



Skodsborg Badesanatorium

Photo courtesy of the Historic Archive of Seventh-day Adventists (HASDA) in Denmark.

Skodsborg Badesanatorium (Skodsborg Sanatorium)

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Skodsborg Badesanatorium (Skodsborg Sanatorium) is a pioneer Seventh-day Adventist medical institution at Skodsborg, a suburb of Copenhagen, Denmark. It was originally owned and operated by the Seventh-day

Adventist Church and stood as a model and inspiration for other sanitariums and hospitals in Northern Europe.¹ The institution is still being operated as a health resort under the name Kurhotel Skodsborg, but it no longer belongs to Seventh-day Adventists.

Early Inspiration

In 1889/1890 Carl Ottosen went to America to learn about different health treatments at the Battle Creek Sanitarium. During his stay he got to know Dr. J. H. Kellogg, who became his mentor and inspiration. Dr. Kellogg convinced Ottosen to study medicine instead of theology, and in 1896 he graduated with a medical degree. Following his graduation Kellogg encouraged Ottosen to establish a health sanitarium in Scandinavia. In the spring of 1897 Ottosen returned to Denmark with his (Norwegian-born) American wife, Johanne, whom he had married while in the US, to carry out the plan of establishing a health sanitarium in Denmark modeled after the one in Battle Creek.²

Early Beginnings Until World War I

In the summer of 1897 a small group of Seventh-day Adventists, led by Dr. Ottosen, were riding their bicycles on Strandvejen in the area of Skodsborg looking for a suitable place to establish a sanitarium.³ Two villas near the sea, Skodsborghus and Sundeved, former cavalry buildings for the king's summer residence,⁴ immediately caught their attention and interest. When the owner heard about the purpose of using the villas as a foundation to build a health sanatorium, he reduced the sale price to 50,000 kroner (the equivalent of US\$7,523.19 in 2019).⁵ They had 10,000 kroner to purchase the buildings;⁶ the rest of the money came from donations, the majority from Scandinavian Adventists.⁷

On May 9, 1897, the Scandinavian Philanthropical Society was established by the initiative and support of Ottosen.⁸ The society's main purpose was to promote health, social, and humanitarian work. In the beginning the Scandinavian Philanthropical Society was run as an independent organization, despite having many Adventist board members. In principle, however, board members were chosen by election and anyone could apply even if they were not Adventists. The Scandinavian Philanthropical Society came to have a strong connection with Skodsborg Sanatorium, and Ottosen was one of the members of the board.

In 1898 the sanitarium was officially opened.⁹ The original staff consisted of Ottosen as director, Johanne Ottosen (his wife) as manager, P. Jensen Aagaard as inspector, H. L. Henriksen as businessman, and E. Arnesen in charge of the lab.¹⁰

The two buildings that comprised the sanitarium could together accommodate between 20 and 25 patients.¹¹ That same year a building named Villa Monica was purchased, together with a piece of land, also located on Strandvejen.¹²

The sanitarium received mixed reviews when it first opened, because of its connection with Adventism and its vegetarian focus. The treatments, however, were described in a very positive manner. Because of the focus on a vegetarian diet, the sanitarium soon gained the nickname "The Parsley Palace." Skodsborg was known in public as "The White City," because of the many white buildings on site.

In 1899 a person would pay 1000 kroner to be a member and to use the facilities, 35–70 kroner a week for a room, food, and general treatments. General treatments did not include gymnastics for those who were ill, which would cost an additional 3 kroner per week. A strength test and mapping were 2.50 kroner; an analysis of stomach contents, 3 kroner; and special massage, 1 kroner. For patients who were not members, the cost would be double. Specialized treatments for the ear, nose, and throat would cost extra. Each patient was asked to bring two bath sheets, one woolen blanket, and two towels. If the guests were to use the bath sheets of the sanitarium, it would be an additional cost of 0.25 kroner per day.¹³

In 1899 it was decided to purchase another property, Villa Bøgely, located on Strandvejen. However, the sanitarium did not have the money to purchase it. Ottosen personally purchased the building in 1902 and decided to keep it until the day the sanitarium could afford to buy it.¹⁴

In 1901 there were more guests than there was space. Patients had to be housed in guest accommodations in the nearby area, and several times tents were set up on the grounds.¹⁵

In 1902 the Scandinavian Philanthropical Society struggled to pay off the debt and general maintenance of Skodsborg. Ellen G. White, a supporter of Skodsborg, appealed for financial help from Scandinavian Adventists in the U.S.A. As a result, several thousand U.S. dollars were sent as gifts and loans to Skodsborg.¹⁶

The Scandinavian Philanthropical Society was taken over by the Scandinavian Union Conference in 1906 to tighten the Adventist connection and control over Skodsborg.¹⁷ Presidents of the Scandinavian Union Conference and the Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish conferences were all made members of the board. This practice continued as long as the society was in existence. This was done in order to ensure that the company would remain the property of the Scandinavian Union Conference to avoid the problems that had arisen with the private health work in the U.S.A., where sanitarium properties had become the property of individuals.¹⁸ Ottosen resigned from the board of the Scandinavian Philanthropical Society as he did not agree with the decision.

In order to counter the common view in the country that a sanitarium is primarily a health resort for people with such chest diseases as tuberculosis, it was decided in 1907 to change the name Skodsborg Sanatorium to Skodsborg Badesanatorium, indicating that a major part of the treatment consisted of baths, massage, and hydrotherapy.¹⁹

In 1909 what was to be known as the west building was built for a total cost of 60,000 kroner. This building was used as a children's school and education institution until 1918 when the school was moved to Nærum. The

sanitarium then took over the building and converted it into guest accommodation.²⁰

In 1912 there were 872 recorded patients at Skodsborg. In 1913 this number rose to 1,046.²¹ The bath and treatment building was built in 1914. This building had guest rooms and two physiotherapy treatment rooms, which were connected to a private treatment area.²²

World War I

With the onset of World War I in 1914, the number of patients had been reduced to around 30. Almost 100 of the staff had left either because their families wanted them to come home or because they wanted to reduce the financial burden on the sanitarium. In 1919, after the war had ended and life was returning to normal, the number of recorded patients rose to 1770.²³

After World War I

The Scandinavian Philanthropical Society had a financial surplus of between 100,000 kroner and 2 million kroner in 1916. However, their financial debt rose from 471,000 kroner in 1918 to 791,000 kroner in 1924.²⁴

In the 1920s Skodsborg Badesanatorium was known as the largest private hospital and sanitarium in Scandinavia.²⁵

In 1921 the sanitarium bought the building known as Villa Rex.²⁶ The villa had been for sale in 1907; however, the sanitarium could not afford it at the time, so Ottosen had purchased the property with his own money and rented it to the sanitarium until the sanitarium could finally buy it.²⁷

The structure known as Søjlegangen²⁸ and the office building were built in 1923. The latter came to house the consultation rooms, the reception, treasury, administration, and a salon.²⁹

In 1925 hot and cold water taps were installed into most of the guest flats, and the furniture was improved. The washroom (laundry) was provided with new machines, and an automatic boiler was installed. At the same time the kitchen was moved from the north building to the former staff dining hall. The kitchen was equipped with electric ovens and hobs, new fridges, and modern kitchen equipment.³⁰

An operating theater was erected in 1931 attached to the main building. The cost for this was 225,000 kroner.³¹ The money was paid, although the sanitarium, at this point in time, was 500,000 kroner in debt.³²

In 1932 it was decided to purchase a property, located south of the sanitarium, which in the past had been used as a royal summer residency together with the attached park. The total cost was 160,000 kroner. The cost was partly funded by selling the beach area in front of the sanitarium for 30,000 kroner and by agreeing to pay off 40,000 kroner per year for eight years.³³ Some of the money for the purchase came from donations from Ottosen and some of the Skodsborg staff, who donated one month's salary.³⁴ The remaining money was

provided by the Scandinavian Philanthropical Society, which took out a bank loan for the purchase.³⁵ In 1933 what was known as the south building was built.³⁶

In the 1930s the number of patients from Sweden declined because of the establishment of two sanitariums in Sweden and changes in the Swedish economy. Guests from Sweden had previously made up the largest number of visitors to the sanitarium. At the same time, it was becoming popular for Scandinavians to travel to warmer countries. The reducing number of patients, and therefore income, led to the sanitarium executive board's decision in 1936 that the sanitarium buildings were to be used only for medical patients. As a result, in 1939 the operating theaters were converted into patient rooms.³⁷

The number of patients in 1939 was recorded as being between 100 and 130.³⁸ Because of a lack of funds, some staff were made redundant during this time.

World War II

In 1940 Ottosen decided to withdraw from active service at the sanitarium, there were only 25 staff members left at this time.³⁹ In order to increase income, rooms were filled up with pensioners during the summer holidays and some permanent guests on site.⁴⁰

In 1942 Ottosen died at the age of 78 because of a chest infection.⁴¹

In October 1943 parts of the Skodsborg site was occupied by the German military, who used the south building as a field hospital for wounded soldiers, while using the basement of the north building as a kitchen.⁴² Most of the wounded soldiers who arrived at Skodsborg came directly from the battlefields of the Eastern Front. Just before Christmas 1943 the Germans announced that they needed more space. They took over the first level of the office building and Skodsborghus, which was reserved for patients on medication.⁴³

After D-Day, June 6, 1944, the Germans established gas safe rooms in the basement of the south building and a concrete bunker was placed in front of the building. Skodsborghus had its windows sealed off, and depots were established with pharmaceuticals.⁴⁴ On May 4, 1945, the Germans capitulated, and the last German soldiers left the Skodsborg site on August 31. This also ended the "occupation" of Skodsborg.⁴⁵ After the war Skodsborg received compensation for the occupation of a total of 251,168.32 kroner.⁴⁶ Several months of restoration work to the buildings followed, and the final restorations were completed in 1948.⁴⁷

After World War II and the Years to Come

After World War II thousands of refugees arrived from several countries to Skodsborg, where they received care and housing. With the south building and Villa Rex renovated, guests could again come to Skodsborg. In addition to the refugees, thousands of people now came to Skodsborg as guests and life returned to normal at the sanitarium.⁴⁸ In 1949 the massage and physiotherapy education were officially authorized by the Danish medical

board.⁴⁹ The physiotherapy and ergotherapy departments were added in the 1950's.⁵⁰

An Adventist church was built on the Skodsborg site in 1957.⁵¹ Through the years the senior pastor of the church also served as a chaplain for the sanitarium. A rich variety of cultural and spiritual programs were provided for the guests. Especially well attended were the Friday night services in the church.

In 1967 Skodsborg Badesanatorium signed a treaty with the hospitals in Copenhagen to accept some of their patients whose treatments were paid by the public health care system.⁵² With this move the sanitarium ended its many years of treating only private patients. In the following years the patients at the sanitarium were increasingly from the public health-care system, while the number of private patients decreased.

The executive board of the Scandinavian Philanthropical Society was dissolved in 1976, and in its place three independent executive boards were set up for the Skodsborg Badesanatorium, the Skodsborg Physiotherapy School, and the health food factory, Nutana. The boards were to be chosen directly by the West Nordic Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists; however, the Nordic⁵³ Philanthropical Society as an organization continued to exist.⁵⁴

The ratio of Adventists among the staff changed in the 1980s. In 1975, 56 percent of the staff were Adventist; by 1980, 43 percent were Adventist. In 1981 only 40 percent of the staff were Adventists.⁵⁵

During the 1980s the population in Copenhagen decreased, which meant that the council had to save money. Therefore, the cooperation between Skodsborg and the hospitals in Copenhagen was gradually reduced between 1986 and 1991. This reduction of patients from the public health-care system had accounted for two thirds of the patients at Skodsborg.⁵⁶

In order to compensate for the reducing number of patients from the hospitals, increased marketing was used to attract new private patients, and new treatments were offered. The new facilities on site included an eye clinic and dialysis treatments, and in 1991 trials were established with AIDS medication.⁵⁷

The West Nordic Union Conference reestablished a board for the Nordic Philanthropical Society in August 1990, because of the great financial difficulties of the Nordic Philanthropical Society, which was caused mainly by the Nutana food factory.⁵⁸

In 1990 Nutana had accumulated so much debt that in order to save the company the board of the Nordic Philanthropical Society decided to take out a 22 million kroner loan on the Skodsborg properties.⁵⁹ Shortly after the first loan was taken, the Nordic Philanthropical Society voted to take out a second loan on the Skodsborg property. The total loan to Nutana was 27 million kroner.⁶⁰

Nutana was sold in November 1991.⁶¹ Soon after in, December 1991, the Nordic Philanthropical Society was dissolved.⁶²

In 1991 it was suggested to turn Skodsborg Badesanatorium into a private hospital in order to continue operations after the loss of the public health patients from the hospitals in Copenhagen. This was because of a belief that private hospitals were growing in popularity. However, because of the financial problems with Nutana, which Skodsborg Badesanatorium had to help with, and the general lack of finances, it was decided not to proceed.

The End of Adventist Ownership of Skodsborg

As of December 31, 1991, Skodsborg had sustained a financial loss of 1 million kroner for that year. The total financial loss for Skodsborg A/S was, by December 31, 1991, 10 million kroner.⁶³ This would not have been a problem if Skodsborg could earn back the money, but this they were unable to do. By 1992 the badesanatorium was running at a 6 million kroner loss, and according to the budget, there would be another loss of 10 million kroner as 1992 continued, unless something drastic was done.⁶⁴ The total loss was by then 26.5 million kroner. Skodsborg A/S had put in 1 million kroner and guaranteed a bank loan of 6 million kroner; however, this was not enough to cover the total losses at January 1, 1993.⁶⁵ In March 1992 the West Nordic Union Conference had lent the sanitarium 10 million kroner in order to avoid bankruptcy.⁶⁶ On May 14, 1992, the conference decided to stop payments into Skodsborg.⁶⁷ The Skodsborg board decided that it would not be appropriate to ask the church members for more money to help them out. Press announcements were made to create sympathy and to get buyers; however, this was unsuccessful. On May 28, 1992, it was announced at a board meeting that a sale seemed not to be an option.⁶⁸ The board realized that no one was interested in purchasing Skodsborg, and that the Adventist Church was no longer able to financially run the institution. The only option appeared to be to declare bankruptcy. This, however, was prevented after renewed negotiations with a group of investors. According to the contract, the investors would take over the shares in the company for a symbolic sum of 1 kroner and at the same time take over the now 60 million kroner debt. With an expected debt rise of 10 million kroner in the next couple of months, the investors would have to take over Skodsborg A/S for 70 million kroner.⁶⁹ Apart from this, the investors would take over all loan liabilities to the bank, which would lift the debt obligations from the Adventist Church. The investors guaranteed to take over Skodsborg until June 25, 1992, and a sale of Skodsborg was expected to happen before that time.⁷⁰ In September 1992 Skodsborg was bought by Chr. Augustinus Factories A/S and Rasmussen and Schiøtz A/S.⁷¹ Skodsborg as an Adventist institution was now officially over.

After the sale of Skodsborg, many Adventists lost their jobs, the church building on the site was demolished, and the church congregation had to relocate.

Entities to Be Found on the Skodsborg Site

Right from the beginning, the training of health personnel was an important part of Ottosen's vision. Under the leadership of Mrs. Johanne Ottosen, who had received her training in America, a course in nursing was started in early spring of 1898, which aimed at educating the students in physiotherapy and massage in addition to nursing in its regular form.⁷² In the beginning this was a two-year course and went under the name Nursing and Massage. The concept developed, and in the mid-1960's an education program was formalized as the Skodsborg Fysioterapiskole (Skodsborg Physiotherapy School), with its own board. It was a four-year program, and students came from all the Nordic countries.⁷³ The Adventist educational philosophy about the importance of combining the theoretical with the practical was fully implemented. In fact, the students worked almost full-time at the sanitarium while they received their training, and in this way also provided part of the workforce needed. The practical work was for eight hours a day, with the classes and the studying in addition.^{74 75}

A cooking school was also started in 1898 at Skodsborg, where the students were trained in vegetarian and dietetic cooking. It was a one-and-a-half-year course and went under the name Husholdningskursus (household course). Later the kitchen facilities at the sanitarium were upgraded, and the course became a two-year Kokkeskole (chef school).⁷⁶ The students were trained on site and helped provide the meals for the guests.

Also on the site were a small supermarket called Sanafer, a hairdresser for the women, and a bakery.⁷⁷ There was also a laundry, although most of the dirty linens were sent to a laundry off site.⁷⁸ Woodwork classes were also offered to both women and men.⁷⁹

From 1972 a sports program, mainly for private patients, was established to help improve people's physical health. In 1977 folk dance, walking trips, gymnastics, and health education groups were commenced for private patients.⁸⁰

In the 1980s health education programs were run to help people quit smoking, lose weight, and abstain from alcohol.⁸¹

Treatments Provided

From 1898 onward the following treatments were offered: water treatment, air treatment, such light treatment as sunbathing, massage, remedial gymnastics, general gymnastics, diet and nutrition classes, and such sports as rowing and cycling.⁸² Illnesses that were treated were the following: flu; stomach and digestive problems; kidney problems; heart issues; sensitive skin issues; arthritis and other chronic problems with the muscles and joints; problems with the nervous system; diabetes; blood problems; back problems and urinary tract issues.⁸³

Between 1923 and 1939 the majority of treatments provided were massage and hydrotherapy, although all the treatments they had had since the sanitarium was opened were available if required.⁸⁴ Between 1948 and 1966 the majority of patients were treated for arthritis, muscular diseases, and heart diseases.⁸⁵

From 1971 until 1992 the main treatments at the sanitarium consisted of physiotherapy and remedial gymnastics. At the same time, light therapy, massage, and hydrotherapy as treatments decreased radically. This change was mainly because of the increase in patients from the public health-care system and decrease of the private patient numbers.⁸⁶

Contribution to the Church and Society

Skodsborg Badesanatorium made major impacts on the church during the more than 90 years of its operations and was a pioneer for health education in the country. As the first of its kind in Northern Europe it served as a model and inspiration for ten other sanitariums and hospitals that were established. Through its nearly two thousand graduated physiotherapists it became the mother institution of numerous physiotherapy clinics throughout Scandinavia, and many Skodsborg graduates hold responsible positions in public hospitals and teaching institutions. It provided a place of work for many young people and gave them an opportunity for a fruitful and meaningful career.⁸⁷

Wherever the physiotherapists opened private clinics or rehabilitation centers in new places, they often became the nucleus for a church plant or a strong support for the existing church. In Denmark alone there were more than 60 such clinics or centers, many of whom opened their facilities or their homes for church members. Skodsborg graduates have also served as missionaries in countries all over the world. Although many of the treatments and dietary habits were ridiculed at the beginning, society today shows a greater appreciation for the health education that Skodsborg Badesanatorium pioneered.

Famous Guests

Prominent Danish politicians who visited the site were Karl Kristian Vilhelm Steincke, minister of justice, and Madsen Mygdal, prime minister from December 1926 to 1929.⁸⁸

There were also famous artists such as the Danish actor and director of the Royal Theatre, Adam Poulsen (1879–1969); the Norwegian composer and pianist Edward Grieg (1843–1907) and his wife, Nina Grieg; the Danish composers Carl Nielsen (1865–1931) and Peter Lange-Müller (1850–1926); Danish Royal pianist Johanne Stockmarr (1869–1944); and the Danish opera singer Else Brems (1908–1995).

Among the famous authors who visited Skodsborg were Herman Bang (1857–1912) and Jeppe Aakjer (1866–1930).

List of Skodsborg Medical Directors⁸⁹

Carl Ottosen (1898–1937); A. Andersen (1937–1958); Eskild Hansen (1958–1971); Axel Milholt (1971–1977); Roland Nielsen (1977–1981); Uffe Jørgensen (1982–1986); Allan Wiik (1986–1990); Uffe Jørgensen (1990–1992).

List of Skodsborg Administrators⁹⁰

Carl Ottosen (1898–1937); Chr. Hansen (1937–1948); H. Westerlund (1948–1970); A. Falk Nielsen (1970–1975); Johannes Pedersen (1975–1978); Bjørn Kofoed (1978–1982); Reijo Rouhe (1982–1985); A. Falk Nielsen (1985–1989); Bent Nielsen (1989–1992).

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NOTES

1. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, second revised edition (1996), s.v. "Skodsborg Sanitarium."
2. A. Andersen, "Skodsborg Badesanatoriums grundlæggelse og udvikling gennem 50 aar," written document, 1930s, HASDA Archives, Vejle fjordskolen, 8721 Daugaard, Denmark.
3. Anders Lodahl Bank and Jørn Hansen, "Skodsborg Badesanatorium: Persilleslottet som blev Nordens største kursted," *Syddansk Universitetsforlag*, 2018, 9.
4. King Frederik VII had bought the country house "Skodsborg" in 1852 together with his wife, Countess Danner, and here they spent long relaxing summers until his death in 1963.
5. Lodahl Bank and Hansen, 10.
6. V. Axel Thomsen, "Skodsborg Startkapital" (1994), 1.
7. Vagner Lund, "Skodsborg Badesanatorium: Sanatoriet—i fortid og nutid," written document, February 1983, HASDA Archives, Vejle fjordskolen, 8721 Daugaard, Denmark, 4.
8. Andersen, "Skodsborg Badesanatoriums grundlæggelse og udvikling gennem 50 aar."
9. Lodahl Bank and Hansen, 11.
10. "Skodsborg Badesanatorium: Den Fuldkomste Naturlægeanstalt I Europa," Skodsborg brochure, 1898, HASDA Archives.

11. Lund, 4.
12. Lodahl Bank and Hansen, 63.
13. "Skodsborg Badesanatorium: Den Fuldkomste Naturlægeanstalt I Europa."
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15. Ibid., 64.
16. Ibid., 63.
17. Ibid., 66.
18. Ibid.
19. An official letter of June 1907 signed by Carl Ottosen and L. P. Hansen applying for the change of name. Copy on file in HASDA Archives.
Accessed January 22, 2020.
20. Lund, 6.
21. L. Muderspach, "Skodsborg—den tidligere historie 1898 til c. 1920," written document (incomplete), HASDA Archives, Vejle fjordskolen, 8721 Daugaard, Denmark, 15.
22. Lund, 6.
23. Muderspach, 15.
24. Lodahl Bank and Hansen, 70.
25. <https://kysthospitalet.dk/om-os/skodsborgs-historie/>.
26. Villa Rex was built in 1857, so that the king could hold councils, meetings, and banquets without leaving the scenic surroundings at Skodsborg.
27. Lund, 7.
28. "The Collonade."
29. Lund, 6, 7.

30. Thomsen, 8.
31. Lodahl Bank and Hansen, 74.
32. Thomsen, 9.
33. Ibid., 10, 11.
34. Lodahl Bank and Hansen, 75.
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36. Lund, 7.
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38. Ibid., 16.
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40. Ibid., 19.
41. Lund, 23.
42. V. Axel Thomas, "Da Tyskerne beslaglagde Skodsborg," *Adventnyt*, 1993, 13.
43. Ibid., 17.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Letter, Skodsborg, October 25, 1948, from the Copenhagen Council, HASDA Archives, Vejlefyjordskolen, 8721 Daugaard, Denmark.
47. Thomsen, 19, 20.
48. Thomas, 17.
49. Lodahl Bank and Hansen, 129, 130, 169.
50. Lund, 7.

51. Ibid., 12.
52. Bank and Hansen, 182.
53. The Scandinavian Philanthropic Society had earlier been renamed the Nordic Philanthropic Society.
54. Lodahl Bank and Hansen, 232.
55. Ibid., 220, 221.
56. Ibid., 216.
57. Ibid., 231.
58. Lund, 231.
59. Lodahl Bank and Hansen, 232.
60. Ibid., 233.
61. Ibid., 234.
62. Ibid.
63. Helge Andersen, in Adventnyt, July 1992.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
66. Lodahl Bank and Hansen, 234.
67. Helge Andersen.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid.
71. Lodahl Bank and Hansen, 234.

72. Muderspach, 15.
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76. L. Muderspach, "SDA Samfundets Sundhedsvirksomhed i Norden," manuscript, 27-28.
77. Lund, 19, 21.
78. Ibid., 21.
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80. Ibid., 254.
81. Ibid., 255.
82. "Skodsborg Badesanatorium: Den Fuldkomste Naturlaegeanstalt I Europa."
83. Lodahl Bank and Hansen, 103.
84. Ibid., 87.
85. Ibid., 185.
86. Ibid., 247.
87. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, second revised edition (1996), s.v. "Skodsborg Sanitarium."
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90. Ibid., 66.

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