The Far West of Denmark

Peasant Initiative and World Orientation in Western Jutland

By Ellen Damgaard

To Siberia

In the summer of 1860 a new district judge was appointed to Lemvig in Jutland (Falbe Hansen 1909). He was a young man of 21 who had just graduated in Copenhagen. He now left the capital on the new railway to Korsor, took the smack over the Great Belt to Nyborg, then the stagecoach to Odense, where his parents lived. His mother was grieved at her son's departure; it was as if he were leaving for Siberia. From Odense to Lemvig was three days and nights of unbroken travel - much of it on newly constructed highways of unrolled stones over the black heath. Most of the time the young man was the only passenger, and he was seized by mounting despondency.

It turned out, however, that he had come to an exciting post. One of his tasks was to auction off all the goods salvaged from stranded ships, and these auctions were the scene of bustling international activity, with merchants from Gothenburg and Riga, from Flensburg and Hamburg. The coastguards were lavish with their champagne. The population along the coast were used to foreigners, and many of them had acquired a smattering of English and German from the stranded seamen.

Compared to these colourful scenes, everyday life in Lemvig was rather tranquil, with one exception: "In the inn there was always an assembly, especially on market days, of a multitude of people from the surrounding countryside, farm-owners and proprietors, who were all energetic traders in cattle and well-to-do people. I often sat with them when I was invited, listening to their chatter, boasting, and bargaining; ... these people frequently journeyed on business to the Marshlands of southern Jutland and Hamburg, had seen more of the world than ordinary farmers, and were more vivacious and quick-witted than they... Reigning like a king over them was N. Breinholt of Sonder Vinkel, a grand old man with a lion-like mane of snow-white locks and beard."

We may guess that the large farmers did not invite the young judge to their table so that he could tell them about life in Copenhagen; more likely they thought that, by sitting with them, he could learn something about life in the really big world. In the geography of the west Jutes, Copenhagen was a remote province, while Hamburg was the real capital. An experience such as taking the new railway from Copenhagen to Korsor and from there sailing by smack to Nyborg could scarcely make any impression on the people assembled round the innkeeper's table; for years they had known what it was like to board the train at Altona, having registered their iron-bound money chests, filled with the proceeds of bullock sales, or to take the steamer from Lemvig to London. Lemvig may not after all have been the Siberia that the young judge's mother had feared.

She was not alone, however, in her prejudices about western Jutland. For several centuries the region has conjured up this picture for many Danes, who have been confirmed in their perception by the history books. In as serious a work as *Politikens Danmarkshistorie* we find the historian Roar Skovmand describing the conflict about the course of the new railway lines in Jutland in the 1840s: "If the war [1848-50) had not come, the evidence suggests that a longitudinal line would have been built from Limfiorden along the Jutland ridge to Hamburg. This would have commercially annexed Jutland to Hamburg for centuries.

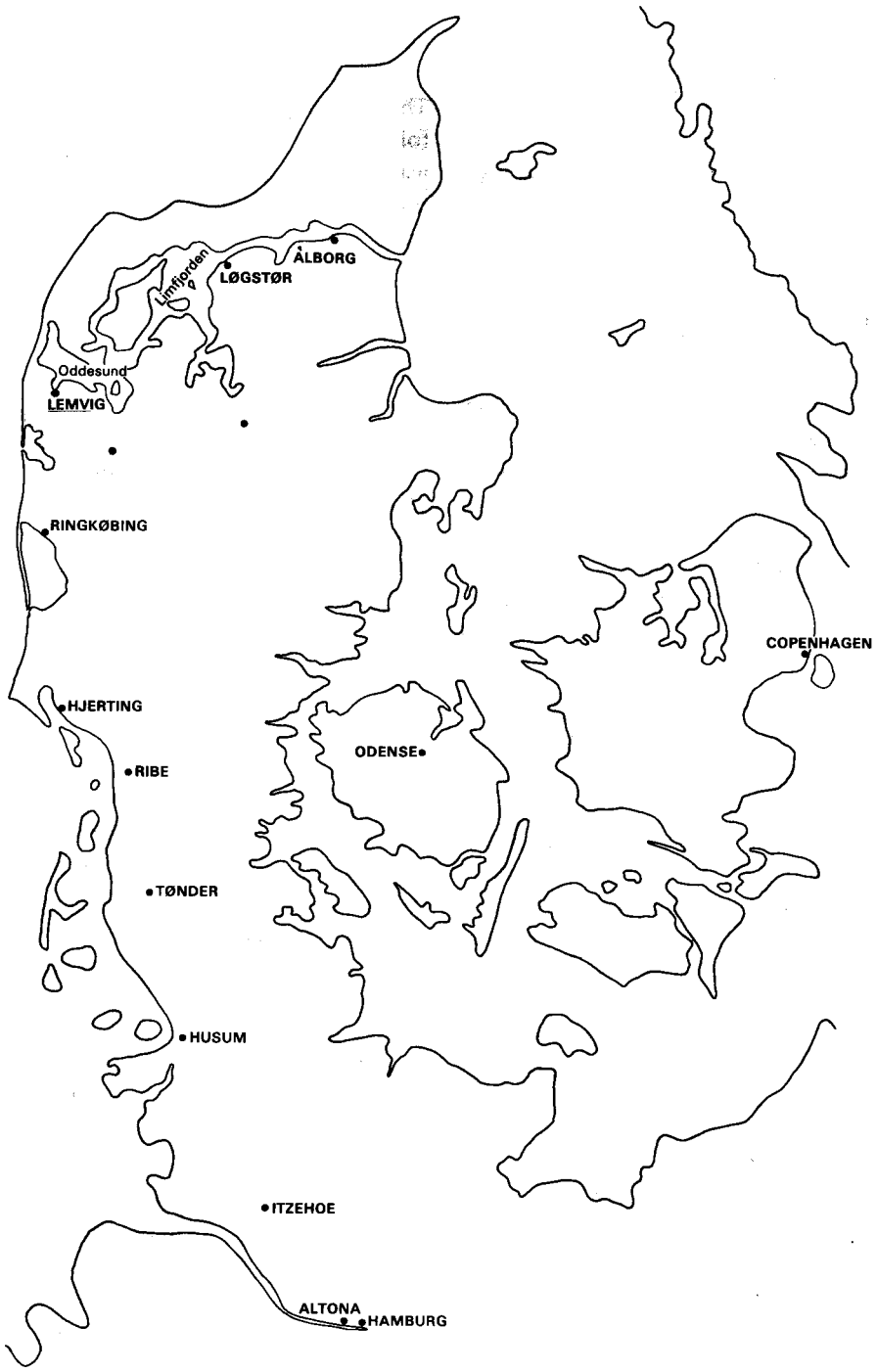
When the Jutish farmers petitioned for a railway line here, they naturally did not look so far; they merely wanted a convenient 'bullock line'." In other words, the Jutish farmers must have been short-sighted not to realize that it would be much better to have a railway along the east coast, as was built in the end, since it "helped to link Jutland to the islands and the capital, instead of to Hamburg" (Danstrup & Koch 1971). Curiously enough, these remarks were published only a year before Denmark became a member of the Common Market and thus ended up being commercially annexed to Hamburg in any case! Perhaps the Jutish farmers with their bullock line were thinking in a much larger European context than was the case in the eastern part of Denmark.

The picture of western Jutland as a remotely situated and - in comparison with the rest of the country - somewhat backward region has been revised in recent years. This is partly due to a number of ethnological studies, some of them conducted by researchers from the museums of western Jutland. We may mention the work which Peter Dragsbo in Esbjerg and Kim Clausen in Skjern have done (1982) to illuminate the peculiar development of railway towns in western Jutland; the museums' charting of the distinctive features of the cultural landscape (Damgaard 1983-84; Dragsbo et al. 1985); the Sydvestjysk Universitetscenter's research project on the development of western Jutland from 1750 to 1914 (Just 1984); and the attempt by ethnologist Johannes Mollgaard (1988) to set western Jutland in a -larger European context. All this research has been carried out in the 1970; and especially the 1980s.

As director of Lemvig Museum and thereby responsible for a certain geographical area of the north-western part of Ringköbing County, it was natural for me to collect material which could shed light on this region's distinctive character and development over the centuries. It turned out that many important deviations from the normal pattern could be observed, as for instance in the relation between a town and its surrounding countryside. The traditional view of the west Jutish peasant must also be revised: there were evidently two very different types of peasant, living on either side of a geographical and cultural boundary.

Although Lemvig in its purely geographical setting is similar to the market towns of eastern Jutland, it was not like these in being an economic and cultural force in relation to its hinterland. On the other hand, there was - especially in the coastal parishes - a population of peasants who in their independence and outward-looking attitude were very different from the peasants of eastern Denmark. These peasants in the Lemvig district had traits in common with peasants to the north and south all the way along the west coast of Jutland and as far south as northern Germany and Friesland.

There are thus striking similarities between my material from Lemvig and the Dutch historian Jan de Vries's (1976) studies of peasants in Friesland in the period 1550-1750. Here the coastal peasants carried on their specialized production of cheese and butter as far back as the sixteenth century; they were prosperous and independent, and their patterns of consumption showed a desire to acquire things which otherwise belonged to the urban sphere at this time. Peasant demand created



1. Map of Denmark and northern Germany, showing the localities mentioned in the article.

a seed-bed for small local trading centres in the region. Moreover, they set so little store by economic self-sufficiency that they bought bread instead of baking their own. By contrast, in nearby districts with a high degree of self-sufficiency, Jan de Vries found both a completely different pattern of consumption and a different social structure. This led him to the following conclusion: "The rural economy of northwestern Europe can be divided into a maritime region of highly capitalized, specialized producers, and a landward region where rural life is less market-oriented and the social structure more pervasively imprinted with a feudal heritage" (de Vries 1976). I should add that I learned of de Vries's studies so late that they could not influence, but only confirm, the observations made from my own material.

In this article I shall present a picture of the Lemvig district from the eighteenth century to the present day, with special reference to factors which furthered the development of a characteristic human type, which could be described in modern terms as an entrepreneur. We shall examine the natural conditions which blurred the occupational boundaries between the town and the hinterland: merchants reared cattle, and peasants were dealers. In the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries this pattern changed in the direction of increased specialization: the merchants gave up their farms, and the peasants became cattle exporters, farmers, or dealers in dry goods. We shall look at some of the factors behind these changes, and at the consequences on the relation between town and hinterland. In the new pattern Lemvig found its natural place as a supplier of luxury articles of consumption and as the physical framework for a weekly event of a social and economic nature: market day. Throughout the time perspective we shall follow the "entrepreneurial spirit", which was of course associated with particular individuals, but which is found in such a large section of the population in some parts of the country that it is possible to speak of a distinctive regional feature.'

The Lemvig District

"The economy of Lemvig owes much to the good district in which the town is situated", was the judgement of the *Danske Atlas* (Pontoppidan 1769). The Lemvig district was the far north-west corner of the present Ringkøbing County. The oldest accurate map of the district is that surveyed in 1790 by Videnskabernes Selskab. It shows that the area was well set off by natural boundaries: the sea to the west, Limfjorden to the north, impassable brook valleys and stretches of bog to the south-east, and Nissum Fjord to the south-west. "The Lemvig District" has been an established concept for many centuries down to the present, when it constitutes one large municipality.

From the map we gain a clear idea of the difficult navigational circumstances, which played an important role in maritime traffic to and from the town. To the west Limfjorden was closed off from the North Sea by the Agger isthmus. To the east there was free passage through Limfjorden as far as the Løgstør shoals; here all cargo had to be loaded on to barges until the ships were lightened sufficiently to clear the sandbanks. The most important land route in the district led due south from Lemvig, over the Storå river at Skaerumbro and thence towards Ringkøbing, Varde, Hjerting, Ribe,

Husum, and on to Hamburg and Amsterdam. Along this route, goods could be shipped to the more distant destinations. Eighteenth-century sources show that the Lemvig district received its basic supplies via merchants in Alborg, while luxury goods came direct from European commercial centres like Amsterdam.

Geographically, the Lemvig district falls into two very different parts. On the 1790 map and on the actual landscape we can draw a boundary from east to west. North of this boundary lay a fertile undulating landscape with many small lakes and patches of meadow spread over the land; along the fiord there were rich stretches of meadow. South of the geographical boundary came, first of all, the large uninhabited heaths, Klosterheden and Kronheden, cut by branching streams abounding in water. Then came, to the far south and south-east, a mixture of poor arable land, heaths, and bogs. Apart from a few clumps of oak, there was no forest for many miles around.

From early days, settlement had been dispersed over the landscape, not nucleated in villages as in the rest of Denmark. The 1790 map marks villages only at Harboore, where there was a population of occupational fishermen living in neighbouring houses. In the rest of the district the farms were isolated or in groups of no more than three or four. This pattern of settlement meant that, even before the agrarian reforms of the eighteenth century, nearly all the farms had their lands gathered around the farmstead, and if any land was held in common, it was only outfields and heath. It

2. Nørre Kastberg was one of the prosperous farms in the parish of Dybe. The occupant was a tenant of a manor, but he was not obliged to do corvée; instead he paid an annual rent in cash and provided transport. The farm became a freehold property around 1800. Photo from c. 1890, Lemvig Museum.

is also significant that each farm had its own name; numerous farm-names in the Lemvig district can be traced back to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and they are so stable that they give their names to the successive owners and not vice versa.

Two Kinds of Peasant

The landscape was the foundation for a variegated economy.' On the good humus along Limfjorden and the North Sea there lived peasants who had specialized in breeding horses and bullocks, or who put the emphasis on dairy cattle and butter production. On their lands they grew barley and oats. They were well off, and many of them became freeholders at an early stage. Others lived so far away from the manor to which they belonged that they could not participate in day-work or corvée, instead settling their accounts with the manor in cash. Their homes were well furnished with deep feather beds, linen cloths, pewter plates, glass, and silver, and the women's chests were filled with dresses of damask, calico, and silk. The finer textiles could be bought from shops in Lemvig or from itinerant haberdashers from Holstein, who smuggled silk scarves and ribbons from Germany into Denmark. Another and evidently very popular way of buying things was when the property of deceased gentlefolk was auctioned off. At the end of the eighteenth century it was common to see the prosperous Lemvig peasants here, buying furniture, domestic utensils, and clothes, all of an urban kind. Their purchases included little tea-tables with oilcloth-covered tops, books and newspapers, pocket inkhorns, coffee and tea things, black silk coats with silver hooks, and so forth.'

There are several examples of contemporary observers being struck by the prosperity of the stockbreeding peasants. "They are well dressed, and love to keep their horses, wagons, livestock, and farm implements in good condition," was one comment (Dreyer 1795). Also the agronomist L. M. Wedel, who visited the district in the same period, praised the population for their good dress and way of life, although he was less satisfied that they were unwilling to accept the many recent agrarian reforms: "The peasant sticks to the old ways, and most of them live well and hold their own; they therefore smile when one talks of the enclosures in Zealand and the like; for their corn, cattle, horses, sheep, meadows, farms, houses, rooms, outhouses, condition, property, knowledge, etc., indeed surpass those of our peasants in Zealand" (Wedel 1806).

The stockbreeding peasants were not only prosperous but also aware of their own worth, and it is obvious that they listened with tolerant scepticism to Wedel's zealous recommendations about planting and ditching, new foddering methods, the tethering of livestock, and improved types of implement. Much of the new legislation which came as part of the agrarian reforms of the second half of the eighteenth century was based on conditions in eastern Denmark and thus of little interest for western Jutland. The enclosure movement, for example, which was one of the most important reforms in the rest of the country, was less significant here, where nature itself had parcelled the land into dispersed farms, and where there had been very few common fields.

In stockbreeding they stuck to methods

which had been tried and tested through generations, and which had created their welfare. But they were ready to try new methods when they thought it was in their own interest. In sources from the 1760s we learn that peasants in the Lemvig district imported rams from England and sheep from Eiderstedt in order to improve the local breeds (Pontoppidan 1769). Many were also competent in reading, writing, and arithmetic; most of the official documents from the late eighteenth century were signed by the peasants themselves, and their homes contained books and writing slates.

In many spheres the lives of these peasants bore the imprint of a modern market economy rather than an old-fashioned self-sufficiency. Whether they produced horses and bullocks or butter and pork, it was for a large market. Their goods were of high value and easy to transport to distant markets, even from western Jutland, where the highways were very poor in the eighteenth century, and where shipping facilities were limited. As we have seen, their way of life is similar to that found by Jan de Vries for maritime Friesian peasants, who were so far removed from self-sufficiency that they bought their bread from bakers. Although the stockbreeding peasants of western Jutland baked their own bread, they often had to buy rye for breadgrain, because they used their land primarily for fodder crops. The coastal peasants of Friesland and north-western Jutland evidently had more in common with each other than they had with peasants who lived a few kilometres inland.

The sandy soil in the south-eastern part of the Lemvig district presented a different picture. The peasants here primarily grew rye. They were more self-sufficient as regards essential supplies, and their production was specially calculated to cover their own consumption and to keep the farm going. Virtually all the peasants in this area did day-work for the manor to which they belonged: they provided labour, horses, ploughs, and harrows to cultivate the manor lands. The most important natural resource in the district was a large peatbog belonging to the squire at Holmgård. The peasants were actually entitled to dig peat solely for their own use; since there was plenty of peat, however, the squire overlooked the fact that his tenants also dug peat for sale. Peat was much sought after in the immediate region, which totally lacked any forest or scrub that could be used for firewood. But it was not a product that could be sent to Amsterdam or Hamburg. The farmers in these parishes thus lived in a different world, both socially and economically, from their fellow peasants along the coast.

Within a small region - about fifty kilometres in any direction - there were thus two vastly different types of landscape and two equally different types of peasant. This gave occasion for trade across the boundary. The cattle breeders bought breadgrain and fuel from the peasants of the heath, while the rye growers could in turn obtain barley and oats for fodder from the parishes in the hilly country along the coast. This trade was to a large extent direct, and it is easy to understand the rector of Heldum when he wrote in 1766: "a rather moderate trade in grain is carried on in Lemvig". Moreover, the big money from the sale of bullocks and horses went straight into the pockets of the peasants and gentry. In these circumstances a market

town could not maintain and develop any position as an economic and social centre for its hinterland.

The Market Town

Eighteenth-century Lemvig was a small town. In 1769 it had a population of 326, rising to 375 in 1801. This was less than the population of many of the prosperous parishes of the hinterland. The town was situated by one of Limfjorden's bays, surrounded on three sides by steep hills up to forty metres high. On the fourth side was the shore of the fiord and the bay, which gave a natural anchorage. The roads down to the town followed steep slopes through ravines; driving loaded wagons was therefore a hazardous undertaking. Since the town had no harbour, goods had to be loaded on to barges and rowed between the shore and the ships, which lay at anchor out in the bay. The peculiar geography of the town thus reinforced its secondary role in relation to the rural parishes.

From the end of the seventeenth century there are signs of the way people with initiative and money preferred to breed cattle rather than live as merchants in the town. There are several examples of a merchant beginning his career in the town, dealing with the peasants in what were called coarse goods: iron, timber, tar, salt, and hops. When he had amassed initial capital in this way, he would hand over the business to his son and buy a large farm in the country. Here he could breed bullocks and horses, a financial game which could bring huge profits. The only well-to-do people in Lemvig in the eighteenth century were in this category.

The other businesses in the town could be called small-ware shops, whose proprietors went to Amsterdam once a year to buy spices, pieces of silk, tobacco tins, ivory combs, and other luxury items (Christensen 1919).`

Merchant and Farmer

Simon Andrup, who established himself as a merchant in Lemvig around 1750, is a fine example of one who combined commerce with stockbreeding. Apart from his large merchant house in Sondergade he owned for a period several of the manors and large freehold farms in the district. In the 1770s he had on two of his farms a total herd of 150 bullocks, as well as cows, horses, and sheep. The bullocks were driven by road to Hjerting and shipped thence to Holland (Moller Hansen 1947).

Apart from his manors, Simon Andrup had a farm adjacent to his merchant's house, with farm buildings in the town and a share in the town's lands. This form of agriculture was in fact pursued on a greater or lesser scale by most market town dwellers during this period. It was primarily self-sufficiency agriculture, but for the merchants the yields could also - in combination with grain bought from peasants - be used in the business for brewing beer or distilling spirits for sale. In Lemvig, however, this traditional form of agriculture entailed certain difficulties: the nature of the terrain around the town meant that the town lands were rather cramped, and in places practically vertical. Ordinary agricultural work required great effort. The merchants' own corn yields were therefore limited. The same was true of the supply of corn from the hinterland; many peasants in the immediate surroundings grew fodder

corn only for their own use, and the rye growers of the southern hinterland did not produce much of a surplus. Much of the corn that was sold either passed directly between the two types of peasant in the district or else was bought by Norwegian ships which anchored off the open coast, thus breaking the town's trade monopoly. In these circumstances, the traders of Lemvig could not prosper by selling corn or producing beer and spirits. It was stock-breeding which came before all other production, and that was what enterprising people - peasants and townspeople - engaged in.

The Freeholders

From the end of the eighteenth century and in the course of the nineteenth, Lemvig's fortunes changed. This was due mainly to some external changes which meant that the town was able to find a profitable place in the interaction with the prosperous hinterland. Three essential factors may be mentioned: the transition of the peasants from tenants to freeholders from 1757 onwards; the abolition of restrictions on the sale of cattle in 1788; and the coming of a passage to the North Sea through the Agger isthmus in 1825.

Tenant peasants in the Lemvig district became freeholders at a very early stage; they were actually among the first in Denmark. The Jutish freehold movement surprised the Copenhagen politicians, who had to check it in 1761 by decreeing that no farm could be sold off by a manor before the division and enclosure of the land had been arranged. From around 1775 there were entire parishes in the Lemvig district - particularly on good land - where the peasants owned their land and buildings. Money for the purchase came to a certain extent from their own funds, or could be borrowed from other peasants or from clergymen eager to invest their capital. In the course of the 1790s and until just after 1800, peasant farms on the rest of the district's manors became freehold properties. The sole exception was a little manor in the poorest of the parishes in the district; here the landowner retained his twenty tenants until 1830 (he himself was the descendant of a tenant farmer who had bought the property by auction in 1761).

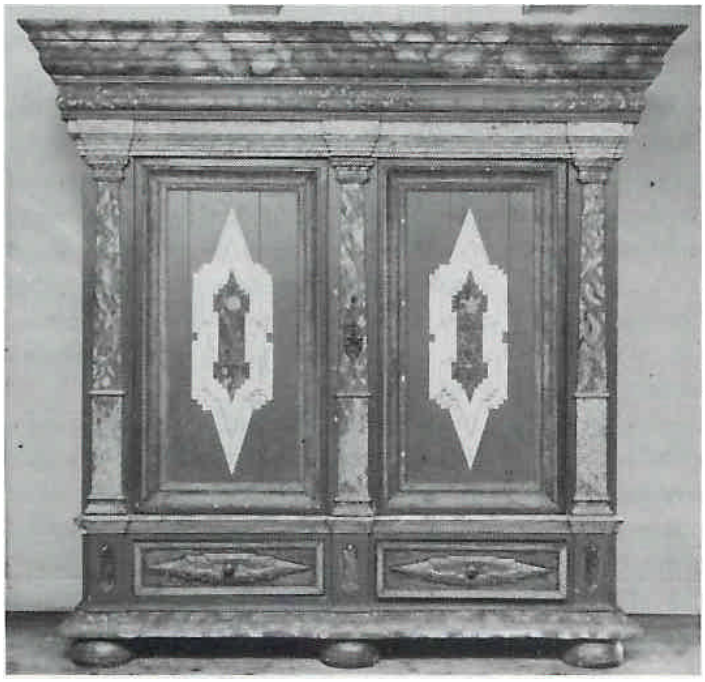
The transition to freeholding had far-reaching consequences for the district. New soil was cultivated, and the population grew. Wherever tenant farms were sold off, the new freeholding peasants parcelled off patches of land on the heath and the outfields, where cotter families could settle as day labourers and small farmers with one cow and a few sheep. Population growth was an obvious reality; from 1801 to 1890 it doubled in the Lemvig hinterland. The increase was largest in the parishes on the heath, where the marginal soil could be transformed into arable land by means of marling, better fertilizing, and the planting of hedges to provide shelter. Only those parishes which had long been densely populated, and where there was no vacant arable soil, remained at the same population level.

This parcelling of the land did not have the negative effect of the growth of a rural proletariat, such as we know from other parts of Denmark. The great variety in the economy of western Jutland offered excellent potential for income from ancillary occupations, besides labouring by the day for freeholding peasants. There was work at

fishing, at the brickworks, at the making of horn spoons, on the large land reclamation projects along the coast, as hucksters or drovers, or as hodmen at the building of the new farmhouses that were needed as a result of the growing population and the increasing prosperity.

Free Cattle Trade

Among the many laws and ordinances passed as part of the agrarian reforms, only one had conditions in western Jutland in view. This was the ordinance of 11 June 1788, removing restrictions from the cattle trade. It had previously been the exclusive privilege of urban merchants and manor owners to ship bullocks abroad; peasants could rear them but not export them. Now, however, everyone was free to export cattle to Germany, the Duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, or Holland, or wherever the market was best. The rural population of the Lemvig district now became part of an international network. On trips to north German markets they learned of new goods and fashions, and the sale of their cattle gave them the means with which to meet their new needs. Peasant carpenters in the district received orders for wardrobes of south Jutish or north German types, and the merchants in Lemvig acquired a clientele eager to buy luxury articles which could be ordered from the large commercial centres. It was not without reason that Simon Andrup's son, Rasmus, was sent to a commercial academy in Hamburg as a young man, before he took over his father's merchant's house in Sondergade in 1793.



3. This eighteenth-century wardrobe (now in Lemvig Museum) came from a farm west of Lemvig. The local cabinet-maker was obviously familiar with the style that was characteristic of south Jutland and north Germany. Photo: Dansk Folkemuseum.

The Agger Canal

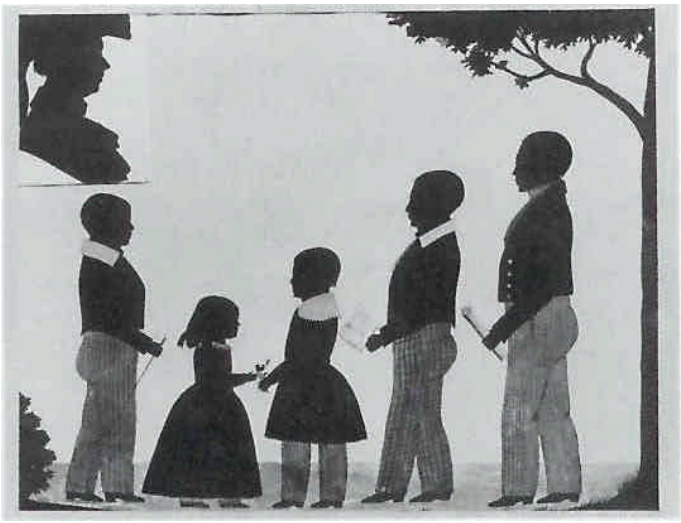
The difficult sailing conditions were one of the most significant barriers to the development of Lemvig's own commercial life, but this too changed radically to give the town a favourable position. A storm flood in 1825 broke a hole in the Agger isthmus, and in 1834 the first ships were able to sail through the new canal. The sea route westwards from Lemvig towards the huge English and German markets was now open. The town's merchants began to invest in shares of ships instead of in farms and manors. The population of Lemvig soared, from 375 inhabitants in 1801 to 688 in 1840. As in the rural parishes, the boom left lasting traces on the face of the town: old thatched houses were demolished and replaced by new buildings - one-storey brick houses with whitewashed cornices and red tiled roofs. Characteristically, the new rural farmhouses and the town houses looked the same, apart from the roofing material; peasants and townspeople had the same taste and the same economic means.

The Road to Hamburg

With the transition of the peasants to freeholders, the abolition of cattle trading privileges, and the coming of the Agger canal there were new opportunities for exploiting the resources that had long typified the district. The dynamism was still based on cattle rearing, but now there was also a chance of influencing the whole process of sale. In the course of the nineteenth century the bullock trade became the speciality of a number of large farms, particularly for a network of families in north-western Jutland. Among the most prominent was the man whom the young judge had seen holding court like a king at the table in the Lemvig inn, Niels Munch Breinholt.

His farm, Sønder Vinkel, was one of the old freehold farms in the prosperous parish of Heldum, and the owner traced his ancestry back to the stockbreeders whom the agronomist Wedel had met around 1800, who "stuck to the old ways" and smiled indulgently at the newfangled ideas. This farm was, as his son Niels Buch Breinholt recalls in his memoirs, "as static as can be imagined, so old-fashioned that its main features were exactly as in his father's and his grandfather's time, but this is not to suggest that his maintenance of the old farming traditions was irrational; on the contrary, it exactly suited the time-honoured experience which had proved so economically beneficial for the continuance and success of the family, so why break with the traditional way of management?" (Breinholt 1911). Niels Munch Breinholt was an eminent cattle breeder and dealer, who through his knowledge of the business and his commercial talent often obtained prices for his cattle which were almost double those of comparable farms, and he was among the pioneers, after the coming of the Agger canal, in building up an English market with direct connections from Limfjorden.

The Breinholts of Sønder Vinkel were related to a number of cattle-dealing families in north-western Jutland, so it was natural that the eldest son followed in his father's footsteps from an early age: Niels Buch Breinholt was only fifteen when he made his first trip south in 1846, travelling to the October markets in Tønder, Husum, and Itzehoe with a group of cattle dealers consisting of close relatives. Following the



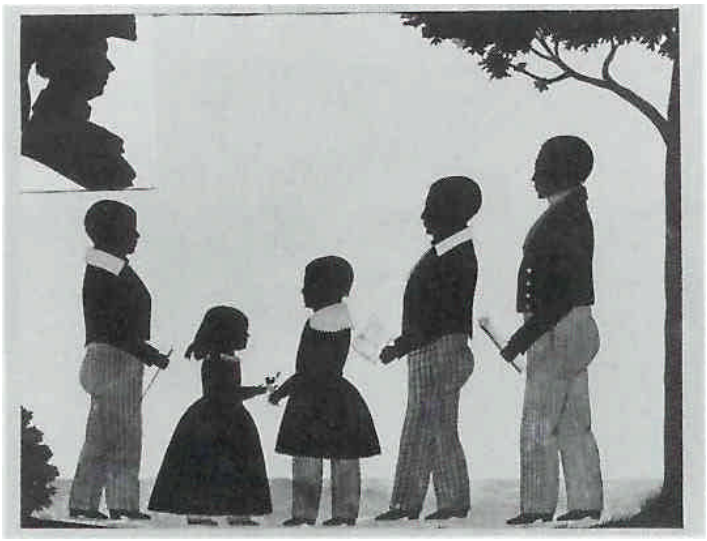
. The bullock farmer Niels Munch Breinholt of Sønder Vinkel, near Lemvig, with his wife Ingeborg. Silhouette c. 1845, Lemvig Museum.

tradition, the successful market visit concluded with a pleasure trip to Hamburg. Here they bought things such as silk, which was cheaper than in Denmark, and which the respectable Jutish peasants smuggled past the Danish customs officers at Altona station, tightly wound around their bodies under their clothes. It was not only the Holstein haberdashers but also the ordinary people of western Jutland who smuggled luxury goods over the border between Germany and Denmark.

The following year the young man was sent to Hamburg once again - this time to attend high school so that he could improve his German and learn some English. The peasants did not lag behind the townspeople when it came to giving their sons an education. While in Hamburg he stayed with one of his father's business connections, the firm of Claus & Wilhelm Olde, situated "am neuen Pferdemarkt", popularly known as "das Schulterblatt". This was a central location in the west Jutish picture of the world, "a name which, in a Danicized form, was known throughout Jutland, since many of the cattle dealers and commission agents lived around the square, and since Hamburg at that time was the destination for the Jutish bullocks". To lodge here with the Oldes was really to be right at the centre of the European cattle trade. It was not only German and Danish cattle producers and buyers who came here, but also English cattle merchants, who picked out the fine Jutish bullocks for export (Tang 1962).

The Way to England

In the summer of 1850 Niels Buch Breinholt was sent by his father to London along with a friend who was the son of a marshland farmer from Ballum in southern Jutland. Since the 1840s Niels Munch Breinholt, together with some other prominent west Jutes (C. B. Claudi from the Grysbaek farm west of Lemvig and Justice Tang from



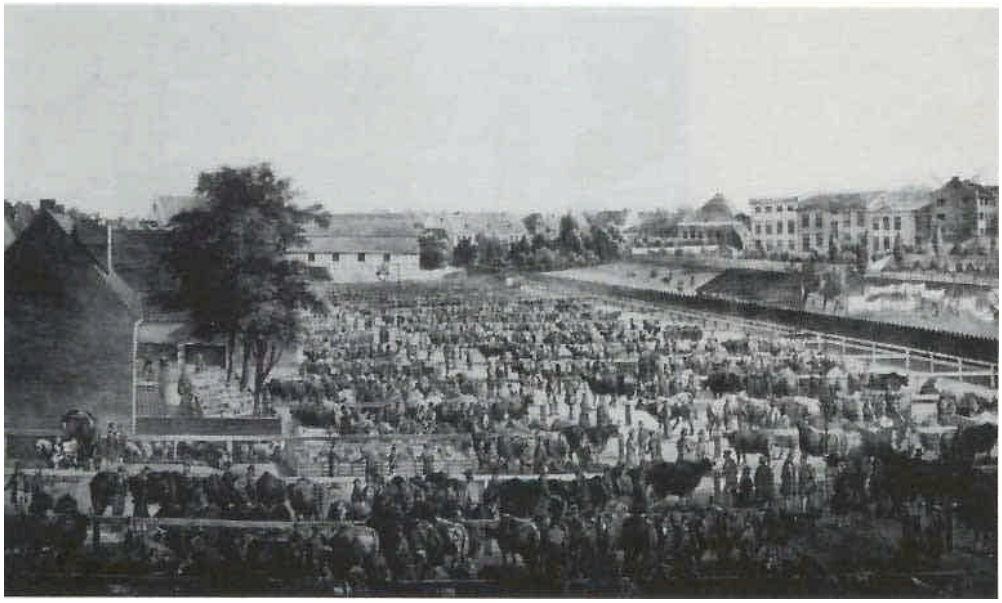
5. The Breinholt children. The eldest son, Niels Buch Breinholt, is on the right. Silhouette c 1845, Lemvig Museum.

the manor of Norre Vosborg, further down the west coast) had made several unsuccessful attempts to establish steamship connections between Limfjorden and England with a view to the export of beef on the hoof. The time was now ripe to resume these efforts, which had been interrupted by the war. The young men were therefore sent off with a cargo of beef cattle to undertake a practical test of sales conditions.

Niels Buch Breinholt's first trip to London was by a steamer which sailed from Hjerting. In the spring of 1851, when he went to England for a second time to supervise the sale of cattle, he travelled on the SS *Jylland,* which sailed through the Agger canal and reached England after 45 hours with a cargo of 130 head of cattle and horses, 70 pigs, and a lot of other farm produce.' The west Jutish cattle breeders and exporters had managed to influence the state into starting a steamship line between Limfjorden and London. When the first cargo of cattle was loaded at Oddesund in Limfjorden, men assembled from far afield, so that it was like a public festival, as Niels Buch Breinholt notes in his memoirs.

The Pier

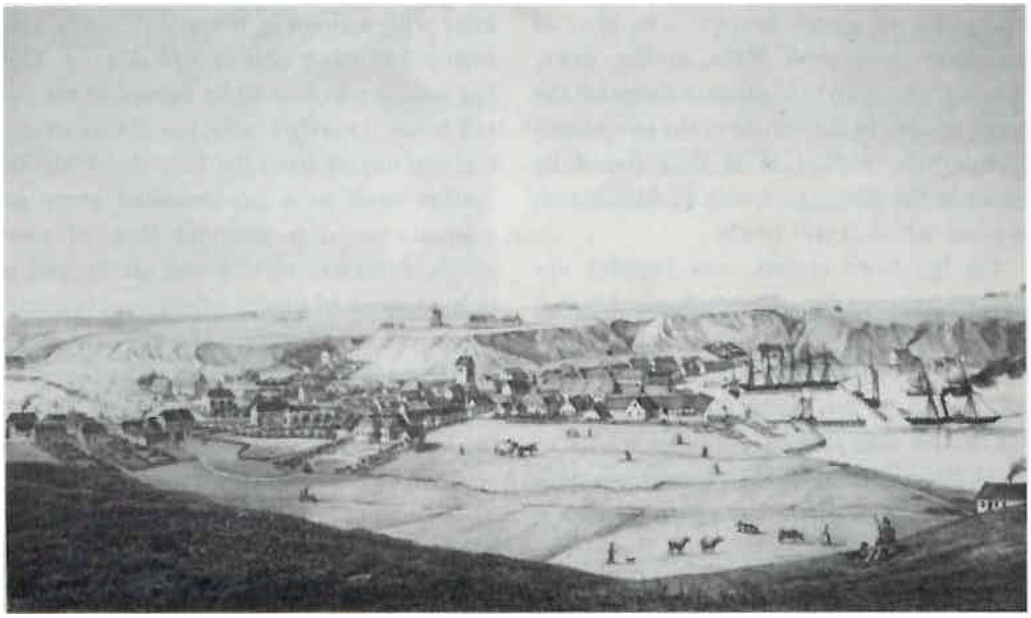
The establishment of the steamship line had some important consequences for the development of Lemvig. The town had hitherto lacked a harbour. Since the coming of the Agger canal, the town council had been deliberating the possibility but had been finding difficulty in obtaining funds to build a harbour. Typically enough, it was a private initiative which had to take up the matter. The cattle breeders in the region wanted a harbour now, when there was the prospect of a steamship line to England. Without a harbour the steamship could not call at the town. In December 1850 a jointstock company was formed by 28 men, each of whom contributed a fixed sum of money towards the construction of a pier." Half of



6. The cattle market in Altona was a central place in the world of the west Jutish farmers. The young Niels Buch Breinholt lived here with the cattle agent Claus Olde in 1847, exactly the time of this picture. Lithograph by Johann Friedrich Knecht, Altonaer Museum in Hamburg (reg. no. AB 2683).

the men were proprietors of the large cattle farms in the region, the other half citizens of Lemvig. The company was headed by Niels Munch Breinholt and C. B. Claudi. The Lemvig representatives were led by the merchant A. W. Andrup, who had taken over his father's business in 1840; he was also chairman of the municipal council, but had given up hope of achieving anything through that channel.

The pier was built in 1851 and proved to be a good investment for the shareholders, who collected tolls from the ships which used it - with the exemption of the SS Jylland. The initiative hurried up the plans for the building of a proper harbour, and the town bought up the privately owned pier in 1854 and incorporated it into the new harbour. The negotiations for the purchase of the pier were somewhat complicated by the fact that three of the shareholders were also members of the municipal council and naturally thought that the pier was an asset for which a decent price ought to be paid, whereas the other three members implied that the pier was too badly built to last for any length of time. Andrup, however, was a powerful man, and he managed to form a majority in favour of buying the pier at the price it had cost to build it, which was an excellent offer. The pier committee did not relent without complaints - this would have been unlike west Jutish businessmen, imbued with the notion that it is wrong to sell something at the price first offered. The matter had to be discussed, even though



7. View of Lemvig around 1860, clearly showing the distinctive terrain around the town. The stately mansion with the meadow in the centre of the picture belonged to the district judge, who was also a farmer. The harbour is the one built by the municipal council, 1855-57. The three large sailing ships are berthed by the earlier private pier. The steamship could be the SS Iris of Ålborg, which sailed between the Limfjorden towns and Copenhagen. Lemvig Museum.

both parties knew very well what the pier was worth.

The harbour brought about a change in the town's relation to the surrounding world. Whereas people before had been almost exclusively dependent on a connection part-way by land along the coast of western Jutland, and thereby linked to north Germany and Holland, links were now spread out in a broader network. Ships from Lemvig sailed to Copenhagen and Riga, to London and Newcastle, and to the old commercial partners of Hamburg and Altona. Broadly speaking, Lemvig now received its "everyday goods" from Copenhagen, its "coarse goods" from England and its more luxurious "choice goods" from north Germany.

The New Times

Heightened activity in the Lemvig district was, as we have seen, a result of the peasants becoming freeholders, and acquiring the right to sell their cattle freely, and also being provided by nature with better opportunities for choosing an export channel by sea or by land. As in the eighteenth century, there were still two kinds of peasant, but they were in the process of refining their own areas of work and giving up their ancillary occupations. It was now a matter of specialized stockbreeding or rye growing. The large commerce in livestock became increasingly a speciality of a dynasty of farming families. Fishing and horn spoon making became cotter's occupations, and the traditional peasant dealing in

smuggled silk goods brought a number of peasants' sons with them to the town, where they set up in legitimate shops on the main streets. In the course of the nineteenth century the market town thus found its place in the interaction with its hinterland, a place which it still holds.

On the town streets, new fagades appeared between the old merchants' houses. In 1846 the first draper's shop was opened, soon to be followed by several others. Here and there in the town lived ladies who made and sold millinery. In the course of the following decades the drapers, together with the ironmongers, became a dominant element in the urban scene, and their striking window displays and inventive signs overshadowed the merchants' houses, which at most proclaimed their existence by a name painted over the doorway. The new tradesmen adopted new methods; ironmongers displayed their wares out on the footpath, and the drapers waged war in the local newspaper with large advertisements for seasonal goods, sales, and Christmas displays. Customers able and willing to spend money came every Saturday to Lemvig, aware that they were part of an international community, and keeping up with fashions in dress and home furnishings. Many west Jutish peasants had admired the window displays on the shopping streets of Hamburg long before their counterparts in Zealand had seen a huckster's shop.

The drapers and ironmongers had no need to own farms to support themselves, and the old-fashioned merchants also sold off their lands. The fields where the townspeople's horses, cows, and sheep had grazed became new housing districts in the 1880s. The merchants were no longer farmers with a share in the town's lands and interests in stock rearing and dealing. The big money was now to be earned in the retail trade. Lemvig's only possibility of attracting buyers from the hinterland was to market itself as a concentrated array of temptations - a constant flow of new goods, extensive service and credit, and a rich selection of places where people could meet over refreshments. The effect of these endeavours was reinforced by the fact that all of this took place on one fixed day of the week, Saturday.

Market Day

Saturday was market day, when all the peasants came to town. Saturday in Lemvig plays a major role in recollections and accounts of life in the town in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By contrast, older sources either fail to mention market day or do so only in passing. It appears that market day attained its social and economic significance only during the nineteenth century, and was thus a visible expression of the town's new place in relation to the hinterland.

For the people of the district the trip to Lemvig was a weekly festivity, where they could see the latest novelties from the great world abroad and hear the latest news from the immediate surroundings. The social urge was combined with a desire to indulge in the modern pleasure of shopping, i.e., spending for fun, not buying necessities. For the large stockbreeders and tradesmen who met in the inn around 1860, market day was like a news exchange. Without having to make special arrangements, they knew that they would meet the same people around the table every week. The import-

ance of Lemvig's market day was thus far greater than the original economic function.

The Drapers

Like market day, the drapers' shops were also an expression of the new relation between the town and the hinterland. In the 1850s there were as many as six draper's shops in a town with about 1,100 inhabitants. The first two drapers who settled in the town came, characteristically, from the south, from the Ribe district. They had had the chance to meet the Lemvig stockbreed ers back in Ribe, and they were in fact good friends with, for example, Niels Munch Breinholt of Sonder Vinkel. When they moved from Ribe to Lemvig they knew that there was a market for quality small-wares. It is striking, however, that the new generation of shopkeepers who boosted Lemvig's economy in the latter half of the nineteenth century primarily came from the prosperous parishes of the hinterland. They came from farms where there already was a tradition of trading, whether in livestock, land, groceries, or small-wares. They could calculate buying and selling prices, they knew the commercial channels, especially

8. The eastern side of the square in Lemvig in the 1880s. The shops to the left belonged to members of the Bechgaard family. Hans Bechgaard's drapery shop was in the two-storey house in the middle of the row. Lemvig Museum.

southwards to Hamburg-Altona, and they already had an established clientele by virtue of their kinship ties with their home parishes.

A good example is Hans Bechgaard, who owned at the turn of the century the town's largest and finest drapery shop, on the town square. He was born in the rich parish of Dybe on a large farm which had long been pursuing trade. His grandfather had come from central Jutland and had sold hosiery on a grand scale to the citizens of Copenhagen in the late eighteenth century. Hans Bechgaard's brothers and one brother-in-law, who came from the neighbouring parish of Ramme, and who thus were all of the peasant estate, were to play a prominent role in Lemvig's commercial life. They were the town's biggest taxpayers, and they attracted attention every morning when they rode through the streets on their fine, well-fed horses. "King Hans", the peasant's son, was an eminent member of Lemvig's municipal council, and for many years chairman of the local businessmen's association. Lemvig was still the peasants' town. [7]

The West Jutes

So Lemvig was not the Siberia which the young judge's mother had imagined. It merely lay in a district which differed in many ways from circumstances in eastern Denmark. It was as if western Jutland turned its back on the rest of the country. The people here had a long tradition of being independent and self-assured. The peasants had of course been manor tenants as in the rest of the country, but the manors were widely scattered and small, and the burden of day-work much less severe than in eastern Denmark. Many peasants did no day-work at all, paying their dues in cash. Moreover, they became freeholders at an early stage.

Most of the local population lived on medium-sized farms, which had long been dispersed through the landscape with their lands grouped around them. Cultivation in common - the practice in eastern Denmark - is known only from isolated cases, as when pieces of land lay between two or three farms. Market-oriented production of bullocks and horses was also accompanied by social and geographical mobility. There were chances of great profits and losses, as well as steady progress up the social ladder. There were several examples in western Jutland of tenant farmers becoming estate owners in the eighteenth century; progress did not depend on birth but on a talent for the undertaking on which one embarked. Geographically the world stretched, as we have seen, far beyond the parish boundaries, chiefly southwards along the coast to southern Jutland and north Germany.

Independence and self-assuredness were found not only among the prosperous peasants. Even a poor young farmhand, from humble circumstances in the poorest parish in the Lemvig district, was swift to react to overbearing "bailiff's ways": the cotter's son Peder Lykke was serving on a large farm west of Lemvig, where a new bailiff had been appointed. The latter had received an agricultural education on the island of Falster in south-east Denmark and ordered the servants to remove their hats when addressing him, and "he thought he could introduce the habits and pace of work he knew from Falster, but he forgot that the islanders were used to being under the bailiff's stick, which cannot be used

against us free and tough Jutes, who have been reared and accustomed to working in freedom, not under commands" (Damgaard 1983).

Doffing one's hat for a bailiff who was evidently still wet behind the ears - that was more than a Jute could do. On the other hand, they willingly took their hats off, both literally and figuratively, to people who really deserved it. This was true, for instance, of the Breinholts, who were always addressed by the formal Danish pronoun I, never the familiar du, and for whom hats were raised (Grohshennig 1907). It was not due so much to these people's birth, wealth, or influence as to the fact that they had a number of qualities which were admired without respect of persons. These qualities included a talent for business, independence, inventiveness, diligence, and honesty.

The Entrepreneurial Spirit

The line can be followed down to the present day. Without doubt the most respected people in Lemvig today are "The Ladies". These are the two Bache Lauridsen sisters who run the town's largest and finest women's fashion shop. The customers here are not only from the Lemvig hinterland; there are regular customers from other large towns, and the semiannual sale attracts people from most of western Jutland. The two sisters work in their shop every day

9. The two Bache Lauridsen sisters in front of their shop - "Damernes Magasin" - on the square in Lemvig. Photo: Jørgen Borg, 1985.

from morning till evening, although they are both over 75. They themselves go to Copenhagen, Paris, London, Düsseldorf, or wherever the coming year's fashions are on show; they select and purchase, they serve their customers, mind the till, guide their trainees, and check the day's takings. Every morning they hold a short service with the staff, with a prayer and a hymn, before the day's work starts. The two sisters come from a modest background in a little railway village west of Lemvig: their father was a country butcher and trader, their mother made ladies' hats at home. They themselves say that they have business in their veins and that they want to work in their shop as long as they are able (Damgaard 1986).

The ladies and their shop, "Damernes Magasin", are one of the cherished myths of the Lemvig district. This is a modern version of the classic west Jutish entrepreneurial myth about the man who began by cultivating the heath and living in a sod-hut, and ended up leaving each of his three sons a well-running farm. Everyone in the district was delighted when a television programme was made about the ladies in 1988. It was a good piece of TV journalism which really illuminated life in the shop, the story behind it, and the personality of the owners. There was scarcely anyone in the Lemvig district who did not watch it, and the general opinion was that it was a genuine west Jutish story of diligence, industry, and independence - and it would do the Copenhageners good to hear it.

The shop is more than a myth, however. It is a reality which once again reflects the fact that Lemvig's dynamism comes from the hinterland. Like the peasants' sons of the nineteenth century, the butcher's two daughters came to the town with commercial blood flowing in their veins. The shop which they run is based on the 25,000 inhabitants of the hinterland, not only on the 7,000 of them who live in the town itself. And like the peasants in the district last century, they themselves travel to the large business centres to acquaint themselves with international currents in their sphere. In the old days it was the livestock at "das Schulterblatt" in Altona, whereas now it is the fashions at the fairs in Düsseldorf, but the basic pattern is the same.

The community in western Jutland thus created the seed-bed for a special human type, who may be called the entrepreneur - or in Danish *iværksætter.* The concept is taken from the business world, and is not used here in exactly its ethnological sense, since an *ivaerksaetter* does not work in opposition to the surrounding society, but as a part of it. He chooses his models within his own social class, and his qualities are admired by those around him. He is an enterprising, independent, self-assured individual, who uses every opportunity to set things in motion.

This kind of entrepreneur can be followed through many centuries of west Jutish history. He is sprung from the peasant population of a highly distinctive district. In that respect the Lemvig district is only one part of central and western Jutland, where commercial zeal and independence are hereditary traits. Everywhere we find the same old tradition of independent ownership, the same closely stratified social structure, with excellent opportunities for mobility, primarily through vigorous commercial activity, and the same centuries-old contact with the large economic centres in north-west Europe. The visitor from Copenhagen may

say: "This is really remote!" but the west Jute replies: "From what?"

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Notes

1 The present article is part of the ongoing research work at Lemvig Museum and is thus based on a wide range of primary sources. In view of the concentrated form of the article it has not been possible to include more than the most essential source references.

2 Præsteindberetninger 1766-1769, Landsarkivet (regional archives), Viborg (C4-774/775). These reports from the clergy formed the basis of the *Danske Atlas.*

3 These objects are listed in the following estate inventory deeds and auction records: Ryssensteen Godsarkiv, skifteprotokol 1775-1801, Landsarkivet, Viborg (G 412-2). Rammegård Godsarkiv, skifteprotokol 1776-1802, Landsarkivet, Viborg (G 417-3). Skodborg-Vandfuld Herreders Gejstlige Auktionsprotokol 1701-1807, Landsarkivet, Viborg (C 39 D 3).

4 Kommissioner af 1732 26. aug. til at inkvirere hos Købmaendene og Kraemmerne i Købstæderne... (commission of inquiry concerning merchants in market towns), Rigsarkivet, Rentekammeret (Public Record Office), Copenhagen (2245.155).

5 *Gleason's Pictorial Drawing Room Companion*, Boston, 1851 (copy in Handels- og Søfartsmuseet, Kronborg).

6 Lemvig Havnekommission 1839-64, indkomne dokumenter (harbour commission documents). Landsarkivet, Viborg (D 15.33).

7 Undersøgelsesarkiv vedr. manufakturhandlere i Lemvig (research archive regarding drapers in Lemvig) 1846-ca. 1900. Lemvig Museum.

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