

HENRIKSON FAMILY HISTORY

Written by Julia Christina (daughter of Bertha and Christian)

My dad's parents, Henrik and Inger Henrikson, left Denmark without their oldest son. He had decided not to travel with them to the United States, but instead stay in Denmark with his wife. The Henrikson family docked in New York City, then they moved on to the Newton, Iowa area. Not long after arriving in Iowa, Henrik became very ill with cancer and died shortly thereafter. How sad to have traveled so far with your family, knowing that you had left one son in Denmark, and then not to have the chance to experience what you had hoped.

At that time a wife was totally dependent upon her husband for her and her children's livelihood. Very soon after Henrik died, Inger was offered a ride with a Danish family who was traveling to the Dakota Territory. Since the traveling wagon was full of their belongings, there was room only for Inger and the clothes she would need. She entrusted the care of her two young sons, Christian and Lars, to her daughter Karen who was nineteen at the time. It is supposed that Karen worked for a family in Iowa with the understanding that her brothers stay there too.

Inger was traveling with the Kobra family who had two sons. By the time the wagon full of settlers had reached Lake Albert, Dakota Territory, Inger and Nels Kobra had decided to be married. They homesteaded on acreage on the shores of Lake Albert. Inger lived only a few years after arriving at her new home. My guess is that she was heartbroken from first losing her husband, and having to leave all her children--one in Denmark and three in Iowa. She probably wasn't even acquainted with the folks who were to look after her children in Iowa. The harsh South Dakota weather and the loneliness very likely added to her early death.

At some point Karen moved to Nebraska (I don't know when or if her brothers went along too). After arriving in Nebraska she married Jens Larson, and they moved to Northern Minnesota. By this time her two brothers were able to make their own way into the new world, and eventually worked their way into the Dakota Territory.

As far as I have been able to learn, my father Christian worked for an Irish family for quite some time while in Iowa or Nebraska. While living with that family, he learned the English language. It was this kindly Irish woman who insisted upon him pronouncing each word correctly--when he said something incorrectly, she made him repeat the word until he had it right. That must have been a big help to him as he branched out looking for other jobs.

Later, Christian worked for the railroad as a section worker. His jobs included replacing ties, etc. He worked for the railroad until he was able to make the trip to the Lake Albert & Lake Poinsett area. He ended up in that area probably to be near his mother and brother. To earn a living he bought a team of horses and a plow. The settlers hired him to break sod for them while the weather was warm enough. During

the cold months he played serious poker to keep himself in food and clothes. He was a professional gambler!

Before settling down he planned to do more traveling--see more of the United States, particularly California. But a beautiful dark haired and green eyed Brunick girl stole his heart. Marrying her seemed much more important to him than doing any more traveling.

During the winter of 1938-39, Pop decided to finally take a trip to California. He went with some Danish acquaintances and they stayed in California for about a month before they returned to South Dakota.

Christian came to the United States when he was only eleven years old. As an adult he said that he had no desire to go back to his homeland. I often wondered why not, but of course I never did ask him. Because he was young when he left Denmark, possibly he had few fond memories of it. One thing he did remember about the Old Country was its smell of dampness. One time his brother, my Uncle Henrik (who still lived in Denmark), sent a set of wool cards to Mom and Pop. These cards were made to card wool into quilt linings or for making yarn. As my parents opened the box containing the cards, my dad said, "that smells just the way I remember everything smelled in the Old Country." The cards had a mildew odor--to me it seemed like a friendly smell--maybe because he had said it smelled like his old home.

My dad died a quiet and peaceful death. He and Mom had just returned home from having supper with some very good friends. He took off his jacket, sat down in his favorite chair and quit breathing.

Mom stayed in her home several more years--traveling to Mae's in Michigan, and Esther's and mine in California for as long as she was physically able. She became frail and unable to cope by herself and moved to a nursing home in Volga, S.D. After living there two years she became very ill and died in the Volga hospital.
