

The Legacy of 1848

Iowa's transplanted Schleswig-Holstein journalists and Denison's own Henry Finnern

Denison, IA (awj) - Who was America's most remarkable and unique immigrant group? Surprisingly, many historians feel it may have been a small group of a few thousand revolutionary refugees from Europe who arrived in the United States between 1847 and 1856. Although unsuccessful in their struggle for freedom in Europe, these "Forty-eighters" provided an intellectual transfusion that had a pronounced effect on the political and social history of America during one of its most critical periods.

Many of the Forty-eighters hailing from Schleswig-Holstein in northern Germany chose Iowa as their adopted home. There, some of the best and brightest began using their finely honed journalistic skills to argue in favor of the freedoms and liberties so dear to them. Ironically, the patriotism of these recent immigrants was more grounded in the bedrock beliefs of America's founding fathers than in many of the attitudes having currency in the United States at the time.

The legacy of this extraordinary immigrant group, although far-reaching and profound, is little understood by most Americans today, many of whom are three or four generations removed from their own immigrant ancestors. The overarching purpose of the Legacy of 1848 Conference is to identify and come to grips with the important legacy left to all of us by the Forty-eighters.

The conference will also present the biography of Heinrich Christian Finnern, a Schleswig-Holstein immigrant who settled in Denison, Iowa, becoming a successful newspaper owner and respected public servant. The story of Finnern's grit and determination in overcoming obstacles and prejudices is a poignant one with lessons that are increasingly relevant. His life provides an example - perhaps even a blueprint - for how an immigrant can succeed in his adopted home, be a constructive part of his new community, and even help shape the future of his fellow citizens.

The Legacy of 1848 Conference will be held October 30-31, 2009, in Denison, Iowa. Coordinating the conference events will be Forty-eighter experts Dr. Joachim "Yogi" Reppmann (Northfield/Flensburg) and Dr. Don Heinrich Tolzmann (Cincinnati). The keynote address will be presented by Hollywood film and TV star Eric Braeden. Braeden, a Schleswig-Holstein immigrant himself, was awarded the Ellis Island Medal of Honor in 2007 and has twice been presented with the Federal Medal of Honor from Germany's president for his contributions to German-American relations.

For further information about the Legacy of 1848 Conference, please contact Dr. Reppmann at yogireppmann@yahoo.com or visit his Web site at www.moin-moin.us.