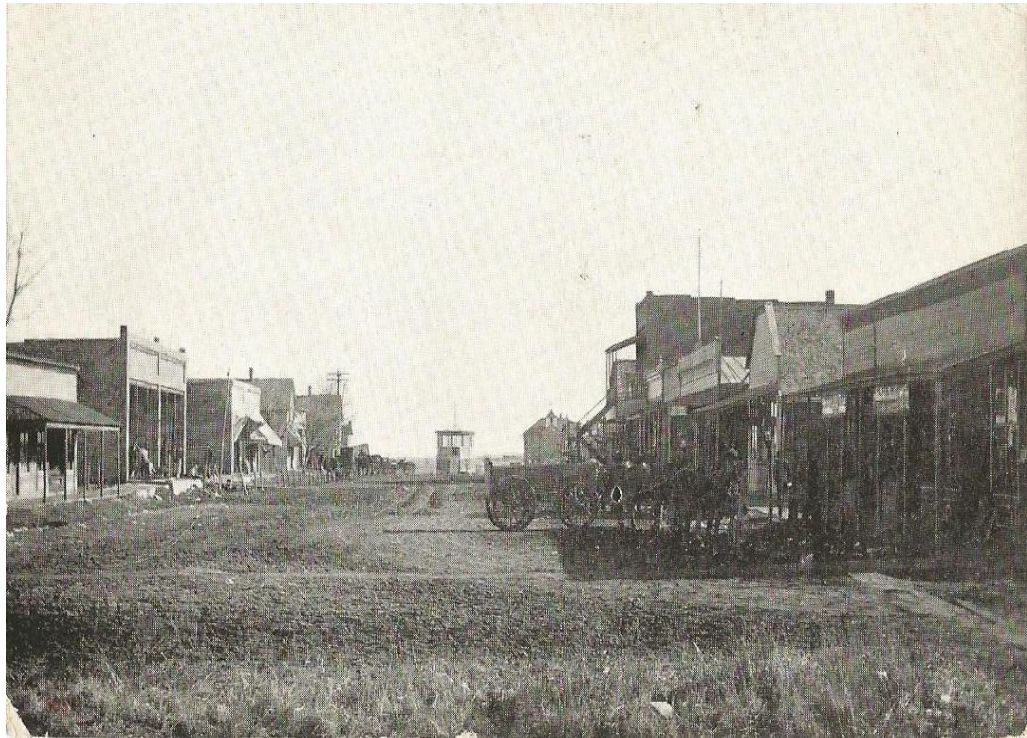


From Helsingør to Elsinore: A History of Immigrants from the 1860s

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This paper shares the history and stories of those in the town of Elsmore, in Elsinore Township, Allen County, Kansas. The town was founded in 1866, and is still occupied today. In this paper, I used newspapers, field work, census data and Kansas directories.

Can you imagine uprooting your life and moving almost 5,000 miles from home to a place you have never been before? The immigrants from Helsingør, Denmark traveled over 4,700 miles to settle in southeastern Kansas in the late 1860s. When they arrived, they were surrounded by vast prairieland with the sound of a stream trickling in the distance. This once quiet grassland quickly transformed into a small community of farmers where people would create families, worship in church, and send their children to school. This community was named Elsinore, after their home in Denmark. This paper will tell the story of how families immigrated to America and developed a community that is still active today.

Finding Home in America

In 1864, *The Osage County Chronicle* of Burlingame, Kansas, printed an article titled, "The Fate of Elsinore."¹ The article was from a correspondent of *The London Times*, who discussed the happenings of European communities. The author portrayed the disappearance of Elsinore, Denmark. The commentary opens with the phrase, "Elsinore is dying, dead – the little town could not survive the abolition of the Sound of Dues, on which it thrived for so long a time." The elimination of Sound of Dues meant that Denmark had lost control of the tolls they charged ships that navigated through the Baltic Sea, an enormous loss of profits.² Elsinore, a coastal town that was once wealthy and affluent became deprived. With the increasing poverty, the Danes were pulled by the stories of successes in America.

Some Danes had emigrated prior to the 1860s, especially in the late 1840s when starvation and disease spread to Denmark during the Irish Potato Famine.³ More were encouraged to immigrate to the United States when Abraham Lincoln signed the Homestead

¹ *The Osage County Chronicle*, August 20, 1864.

² "Art. The Sound Dues of Denmark." *The Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Review* 33, no. 4 (October 1, 1855), 1.

³ "Danish Immigration to America." Danish Immigration to America: History for Kids.

Act of 1862.⁴ The Act enabled settlers to claim up to 160 acres of land in the plains region, including the Kansas Territory. Settlers residing on the land for at least five years would obtain ownership of it, which was a bargain too good to pass up.

The First Years

“Elsinore is a new town, in a beautiful location fifteen miles east of Humboldt, and has several business houses,” boasts a *Fort Scott Daily Monitor* article in July, 1870.⁵ The author is reporting the current events of Allen County, and this newspaper article marks the “grand opening” of Elsinore to people outside the area. The article adds, “Elsinore bids fair to be a lively place,” and indeed Elsinore had been a flourishing community for a couple years before the publication of this article. In 1870, the settlers of Elsinore already had their own grocery and blacksmith.

An indicator of a prosperous community is a post office, and Elsinore’s was established on November 22, 1866.⁶ The city of Elsinore was located in Elsinore Township, and both saw an enormous increase in population at the end of the 19th century. According to *Cutler’s History of the State of Kansas*, the Township had 452 people in 1870, but had more than doubled by 1880 with a population of 1,054.⁷ At this time, Elsinore was considered the “center of attraction” for those in the surrounding towns in Elsinore Township. “They went there for their mail, to vote, and to buy groceries.”⁸

⁴ "Primary Documents in American History." Homestead Act: Primary Documents of American History (Virtual Programs & Services, Library of Congress).

⁵ *The Fort Scott Daily Monitor*, July 28, 1870

⁶ "Post Offices." Kansas Historical Society.

⁷ William G. Cutler, "Allen County" in *History of the State of Kansas*, accessed November 15, 2017. <http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/>.

⁸ L. Wallace Duncan and Charles Frederick Scott. *History of Allen and Woodson Counties, Kansas*. (Iola, Kan.: Allen County Historical Society, 1976), 97.

From Elsinore to Elsmore

In 1887, reports of the Kansas City, Parsons and Pacific Railway stated that a railroad was to be laid through the area, and Elsinore Township representatives (along with those in Osage and Marmaton) were able to persuade contractors to lay tracks through their townships.⁹ However, the company would not approve unless each Township would purchase \$20,000 in company stock. The decision was put a vote and the people of Elsinore Township agreed upon it.



Figure 1. A photograph of the depot and railroad, looking east down Main Street in Elsmore, Kansas, circa 1900.

SOURCE: Allen County Historical Society, Inc.

Alongside the tracks, the Company promised to build a train depot, station and telegraph office.¹⁰ Near the end of 1888, the railroad was completed alongside the platted area and facilities. Because the track was laid two miles west of the city of Elsinore, businesses, followed by families, moved directly east of the railroad for convenience. The first person to

⁹ Ibid., 98.

¹⁰ Allen County Historical Society Photograph Collection, Allen County Museum, Iola, Kansas.

move was W.D. Cox. In 1888 and he moved his country store to the newly platted land.¹¹ His move created a domino effect, and by 1889, the new Elsinore was populated by 300 people.



Figure 2. A photograph six men posing in front of “Tippy’s” grocery store in Elsmore, Kansas. Circa 1899. SOURCE: Allen County Historical Society, Inc.

The first year after the railroad was laid, the name “Elsinore” was being painted across the depot. Evidently, the painter failed to dot his “i,” which made the “in” to look like an “m” in the title. This caused the name of Elsinore to be mistaken for Elsmore, however the accident provided a way to distinguish between the two places.¹² People referred to the original city of Elsinore as “Old Elsinore”, and the newly platted area east of the railroad became Elsmore. On February 11, 1889, The Elsmore post office transferred from Old Elsinore to Elsmore, both in location and in name.¹³

The Twin Town: Savonburg

The same year that Elsmore was platted, a town company was established in Savonburg, Kansas, about 3 miles south. The cities were considered “twin towns” because of their

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ "Post Offices." Kansas Historical Society.

numerous similarities. For example, Savonburg settlers were also of Scandinavian, most of them from Sweden. In the early 1890s, the State Board of Railroad Commissioners needed help on the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad, informally known as the Katy. The company constructed a depot and stockyards in the area, which caused the town to flourish.¹⁴ Savonburg gained the reputation of being “the best shipping point on that railway division for livestock, grain and broom corn,” however those in Elsmore would claim otherwise.¹⁵ In fact, Jesse Decker, secretary of the Elsmore boasts: “Elsmore easily ships more of this commodity than all other towns in the county and more than any two other towns in Southeastern Kansas,” clearly indicating their superiority over Savonburg.¹⁶ By the year 1900, the two towns matched in both population and trade, which is still true today.

Elsmore Today

If you were visiting Elsmore today, you will find a farming town of half a mile long and a fifth of a mile wide. The three main roads consist of Railroad Street, which sits directly to the east of the railroad, Main Street, and York Street. They are intersected with numbered roads, 1st through 8th, and many consider 2nd street to be “Main Street” since the City Hall, Bourbon Allen Bar and Grill restaurant and playground are all located there.¹⁷ Elsmore’s twin town, Savonburg, still sits 3 miles south and the railroad still passes through both, however both depots are gone so there is no need for trains to stop. With populations of 77 and 109 respectively, both Elsmore and Savonburg rely on farming as their main source of revenue.¹⁸ At the beginning of the 20th century, the automobile caused the railroads to be used less and

¹⁴ Duncan and Scott. *History of Allen and Woodson Counties*, 97.

¹⁵ Allen County Historical Society.

¹⁶ Duncan and Scott. *History of Allen and Woodson Counties*, 98.

¹⁷ Interview by author with Dick Fewins, resident of Elsmore, Kansas, December 9, 2017.

¹⁸ Bureau, US Census. "Elsmore city, Kansas." Census.gov.

forced residents to relocate to larger cities in Allen County, such as Moran, Humboldt, and Iola. Fires destroyed some buildings and most were not rebuilt.

The immigrants from Helsingør, Denmark traveled over 4,700 miles to settle into their new home in southeastern Kansas in the late 1860s. The prairieland that was once Elsinore has now diminished, replaced by a cemetery, however the town of Elsmore is still the home to 77 people. The town lives on as a community of farmers and families. This paper has shown the early stages of settlement and how it affects Elsmore today.

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