

How the Peasant House Became a National Symbol

A Chapter in the History of Museums and Nation-Building

Bjarne Stoklund

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The author – who has retired from a chair in European ethnology at the University of Copenhagen – has a past as a curator at the Open Air Museum near Copenhagen. In this article he is investigating his own roots by analyzing the role that “folk culture”, especially peasant houses and dwelling-rooms, played in the construction of national culture.

The interest for the material elements of folk culture developed inside the framework of the great exhibitions, and was further cultivated in two new types of permanent institutions: museums of applied art and “folk museums”/open air museums. The establishment of folk museums culminated in the decades around 1900. This was also a period of national mobilization and dominated by the national principle that political and ethnic unity should agree, with oppression of minorities as well as their political mobilization as consequences. How is this development mirrored in the uses of folk culture? Among other things in the way that ethnic groups without a proper state of their own become providers of national symbols for the dominant nations. This is exemplified by the way in which the Dutch, the Germans and the Danes have used elements of Frisian culture in their respective nation-building. In the same period there is a national struggle to possess desired treasures of folk culture. This is illustrated by two examples of a national German-Danish conflict about old farm houses from the border area between the two nations.

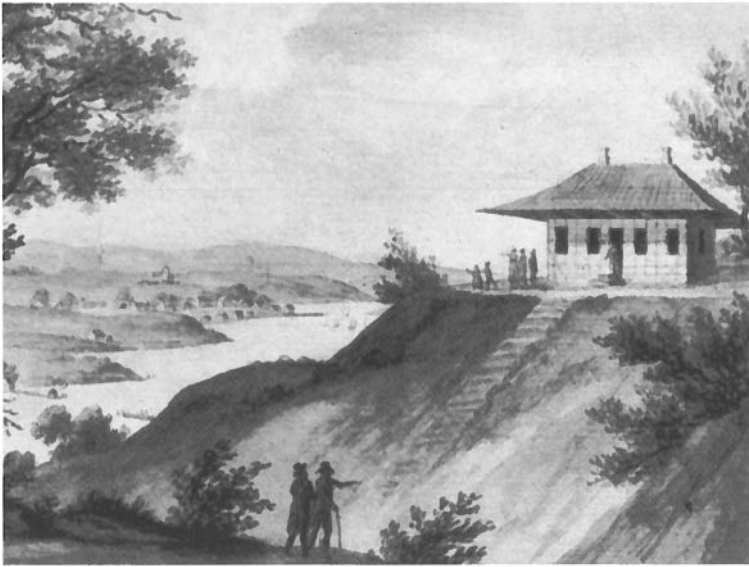
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For 25 years I have been professor of European Ethnology at the University of Copenhagen, but I have a past in a world that in many ways is different from the academic: that of the museums. For 12 years I was a curator at the Danish Open Air Museum north of Copenhagen. It was in the happy days of the sixties before the severe reductions in state subsidies and before private sponsorship had been invented as a solution. Nearly every year we opened a new building in the area of the museum that had just been enlarged to double the size. For me it was a wonderful chapter in my life course – I was free of economic and administrative burdens and could do all the enjoyable things.

I got my interest for peasant houses in these

years and I have kept it since. Houses are not a bad entrance if you want to understand social life and culture. Peasant houses will also have a main role in this article but not the usual one. I want to look at what happened when peasant rooms and houses were put into museums as a part of the construction of national cultures in Europe. I am thus investigating my own roots as a museum man and looking into a world that in the eyes of today's ethnologist is both fascinating and exotic.

What we shall be dealing with is part of a more comprehensive pattern: the role of the so-called folk culture in nation-building. A few introductory specifications will be necessary. First that the role played by folk culture has not



A Swiss “chalet” at a Danish estate in Northern Zealand. Watercolour from about 1800. – From Elling 1979.

been the same in the whole of Europe. It is first and foremost in the Scandinavian countries, in German-speaking Central Europe and in Eastern Europe that folk culture has been cultivated in a national context. On the whole this difference is congruent with the two types of nation-building: The “political” to the west and the “cultural” to the east. With that background it is not surprising that phenomena like folk museums and open air museums are latecomers in France and Britain, and that the first in Britain appeared in the Celtic fringe.

There are, however, some important chronological differences too, that must be taken into consideration. The content of folk culture has not been the same through the whole of the 19th century. In the first part of the century the interest was concentrated on the linguistic expressions: folk songs, folk tales, legends and similar kinds of oral tradition, whereas the material folk culture did not play any role until the second part of the century.

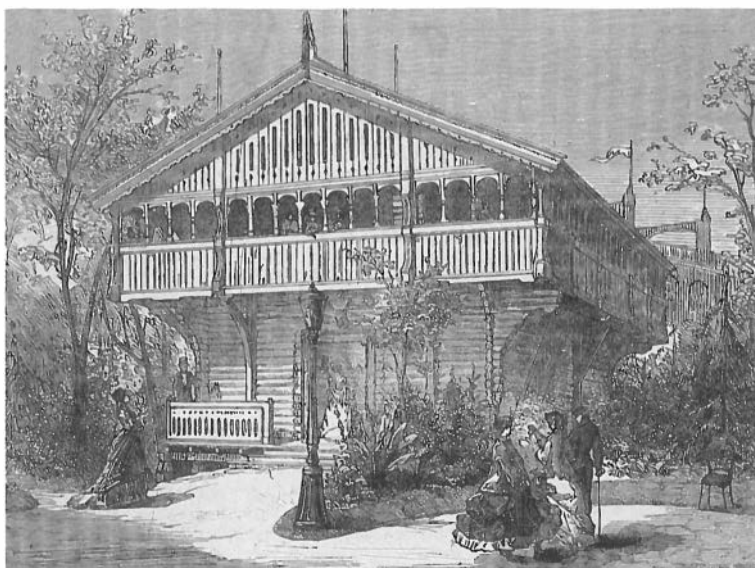
How can we explain this shift in interest with regard to folk culture? I believe that a major part of the explanation is to be found in the role of the international exhibitions in the latter half of the century – these great exhibitions that in themselves are of topical interest if one wants to understand the culture of this

fascinating century.

It started with “The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations” in London 1851 and went on in rapid succession with one or two World Exhibitions every decade plus a lot of similar arrangements of regional or national importance. The first of these exhibitions were primarily a presentation of the industrial production and a competition among the participating states about the quality of their products, but they soon developed into also being a cultural contest. Every nation-state that wished to become a member of the good company had to prove that it possessed a peculiar historically rooted and aesthetically valuable national culture. And what was – seen in the light of the romantic ideas of the period – more genuinely national than the so-called “folk culture” with its supposed timelessness, continuity and independence of international fashions (Stoklund 1994; Wörner 1999).

However, to communicate such qualities in an exhibition the preferred oral traditions were of little use. Everything in an exhibition must be visually communicated, and therefore material folk culture was more suitable for that purpose – and especially such material elements that at the same time were aesthetically appealing: folk costumes and other textiles,

At the Paris World Exhibition in 1867 Norway was represented by this two-storeyed “loft” from the landscape of Telemark. – From Ducuing 1867.

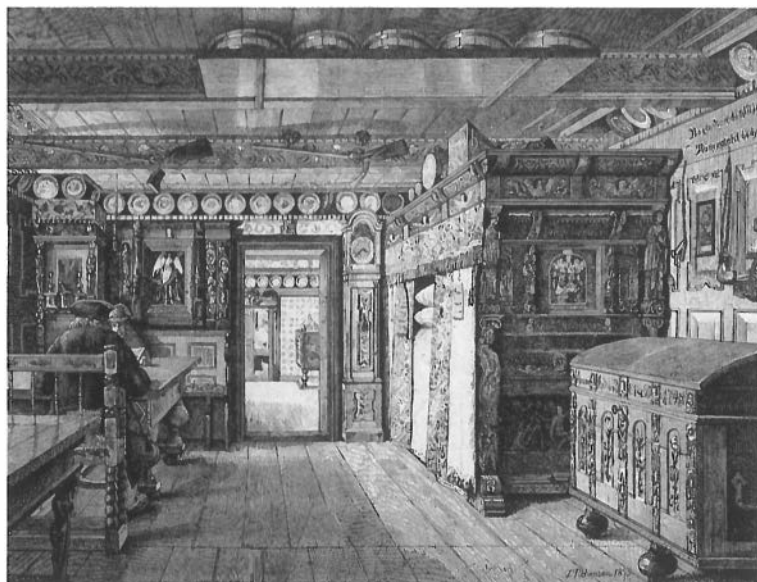


vernacular architecture and rooms in the peasant house with richly decorated furniture and implements – the kind of objects that around the turn of the century acquired the designation “folk art”. Such objects were not seen in the earliest exhibitions. About the London-exhibition 1851 it was said afterwards that the participating countries resembled each other too much. Nations, however, by definition are different, and in the succeeding exhibitions it was tried deliberately to underline that difference. From one exhibition to the other a common national rhetoric was developed, together with a set of rules for the way in which nationality should be communicated. And to this repertoire of the nation-state belonged in the last decades of the 19th century elements of a material folk culture that were gradually becoming national symbols.

In this connection the most important world exhibition is quite obviously the one that was held in Paris in 1867. It became decisive for its successors with regard to form as well as content. It may seem an irony of fate that these folk culture elements were launched at an exhibition in Paris, since France is supposed to be a textbook example of “political” nation-building. Responsible for that is, however, to a great extent a single person, the mining engineer and social reformer, Frederic le Play – by the way

one of the most fascinating figures in the history of European ethnology and sociology. Le Play seems to have conceived the idea of the “pavilion”-system that was introduced at the 1867 Exhibition and has been continued as the main principle at all the succeeding exhibitions. He complemented the traditional central hall with a surrounding park, in which each of the participating countries was invited to acquire an area where it might build something that was characteristic of its country. Most of the participating states brought a piece of vernacular architecture or similar, but not all. It is symptomatic for the mentioned east-west difference that the practical British presented an electric light-house.

By the way, the exhibited buildings were of course not genuine – nobody thought of authenticity at that time. They were replicas, and in some cases very free copies. The houses were not supposed to document real conditions, but rather to strike a national note. These small houses were called “pavilions”, and behind the 1867 innovation lies a tradition of using such houses in private gardens. In the romantic gardens of the 18th century they became important elements; they underlined the variations between the different sections of the garden, and they were supposed to be evocative archi-



A Zealand peasant room, first on display in an exhibition in Copenhagen in 1879, later incorporated into the Danish Folk Museum. – From Nyrop 1879.

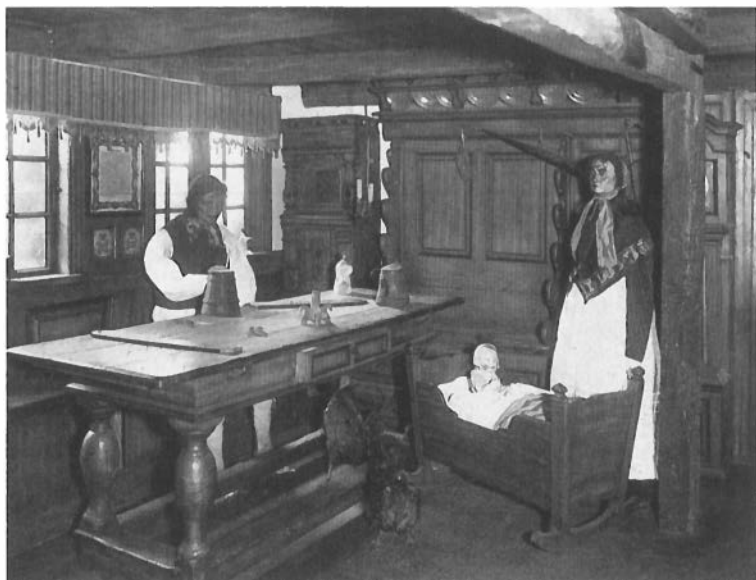
ecture such as antique temples, Chinese pagodas or straw huts from remote Pacific islands.

In the late 18th century a few European peasant houses appeared among these pavilions, most of them being “chalets” from Switzerland. In the Danish romantic gardens, however, Norwegian wooden houses can be found instead of or together with the “chalets”. Such houses were usually surrounded by dark coniferous trees. They were symbolizing an alternative way of life that might be imagined among free herdsmen in the mountains, and they were supposed to arouse noble feelings and contemplation among the promenading visitors in the garden (Elling 1979).

What was new at the 1867 Exhibition was that such houses for the first time were being established in a park as national or ethnic symbols. But the idea seems to have been in the air. Tamás Hofer has mentioned that in connection with a Panslavonic congress in the same year a kind of ethnographical village comprising Slavonic houses from all parts of Eastern Europe was arranged in Moscow (Hofer 1991:167). And the idea of such ethnographical villages has been mentioned in print several times, i. e. as early as the 1790’s by the Swiss author von Bonstetten (Uldall 1957; Zippelius 1995).

The Paris innovation, however, became very influential, which of course has to do with the fact that the great exhibitions were some of the first media for mass communication. In a way we are dealing with two different innovations. One is the “pavilion”-system, and I have already mentioned that it became the system of layout for all future exhibitions. The other one is the ethnographic houses that also became a recurrent feature at the succeeding exhibitions. The first one after Paris 1867 was Vienna 1873, and for that the organizers had planned to make an “ethnographic village” with houses from all over the world. The final result of this ambitious project, however, was only 7 houses - 5 from different parts of the Habsburg Empire, one from Alsace (just incorporated in the newly founded German Empire) and one from Russia (Pemsel 1989; Wörner 1999). Later world exhibitions developed this field further, including not only peasant houses in great numbers but also settlements from the third world, most of them populated with imported natives.

The ethnographic houses, however, were not only found in the temporary exhibitions. They moved rather early into the permanent establishments that we usually call “open air museums”. The earliest one was opened to the public in 1892 by the Swedish museum pioneer, Artur



Peasant rooms with dummies in “national costumes” became a popular element in local museums. Photo from 1943 of a room in the museum of Næstved, South Zealand. – From Skougaard and Varnild 1994.

Hazelius, in a place called Skansen in Stockholm (Biörnstad ed. 1991). In some East European countries “Skansen” has in fact become the technical term for an open air museum; in Poland there is even a journal for “Skansenology”. Nearly as old as this museum is the open air museum in Lund, also in Sweden (Bringéus 1992) and in Denmark in 1997 we celebrated the centenary of our first open air museum, founded by Bernhard Olsen (Rasmussen 1979).

Artur Hazelius as well as Bernhard Olsen started by opening museums (in 1873 and 1885) of a more conventional form, but with a new content: folk culture. In these museums, too, the peasant house had an important role to play. Rooms provided with decorated furniture and peopled with wax figures in folk costumes became very popular elements in these new museums, not only in Scandinavia but also in Central Europe (Bauer 1991).

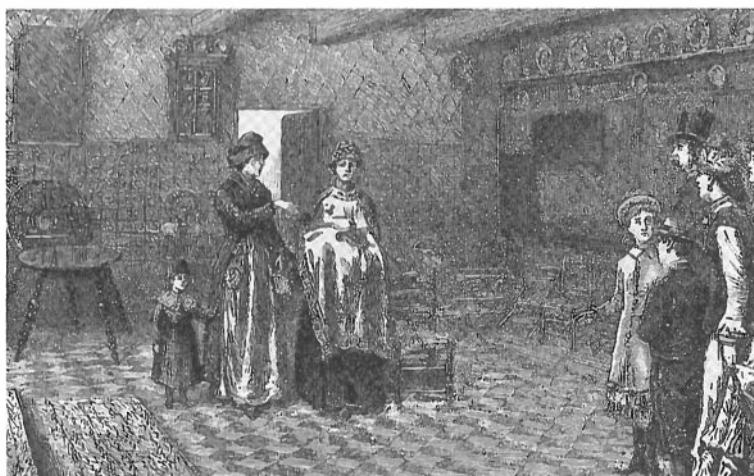
With justification it may be maintained that even this form of museum display has its origin in the 1867 Exhibition. The organizers had invited the participating countries to send wax figures with folk costumes to the exhibition. Quite a lot accepted the invitation, but the Swedish participants attracted the most attention by presenting some very life-like figures with costumes from different parts of Sweden.

The figures were arranged in small groups with an anecdotal content, most of them copied from by that time very popular genre-paintings (Berg 1980; Stoklund 1993).

Artur Hazelius included these folk costume-groups as an important part of his new “Scandinavian-ethnographic” museum in Stockholm 1873, but he replaced the set pieces around the acting figures with three walls from real peasant rooms. The fourth wall was left out to allow the public the possibility to look into the room and to study the idyllic life that was on display there. In this form he repeated the presentation of these popular, three-dimensional genre-paintings at the World Exhibition in Paris 1878.

On that occasion, however, the Dutch participants presented a room from Hindeloopen in West Friesland that was recreated with all its four walls, and where the public was allowed to enter the room through the door. This arrangement impressed the Danish folk museum pioneer, and when seven years later, in 1885, he opened his Danish Folk Museum the peasant interiors that he had acquired were presented in that way (Rasmussen 1979; de Jong and Skougaard 1993).

I hope through this sketch to have demonstrated how the shift in interest from oral tradition to material elements came about. The



The Hindeloopen room at the Paris World Exhibition in 1978. To the left the wax dummies, to the right the exhibition visitors. – From de Jong and Skougaard 1993.

great founding period of the new folk museums in Scandinavia and in Central Europe is the decades around the turn of the century. These years are also in other ways a decisive period in the history of nation-building, dominated by a strong spiritual national rearmament at the threshold of the military show-down in World War I. The main principle of nationalism – that the national and political entity should be congruent – in these years is increasingly being maintained by the European nation-states. But it is a well known fact that very few – if any – of these states were in accordance with the principle that state and nation should be one and the same. Linguistic or ethnic heterogeneity, however, is a disorder in the house of a well organized nation-state, and consequently ethnic differences were denied and attempts made to create a standardized national population. In Denmark the attempts to Germanize the Danish population in Schleswig will be well-known, but in the same years attempts to Magyarize the minorities in Hungary were made as well as a russification-policy towards the Finnish and the Baltic peoples.

The logical counterpart to this state policy was that national movements among the larger minorities were beginning to formulate political claims with reference to the cited national principle: every nation its own state. In this emerging confrontation each of the parts could make use of folk culture and folk museums: the

minorities that were striving for independence in order to profile themselves culturally, the established nation states in order to demonstrate that cultural differentiation is a natural part of national unity.

What happens during this intensified “nationalization” or “ethnization” of culture to those ethnic groups that are not taking part in the race for individual states? To a great extent their culture is taken to the benefit by the contesting parts, by which the groups not participating become so to say invisible. I shall try to demonstrate that with some examples taken from the Frisian language group: The West Frisians in the Netherlands and the North Frisians in the former Danish, now German landscape of Schleswig. Both groups have in some periods played a great part culturally but never politically.

Let us take as a point of departure the Hindeloopen room at the World Exhibition 1878 that I have already been referring to. This room, which comes from one of the West Frisian coastal villages by the Zuidersee, was arranged in 1877 for a Frisian exhibition in their main town, Leeuwarden. The next year it was sent to the international exhibition in Paris – peopled by costumed dummies in the Swedish style – in order to represent Holland in the cultural competition among nation states. And they were successful in that the room became very popular at the exhibition (de Jong and Skougaard

The Hindeloopen room in the “Museum für deutsche Volkstrachten und Erzeugnisse des Hausgewerbes” in Berlin. Drawing by Edward Thiel. – From de Jong and Skougaard 1993.



1993). To summarize what happens here: an example of Frisian interior design has been changed into a Dutch national symbol.

There were others, however, who desired these beautiful rooms from Hindeloopen. Adriaan de Jong has proved that at least three German museums have possessed a room from this small Zuidersee locality. Why was that the case? Part of the explanation can be found in an article in the *Kölnische Zeitung* of 1878, from which I quote in translation: “Friends of German history and German life are by preference looking towards Dutch West Friesland, the old homeland of the Frisian tribe that used to inhabit the area between the rivers Rhine and Ems and the North Sea, because this tribe has kept its German character longer and in a more genuine way than other Germanic tribes” (de Jong and Skougaard 1993).

Observe how this article equates Germanness and Germanic tribes. The idea about the connection between the Germanic tribes from the period of the great migrations and the folk culture of a much later era has put its mark on older ethnological terminology in concepts such as the Saxon house, the Burgundian chimney or the Alemannic rake, and it was important for German nation-building in general. As a model of understanding or explanation it fitted perfectly with the creation of a German unity based on separate parts each with its characteristic features. It is well known, however, that the

model could also deliver arguments for a further German policy of expansion, as we have experienced in both this and the previous century.

One of the museums that possessed a Hindeloopen room was the German folk museum, established in Berlin 1889 with direct inspiration from Artur Hazelius’ “Scandinavian-ethnographic” museum in Stockholm. The founder was no less a person than Rudolph Virchow, one of the leading figures in the history of medicine, founding father of pathology, but who was also interested in physical anthropology and “Rassenkunde”, race knowledge. The declared goal for his “Museum für deutsche Volkstrachten und Erzeugnisse des Hausgewerbes” – as it was named at the start – was to show “die Eigenart der deutschen Stämme in Tracht und Geräten” – the peculiarities of the German tribes in costumes and implements. That indicated that the collections of the museum extended far outside the borders of Germany – e.g. to Switzerland and, as we have already seen, to West Friesland (Steinmann 1964; Müller 1992).

Rudolf Virchow was also collecting in North Friesland which generally in the eighties and nineties was one of the favourite hunting grounds for collectors of folk culture objects. In that area there were not only houses with a rich Friesian interior design, but also in the adjacent village of Ostenfeld and its surroundings you would find the most old fashioned farmhouses of the so-called Saxon type, and you



A "North Frisian Room", designed by Heinrich Sauer mann for the "German National Applied Art Exhibition" in Munich 1888. – From *Heinrich Sauer mann* 1979.

could come across chests and cupboards with Gothic or Renaissance carvings.

These were the objects that attracted the early collectors, among them also Heinrich Sauer mann from Flensburg. Sauer mann was not only a collector and museum founder but also a craftsman and furniture producer. He is a typical representative of the era of historicism in the way he transformed stylistic features from the peasant furniture in his own collection into modern so-called "altdeutsche Möbel". He began to collect for his own pleasure and use, but out of this grew a museum of applied art with an associated school as in many other cases. Later on the museum was changed into a general culture-historical museum, today named the "Städtisches Museum" – the town museum of Flensburg (Redlefsen 1976; *Heinrich Sauer mann* 1979).

As already mentioned peasant rooms became a preferred element in both folk museums and museums for applied art – and of course they were not missing in the institution that Sauer mann created. Some of the most beautiful rooms came from North Friesland, and it was this kind of room that together with a comprehensive collection of furniture in Renaissance-style formed the basis of Sauer mann's own production. In the German Empire established in 1870 the new Renaissance had become the national German style par excellence – just as the Renaissance period generally was hailed as an era with great similarity to the dynamic end of the 19th century. Sauer mann's furniture forms part of that dominating Renaissance-style, but with a specific and unique touch of popular Frisian design. This was especially marked in the complete rooms that he designed and which

were put on display on exhibitions in Germany and abroad. With the Frisian peasant room as a model he created large rooms meant for ceremonial purposes.

One of the earliest of these formed part of a so-called German national applied art exhibition in Munich 1888. In the catalogue of the exhibition it was described as a "North Frisian room, designed and carried out from old motifs". It is called a North Frisian room, but it is in fact Sauermann's own paraphrase of the original. It seems a little intriguing that this room in the Munich exhibition was acquired by no less a person than Artur Hazelius for his Nordic Museum in Stockholm, where it has never been on display but is said still to be stored (Redlefsen 1976). What was Hazelius' intention with this piece of applied art? Did he accept it as a genuine Frisian room – or had he realized that the difference was not that big between this modern product in antiquarian style and the old rooms that imaginative museum people had reconstructed?

Three years later Heinrich Sauermann was asked to design a room for the so-called Worlds Columbian Exhibition of 1893 in Chicago. The inspiration was still the same, but now the room had taken on even more imposing dimensions. The increased height of the wall was managed by putting examples of the characteristic Schleswig picture weaving, the so-called Beiderwand, on the wall over the panelling, a feature totally Sauermann's own invention. This room is now called not North Frisian, but a Holsteinian room, and in an exhibition in Kiel 1896 a similar glorious room is named a "Niederdeutsches Wohnzimmer". The point of departure is still the Frisian interior design, but now it is displayed under headings that present it as a national German style (*Heinrich Sauermann* 1979).

However, the Danes could also use the Frisian folk culture. In 1892 a group of young Danish architects founded "the Society of Dec. 3rd" with the purpose of measuring examples of older Danish house-building in order to create inspiration for modern architects. In 1907 their activities were extended to the measurement of rural houses, and where did they start? In North Friesland, to the south of the German

Danish border. In the text accompanying the published plans it is stressed that as a matter of fact there is no specific Frisian architectural style. In all essentials it is based on the same traditions as the Danish (*Gamle Bygninger paa Landet* 1911 f.). But as everything was very well kept, especially in the Frisian Isles, it was obvious to go there for inspiration for a new rural building-style – and that was what happened in the following years with the association "Bedre Byggeskik" ("For a better building-style").

These North Frisian examples tell about the processes of selection, that are setting in the end of the 19th century, when culture became seriously "ethnicized" or "nationalized". Some peoples are expanding culturally at the expense of others, while these others are being robbed for the elements they might have changed into national symbols. This has been the fate of the North Frisians. They have always been made invisible in the national struggle between Danes and Germans or harnessed to the carriage of either one or other of the two parts.

The previous examples were dealing with the right to appropriate a given folk culture and use it in the construction of a national culture. My last example from the national conflicts around the latest turn of century is the story of a battle about specific museum objects. Although it has strong national undertones, it is also a contest between collectors and museum people to get hold of the best pieces of folk culture, the kind of antiques that gradually were becoming scarce. In the 1880s and 90s there were hectic collecting-endeavours going on in many parts of Europe, but not everywhere. It is interesting that while some parts were left in peace, there were other districts that attracted buyers from far and near, because they had been designated as peculiarly interesting – for national or culture-historical reasons, or very often for both.

In the southern parts of Germany collectors were attracted by the romantic Tyrol. It is mentioned in 1888 that for thirty years there had been a constant traffic of carriages past the border to Germany, where people, especially in Bavaria, knew how to value "diese Kunstschätzen der stammverwandten Tyroler"

(Meixner 1992:99). Artur Hazelius sent his buyers into the remote valleys of Norway, where genuine Nordic folk culture was supposed to hide. The founder of the open air museum in Lillehammer in Norway observed in 1886 a caravan of five carriages, loaded with antiques that some hawkers from Telemark had been buying for Hazelius' museum in Stockholm (Rasmussen 1979:132).

To the very important hunting grounds belonged – as I have already mentioned – the western part of Schleswig. Not only collectors from Copenhagen, Flensburg and Hamburg were casting their nets here. There also came buyers from the museums in Berlin and Nuremberg, and even Artur Hazelius – as we have seen – showed an interest in this exotic country. When the founder of the Danish Folk Museum, Bernhard Olsen, in the 1890s joined the host of collectors, the area – according to his local contacts – was already heavily grazed. In 1899

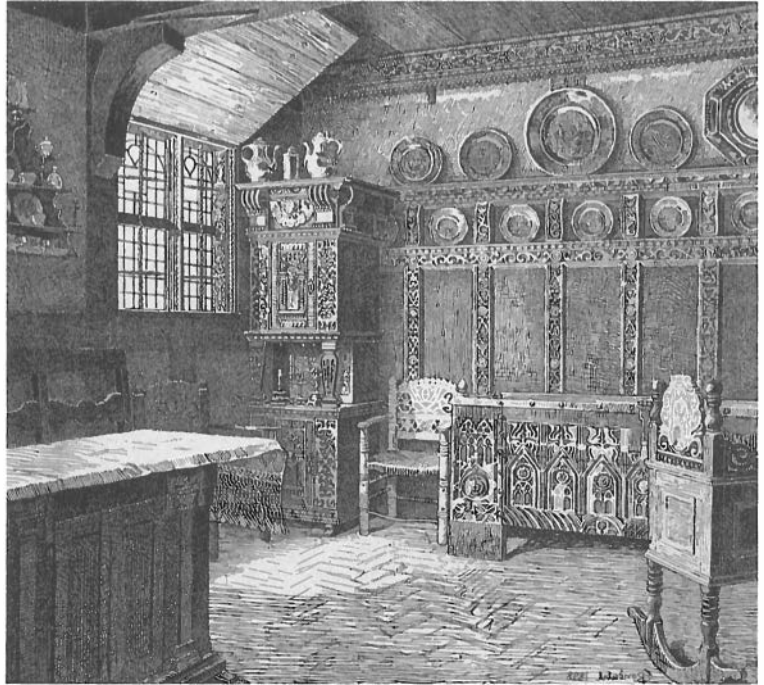
he bought for his recently established open air museum in Copenhagen a farmhouse of the so-called Saxon type from Ostenfeld near Husum. His reasons for the acquisition of this building that was clearly classified as German are not quite evident, but as always national and culture-historical arguments seem to be mixed in. To Bernhard Olsen this farmhouse represented the first step in an evolution, because people and cattle were still living in the same room, and because the house had an open fireplace without a chimney. The farm, however, also comes from the south-west corner of Schleswig, where Danish once was spoken – and consequently it could be considered a symbol of that lost Danishness. However, I could imagine that Bernhard Olsen was fond of the idea that this – in his opinion – primitive farmstead was a German one. This would indicate that civilization increases as you move north!

When Bernhard Olsen was pursuing a farm-



The Ostenfeld farm house that was acquired by Bernhard Olsen for his 1897 founded Open Air Museum. In the gateway the museum director and the farm owner are shaking hands on the bargain. – Photo from 1899 in the National Museum, Copenhagen.

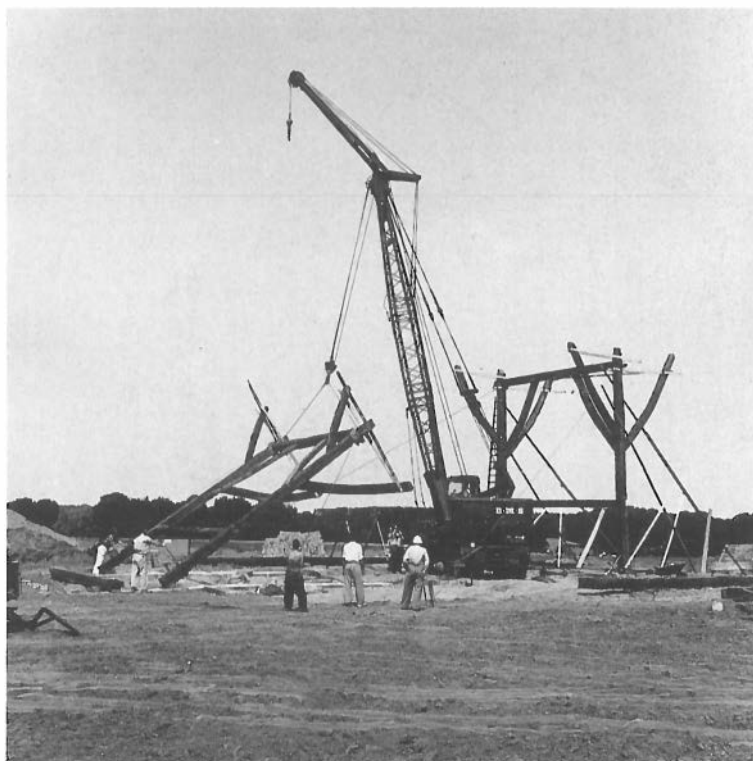
“Peter Heldts Pesel” from Ostenfeld, put on display by Bernhard Olsen shortly after its acquisition. It is now one of the rooms in the farm house from Ostenfeld in the Danish Open Air Museum. – From Olsen 1898.



house from Ostenfeld, he had already acquired the wall-panels and furniture from two rooms from this old-fashioned village. One set of panelling came from a drawing room, a so-called “Dörns”, the other from a best room, here called “Pesel”. Bernhard Olsen first tried to acquire the so-called Peter Heldt’s house, because the large set of Pesel-panelling came from that house. However, the negotiations about this acquisition were spoilt by some influential local people, who did not want the farmhouse sent to Denmark. Instead it was suddenly bought by the lord mayor in the adjacent town of Husum, and moved to that place to be erected in a park. Bernhard Olsen now concentrated his efforts on the acquisition of another farmhouse from which the Dörns-panels originated – and this time he was successful, although there was strong local resistance (Michelsen 1976; Skougaard 1995).

The two sets of wall-panels from Ostenfeld were bought by Bernhard Olsen from a German collector, Ulrich Jahn. Immediately after the acquisition he put the Pesel-panels with furniture on display in his museum and he presented the room in a detailed article in a journal for

applied art (Olsen 1898). However, this Ulrich Jahn was not just a Mr. Anybody. He was the right hand man of Rudolph Virchow in the establishment of the folk museum in Berlin, and he seems to have been a highly-gifted collector and a clever businessman, too. He had a degree in *Volkskunde* (ethnology), but he soon left the quiet life of a scholar to concentrate on some exhibition projects. The first one was a so-called “German Exhibition” in London in 1888, for which Jahn had arranged a section with German folk costumes and among other things a North Frisian house with two rooms. The walls of these two rooms were the two already mentioned panels from Ostenfeld, which were acquired by Ulrich Jahn for this specific purpose. With the London Exhibition Ulrich Jahn had tasted blood, and in the following years he prepared a large German section for the Worlds Columbian Exhibition in Chicago of 1893. What he wanted to put on display was a whole German village, and to collect the necessary objects for that purpose, he made “a veritable predatory expedition from Friesland in the north to South Tyrol and in Switzerland”, to quote an obituary notice (Weinhold 1900; cf. Wörner 1999).



Leaning on his stick, Kai Uldall is inspecting the erection in 1958 of the main construction of the imposing "Hau-barg"-farm house from West Schleswig. – Photo in the National Museum, Copenhagen.

"The German Village" for the Chicago Exhibition in 1893 consisted of no less than thirty-six buildings, including a reconstructed town hall, a romantic castle and typical farm houses from different parts of Germany. We do not know if the two Ostenfeld-rooms were there too, but it is very likely. What we know for certain is, however, that in the middle of the 1890s they were to be found as a part of the permanent exhibition in the folk museum in Berlin. They are mentioned in the guide-book from 1895, and there is no doubt about the identification. Even the furniture in these rooms to a great extent is what is on display today in the Ostenfeld house of the Danish Open Air Museum (*Führer...* 1895).

How did these rooms from the German folk museum in Berlin end up in the Danish Open Air museum in Copenhagen? The key to the answer is found in the guide-book from 1895. Part of the collections, including the two Ostenfeld rooms, are marked with an LS, which means "London Sammlung", the collections

acquired by Ulrich Jahn for the exhibition in 1888, and apparently considered by him as his private property. During a conflict between him and Rudolph Virchow he removed the London collection from the museum and stored it elsewhere in Germany. He may have tried to sell part of it to another German museum, but in the end he offered it to Bernhard Olsen, who immediately was interested, went to Leipzig where the collection was located at that time and bought four hundred objects including the two rooms from Ostenfeld (Rasmussen 1979:200-202). Of course, this was later on among the German museum people criticised as a very unpatriotic act.

It is still treasures from Jahn's collection in the form of Gothic chests and Renaissance furniture that are putting their mark on the interior of the Ostenfeld house in the open air museum. They are telling an interesting cultural history about wealth and conservatism among farmers in West Schleswig. I must admit, however, that

just now I am more fascinated by the second life of these pieces of furniture as objects for collectors and museums. The widely travelled Ostenfeld rooms are telling a peculiar story about man and his material world. They allow one to look into a corner of an exotic bourgeois culture and into the strategies that were used in the establishment of national cultures in the period around the turn of the century.

Let me add a short more personal postscript to this. Shortly after my appointment as curator in 1958 at the Danish Open Air Museum, the director of many years, Kai Uldall, had to leave because of age. His retirement was well arranged and impressive. A few years earlier the acquisition of a new piece of land had doubled the area of the museum, and in the new, open land a crane was setting up the skeleton of the until then largest farmhouse, which would be opened in connection with his retirement. It was a so-called "Haubarg" from the marshlands in the southern part of German West Schleswig, and it was Kai Uldall's declared aim with that large farmhouse to surpass his predecessor, the founder of the museum, Bernhard Olsen. What he had in his mind and was comparing it with was, of course, the other large West Schleswig house, the farm from Ostenfeld.

Kai Uldall was a skilled negotiator. He played his cards well, and the situation was favourable for him, with a Germany that only ten years after the war was hardly able to take care of all its cultural treasures. The local resistance, however, was strong, as it had been sixty years earlier, when Bernhard Olsen was buying the farm from Ostenfeld. The director of the museum in the main town of North Friesland, Husum, considered the "Haubarg" that went to Denmark a "violated virgin" that he refused to meet again in her disgraced situation in Denmark. The commotion that was caused by the case, however, paved the way for the establishment of an open air museum in Kiel for the German Bundesland Schleswig-Holstein.

Thus history repeats itself, and I became the witness of a late offshoot of the national contest about vernacular buildings sixty years after its culmination at the end of the 19th century.

Note

The original Danish version of this article was given as a "farewell lecture" when I retired as a professor at the University of Copenhagen in 1996. It was published in the journal *Folk og Kultur* in 1997. The present English version was held as a public lecture during my stay as a visiting professor at the University of Edinburgh, School of Scottish Studies, in the spring term of 1997. I want to thank the director of the School, Dr. Margaret A. Mackay, for kindly helping me to prepare the English version.

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