
VENTURING FORTH

The Story of the Family of
George and Margaret Nelson

aka Jørgen Nielsen (1821-1871)
and
Margrethe Pedersdatter (1823-1882)

Jack E. Nelson

PRESERVING MEMORIES

CHARLOTTE, NC

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To Irene Groom

*Whose enthusiastic support for this project
made the entire process more enjoyable*

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Preface and Acknowledgements

If someone had asked me three years ago what I knew about the history of the Nelson family, I would have had to plead near complete ignorance. It wasn't a topic that had ever intrigued me much. Then, I was asked to try to piece together what could be learned from elderly relatives and write up a brief history. The task did not capture my imagination until I began getting better acquainted with some people I had only met a few times and meeting others who I hadn't even known about. Before long, the project began to be fun, as I started making some great new friends among people who shared a common heritage with me. What kind of amazed me was how eager many people were to assist me, sharing what knowledge they had, preparing copies for me of old genealogical records, and even turning over to me files loaded with old documents and photographs.

A picture emerged in my mind of an immigrant family traveling with a party of Danish Mormons and arriving in the United States in 1853. George and Margaret Nelson—known in the Old Country as Jørgen Nielsen (1821-1871) and Margrethe Pedersdatter (1823-1882)—came to America with two small children, Marie and Christian Louis. A third child, Birthe, their eldest, they left behind in Denmark. The family first settled in western Iowa, where two more children, Cornelius and Chrisanna, were born. Five years later, they moved

down to northwestern Missouri, where they added another two children to their family, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. The history of the lives of members of this family is what I set my sights on uncovering.

The story presented here should not only interest Nelson descendents but others, as well, who are fascinated with life on the American frontier. Like so many immigrant families, this one struggled hard to get a foothold in the New World. It is a tale of fervent ambitions and shattered dreams. Harsh weather conditions, failed crops, a war injury and frequent illnesses plagued the family. Just the sheer boredom of pioneer life was a recurring challenge. Still, members of this family continued to venture forth, seeking a dream place in which to settle down. In the midst of it all, there remained a family bond, even as the second generation spread out across America, from Missouri to California to Oregon, Colorado and Montana.

What I had first envisioned being a brief project continued to grow as I learned more and more about each branch of the family and became increasingly interested in the family's roots in Denmark. Meanwhile, I kept filing information away in a computer outline document. That working outline grew to be several hundred pages long and is itself a significant collection of family history, documentation and genealogical data that goes beyond what I've presented in this book. For that reason, I've made copies of it and distributed them to members of the family who have shown a keen interest in preserving genealogical records. In addition, another book, titled *Dixie Mountain Legacies: Rural Life in an Oregon Community*, co-authored with Jo Ann Tannock, also grew out of my interest in the history of the Nelson family. That book is a local history of the small community about eighteen miles northwest of Portland where two members of the Nelson family, Cornelius and Abraham, eventually homesteaded.

Credit must go to those who helped me by sharing what they knew about the family. Descendents of Cornelius Nelson were my first informants. Dale and Lillian Nelson got me started, providing some of the crucial details I needed for

learning about the immigration of the Nelson family and putting me in touch with other relatives. Ava Kenny shared generously from records that had been gathered by her father, George Allen Nelson, who was researching the family's history long before anyone else took an interest in the topic. Nancy Horst, Maggie Applegate and Elsie Cornelius added further information to my growing data bank and allowed me to scan old photographs.

I then made new friends from among descendents of other branches of the family. Raymond and Gloria Nelson, Winston Nelson, Kay Nelson and Bob Nelson all filled me in on what they knew about the Abraham Lincoln Nelson branch of the family. In learning about the Christian Nelson branch, I was helped by Mary Weishaar, Robert Nelson, Hesty Watts and Bonnie Mitchell. Irene Groom, Rex Walker and Margie Deering provided most of what I learned about the Chrisanna Nelson Walker family. Irene also passed on to me a copy of an old scrapbook that Alice Hayden had assembled on the George Washington Nelson family. Joe Nelson, Jackie Foster and Charlotte Baxtrom added many more details on that family's history. Finally, after some detective work, I located descendents of Marie Nelson Halck. Leonard and Eugene Verkuyl were happy to share with me what they knew of their great-grandmother's life.

There are others whose help deserves to be recognized. My wife and traveling companion, Joanna, learned nearly as much about the Nelsons in the process of the writing of this book as I did. She has a knack for picking up nuances that I miss during interviews. She also did most of the planning for our trip to Denmark when we went in search of the Nelson family's roots. Our stay in Denmark was enhanced considerably by Nicoli and Maria Techow, who shared their home with us and taught us much about Danish life. Bente Trane, the director of the local archive in the community of Kirke Hvalsø, provided valuable help. And Bent Godfredsen, a resident of Vester Såby—the Nelson ancestral village—gave us a wonderful tour of the area and entertained us with his knowledge of the local history. Børge Fogsgaard, an email correspondent

and volunteer genealogist, helped me over some tricky hurdles in my searches in old Danish records. Constance Holloway assisted by carefully proofreading the entire manuscript.

There is one person whose enthusiasm for this project was unmatched. For years Irene Groom diligently gathered data on the Nelson family. Having spent years working as a county librarian, she had the skills needed to dig into old records and sift through details to find what she wanted. Few people shared her passion. Then, when she heard of my plans to put together a book on the subject, she saw a chance to make her efforts come to fruition by incorporating them into the book. Hearing her excited voice coming over the telephone expressing an eagerness to share more and more information with me was the kind of wonderful experience that made this project so much fun. After many phone calls from her, Joanna and I both looked forward to meeting Irene. When we did, she showed us everything we wanted to see in Gentry County, Missouri, where the Nelson family was settled for many years and Irene continues to live. Her friendship has meant a lot to us and it is to her that we dedicate this book.

Maps and Charts

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Jørgen Nielsen
a.k.a. George Nelson
(7 Apr 1821 - 3 Oct 1871)

Married
7 Oct 1843

Birthe M.
b. 25 Aug 1845
d. Oct 1845

Birthe M.
b. 26 Jan 1847
d. 21 May 1899

Married to:
Peder Hansen
17 Apr 1874

2 Children:

Niels P. Hansen
b. 21 Jan 1875
d. after 1911

Jens J. Hansen
b. 26 Sep 1884
d. 13 Oct 1884

Marie
b. 12 Jan 1849
d. 26 Mar 1880

Married to:
Julius L. Halck
30 Dec 1873

2 Children:

Margaret E.
b. 3 Oct 1874
d. 1968

Bertha Mary
b. 11 Dec 1877
d. 8 Dec 1881

Christian L.
b. 22 Jan 1851
d. 24 Jun 1923

Married to:
Mary E. Whitely
25 Dec 1878

14 Children:

Male child
b. 21 Aug 1879
d. 21 Aug 1879

Lillian Florance
b. 4 Jul 1880
d. 21 Sep 1968

Rosy Ellen
b. 4 Jul 1880
d. 17 Jan 1894

Bessie Estela
b. 27 Jul 1882
d. 14 Aug 1883

Daniel Webster
b. 3 Aug 1884
d. 21 Sep 1964

Clarence F.
b. 1 Aug 1886
d. 31 Oct 1971

Mary May
b. 22 Feb 1888
d. 2 Sep 1963

Margaret Etta
b. 1 Nov 1889
d. 11 Nov 1893

Christian C.
b. 25 Sep 1891
d. 10 Nov 1967

Bertha Leanna
b. 29 Dec 1893
d. 5 Feb 1960

Malinda Alice
b. 29 Oct 1895
d. 24 Apr 1936

Wiltha Fanny
b. 26 Mar 1898
d. 6 Feb 1989

Clara Malinda
b. 15 Nov 1900
d. 1 Nov 1983

Roy William
b. 3 Dec 1903
d. 20 May 2003

Cornelius
b. 8 Sep 1854
d. 1 Oct 1949

Married to:
Anna A. Sutherland
12 Dec 1880

6 Children:

George Allen
b. 31 Jan 1882
d. 28 Jul 1961

Charles L.
b. 4 Feb 1884
d. Mar 1981

Lillian May
b. 10 May 1888
d. 5 Jan 1945

Mabel L.
b. 9 Sep 1889
d. 20 Nov 1939

Walter L.
b. 2 Feb 1891
d. 9 Aug 1983

Clarence D.
b. 31 Mar 1893
d. 31 Oct 1983

Margrethe Pedersdatter
a.k.a. Margaret Nelson
(6 Feb 1823 - 19 May 1882)

Chrisanna
b. 20 Feb 1856
d. 8 May 1943
Married to:
Anthony G. Walker
31 Mar 1886

5 Children:

Quincy M.
b. 2 Feb 1887
d. 4 Mar 1940
Anthony G.
b. 9 Apr 1891
d. 27 Apr 1957
Earl Homer
b. 25 Oct 1893
d. 5 Feb 1958
Minnie Ellen
b. 15 Sep 1895
d. 12 Dec 1976
Oliver Teller
b. 4 Sep 1897
d. 24 Jan 1967

George W.
b. 25 Jan 1860
d. 13 Jan 1925
Married to:
Laura A. Collins
25 Oct 1885

11 Children:

Margaret
b. 19 Oct 1886
d. 16 Dec 1980
Floyd
b. 2 Sep 1888
d. 16 Jul 1989
Cornelia Jane
b. 21 Oct 1890
d. 4 Aug 1986
Bertha Mary
b. 24 Feb 1893
d. 18 Aug 1962
Martha Ellen
b. 30 Oct 1894
d. 6 Aug 1960
Olia May
b. 24 Oct 1896
d. 3 Dec 1988
George W., Jr.
b. 26 Dec 1898
d. 12 May 1964
Olive Grace
b. 28 Aug 1901
d. 3 Mar 1989
Anna Amelia
b. 28 Mar 1904
d. 23 Aug 1984
Easter Hazel
b. 1 Apr 1907
d. 6 Aug 2005
Richard H.
b. 26 Jul 1910
d. 16 Jan 1981

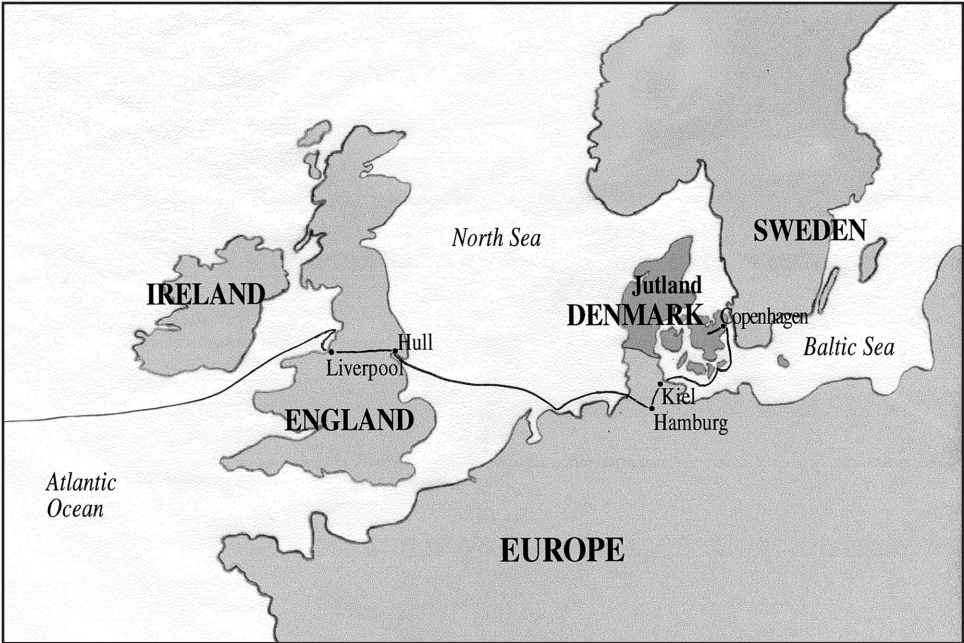
Elizabeth
b. 30 Mar 1863
d. 15 Aug 1863

Abraham L.
b. 16 Dec 1865
d. 2 May 1950
Married to:
Fidelia Ryckman
26 Jul 1892

12 Children:

Oscar
b. 11 Sep 1894
d. 17 Mar 1952
Lincoln
b. 4 Jan 1895
d. 18 Jan 1905
John Roy
b. 2 Jul 1896
d. 29 Jul 1978
Arthur
b. 10 Aug 1898
d. 18 May 1903
Elmer
b. 6 Nov 1899
d. 27 Oct 1979
Lucy
b. 13 Jul 1901
d. 30 Sep 1991
George W.
b. 18 Mar 1903
d. Jun 1984
Virginia "Myrtle"
b. 15 Apr 1904
d. 5 May 1986
Albert W.
b. 17 Apr 1906
d. 13 Feb 1993
Lewis E.
b. 16 Aug 1908
d. 19 Feb 1995
Thomas E.
b. 26 Jul 1911
d. 13 Jun 1998
Raymond H.
b. 8 Feb 1917
d. 27 Aug 1991

Elizabeth
b. 31 Mar 1868
d. 28 Feb 1869



Route of travel during the immigration to the United States, 1852-53.

Chapter One

COMING TO AMERICA

We can only imagine the sense of anticipation and anxiety people were feeling on an overcast Monday morning, December 20, 1852, when a large gathering of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints congregated on the wharf of Copenhagen Harbor. Nearly 300 of those in the crowd were preparing to depart on the steamship known as the *Obotrit*, which made regular trips carrying passengers between Denmark and Germany. Others had come to bid their friends and relatives farewell. Those leaving were on their way to Mormon “Zion,” a place they had been told was a land of refuge and opportunity, of freedom from attacking detractors and a future haven during the coming apocalypse, when plagues would inflict the wicked of the earth. The emigrants boarded the vessel in the morning, then the intrepid “Saints” gathered on deck and sang a number of psalms. Around noon the ship pulled away while members staying behind cheered and waved their hats and handkerchiefs. For many it would be the last time they would ever see their loved ones; still others yelled assurances that they would meet again in Zion. It was reported that off to one side, a less sympathetic group broke into jeers and curses, heckling the passengers with taunts of their having been deceived by their leader, John Forsgren, derided as “that Swedish Mormon Priest.”

On board, among the many religious converts heading for Salt Lake City, Utah, to join a growing population of Mormon settlers, was a family that came

to be known as the Nelsons. Family names were not widely used in Denmark at the time, and the name “Nelson” was a later adaptation of the Danish “name” Nielsen (i.e., Niel’s son). Jørgen Nielsen, thirty-one at the time, was traveling with his twenty-nine-year-old spouse, Margrethe Pedersdatter (i.e., Peder’s daughter), and two of their children, Maria, who was just about to turn four, and Christian, just shy of two. Their third and eldest child, five-year-old Birthe Maria, was left behind in Denmark, though they must have had serious doubts about their decision to do so and made a failed attempt to get her back from the people she was staying with on the eve of their departure. Also along were Margrethe’s sister, Sophie Pedersdatter; her husband, Jens Hansen; and their two children, four-year-old Karen Marie and two-year-old Hans Christian.

The ominous looking weather quickly turned more threatening soon after the small vessel headed out into the Baltic Sea. The wind picked up and the waves began to appear like mountains to the fearful passengers, repeatedly raising the little steamship up and bringing it down with a hull shuddering force. Some of the passengers remained on deck, clinging with all the strength they had to the bolted down benches. The ordeal continued on into the night. Wave after wave crashed across the deck. Relief came in the early morning hours when they passed by the island of Falster and the captain steered the boat into a bay and dropped anchor. They rested at anchor for over twenty-four hours before continuing safely to the German harbor town of Kiel, arriving on Wednesday evening, December 22.

After spending another miserable night aboard the *Obotrit*, the passengers disembarked and boarded a 6:45 a.m. train headed for Altona, near Hamburg. They arrived in Altona after a three-hour train ride and were directed to a large hall where arrangements were made by the shipping company for them to be served warm beer and sandwiches, followed by a hot dinner in the afternoon. Conditions were less crowded than on the boat but the temperature dropped during the night and brought on shivers in the unheated hall. The following day

they boarded a double-decked, steel, British steamship named the *Lion*. One seriously ill passenger, overcome by the ordeal, was left behind at that point.

Once it got going, the *Lion* sailed down the Elbe River, the start of a ferry ride across to Hull, England. Stormy weather, made worse by dense fog, again delayed them, this time near the mouth of the Elbe at Cuxhaven. It was Christmas Eve, but many of the passengers were not celebrating. Despite the double decking, the conditions on board remained crowded. There was not enough room below deck nor out of the wind and rain for everyone. Some of the passengers became irritable. The passage to Zion was turning into a purgatorial experience. On Christmas, the crew attempted to proceed around noon, making it only as far as the coast of Holland before strong headwinds forced them to postpone the North Sea crossing.

Hoping for a lull in the weather, the little ship finally departed the European coast on December 26, but around midnight a full-scale storm descended upon them. The next twenty-two hours tested the faith of everyone on board, as the vessel was battered around on a tumultuous sea. Deck openings were boarded up and nailed shut, leaving the passengers huddled in the dark down below, uncertain of their fate. Waves pounding onto the deck, first, sent up clouds of steam as steam-pipes were doused, then broke through a portion of the deck and spilled a torrent of water into the quarters below. Screaming passengers thought the ship had split open and that they would all drown. The captain later said that in twenty-five years of sailing he had never seen anything like it. They hung on, struggling to stay afloat, until 10 p.m. of the following day, when the storm finally calmed. The huddled mass below deck responded by singing out their praise to God for delivering them. The shores of England were visible in the morning, but it was late in the afternoon before they pulled into the harbor at Hull. The North Sea was littered with wrecked vessels that day, and, reportedly, officials in Hull were surprised to see the *Lion* had made it.

The relieved passengers had to spend one more night in the crowded conditions aboard the *Lion* before they were allowed to disembark and board a train

bound for Liverpool. One woman in the party went into labor just after landing on British soil and remained in Hull to give birth before catching up to the rest of the group in Liverpool. More satisfying relief came in Liverpool, where this party of Danish Mormons was greeted and cared for by others who shared their beliefs, and were even given beds to sleep in.

The Mormon faith had emerged in upstate New York, nearly thirty years earlier, when Joseph Smith allegedly was directed to the discovery of long hidden golden plates that revealed God's dealings with ancient peoples in the New World. Building on his "translation" of those plates and additional divine directives, Smith initiated a religious movement that borrowed heavily from the revivalist fervor of the time. Opposition to the new religious sect soon forced Smith and his early converts to migrate west, first to Kirkland, Ohio (now a suburb of Cleveland), then to western Missouri, and finally—for a brief spell of peace—to Nauvoo, Illinois, along the banks of the Mississippi River. In the midst of all the persecution, leaders of the group launched a mission to England in 1837, where proselytizers met with incredible success. Ten years later, the Latter-day Saints (LDS) members in the British Isles outnumbered those in the United States, even though, starting in 1840, a steady stream had been emigrating to join their brethren at Nauvoo.

In the meantime, Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were murdered by Illinois militiamen in June of 1844. Three years later, Brigham Young led the first company of Mormon pilgrims to Utah. Erastus Snow, a close confidante of Young's, was in an advance scouting party and was one of the first to enter the Salt Lake Valley. Two years later, he was appointed, along with John Erik Forsgren (formerly a member of the Mormon Battalion, which was recruited to fight in the war with Mexico), George Dykes and Peter O. Hansen, to establish a mission to Scandinavia. They began their work in Denmark in 1850.

These missionaries to Denmark found a receptive audience among Baptist congregations from predominantly rural agricultural areas, which at first wel-

comed them as allies in a struggle against often hostile opposition coming from the established Lutheran Church of Denmark. The mission strategy from the start, in keeping with the LDS doctrine of “the gathering,” was to encourage new members to emigrate to Zion (i.e., Utah), the Promised Land of the Latter-day Saints. As the movement began to grow in Denmark, plans were laid to begin transporting converts to Utah. By then British LDS members had ten years of experience in getting people across the Atlantic, and their assistance was extended to Scandinavia. A party of twenty-eight Danes led by Erastus Snow and known as Snow’s Little Flock joined up with British LDS emigrants in Liverpool and set sail on the *Italy* on March 11, 1852. They were the first Scandinavian Mormons to emigrate.

By the end of that year, a much larger group was prepared to leave Denmark under the leadership of John Forsgren, known, thereafter, as the Forsgren Company. The LDS leaders contracted with Morris & Company of Hamburg to transport passengers from Copenhagen to New Orleans, via Hull and Liverpool. Fifty-two *rigsdaler* (about twenty-six dollars) was charged per person for passage, with each passenger permitted 200 pounds of luggage.¹ This was the group that departed December 20, 1852, from Copenhagen on the *Obotrit*, with our immigrant ancestors on board.

Considering all they went through just getting to Liverpool, we could expect to hear of some members of the Forsgren Party deciding to give up on the endeavor and return to Denmark. Only one did, and that was on account of a dog bite he had suffered in Hamburg which, by the time he arrived in Liverpool, was seriously infected. A belief developed among ship crews transporting LDS passengers to the United States that God took special care to see that ships bearing the Mormon Saints made it safely. Between 1840 and 1890, with an estimated 85,000 Mormons coming from across the seas, there was only one serious mishap involving a ship carrying Mormon emigrants, and that was in the Pacific Ocean.

The storm-wracked passage the Forsgren Company made from Copenhagen to England may well have helped establish this belief in providential protection.

Members of the Forsgren Party enjoyed the hospitality of the English LDS for only two nights before they boarded the ship that was to take them across the Atlantic. This time the vessel was a sailing ship—the *Forest Monarch*, a 979 ton square-rigger, 149 feet long, with three masts and one deck, built in Quebec two years earlier. Captain Edmond Brewer was in charge of the ship.² The Party boarded on December 31, but two weeks passed before they set sail for New Orleans. The delay—apparently to await better weather prospects—took its toll. On the night of January 4, another ship scraped the side of the *Forest Monarch*, causing some damage. In anticipation of a storm that blew in on the fifth, the ship was towed out of the harbor area and anchored in the estuary of the Mersey River. On the eighth, having been busy with final negotiations, Forsgren and Erastus Snow came aboard (Snow only temporarily), and began a series of spiritual teachings, as well as to encourage the members to maintain order. Four passengers died during the wait, three of them children; one child was born. Still, the passengers found reason to celebrate and dance, when four couples were united in marriage.

At noon on January 16, 1853, the ship finally hoisted anchor and was towed further out, then set sail around 4 p.m. There were 294 LDS members on board at that point (ninety-five of them children) making it the first large group of Scandinavian LDS emigrants. William Mulder, a LDS historian, has written of the *Forest Monarch* being the “Mayflower of the Mormon migration from Scandinavia.” He notes how in many Mormon families, people speak with pride of having ancestors who came on this historic voyage.³ It was the only voyage in which the *Forest Monarch* was used to transport LDS passengers.

The experiences of members of the Forsgren Company during their long trip to Utah were recorded by at least four people in the group who kept journals on their progress. I have been able to obtain copies of three of these old journals;

and it is from these documents, plus tidbits from various other sources, that our detailed understanding comes about the pilgrimage our ancestors embarked on. One of these old journals was written anonymously, though it is clear that Forsgren appointed the author to record the spiritual life of the group during the journey. It is generally referred to as the Forsgren Journal. The longest of these texts was written by Christian Nielsen (unrelated to our ancestors), who sometimes had a keen eye for detail and was not reluctant to write about the conflicts that occasionally threatened the harmony among the Saints. The third journal, written by Christian Munk, is brief, but corroborates most of the more significant events that occurred during the course of the voyage and the trek that followed. Jørgen Nielsen (aka, George Nelson) appears in all three of these old journals, but only at one critical juncture in Iowa.⁴

The fifty-day Atlantic crossing was full of poignant experiences. Many of the passengers suffered seasickness, made worse by the overcrowded conditions below deck. There were occasional rainstorms, but as the voyage progressed, the weather became warmer and passengers began to enjoy life on deck in their summer clothes. Dolphin sightings and flying fish kept people entertained. Yet, with the warmer weather came an explosion in the flea population. One chronicler of the voyage blamed the fifty-some Irish passengers also on board for the fleas. The LDS Elders did their best to keep their flock occupied and encouraged by requiring them to attend daily gatherings where spiritual instructions were given. These meetings sometimes lasted two to three hours, with teachings presented on the Building up of Zion, the Priesthood, the Last Days, the Thousand Year Reign, the Resurrection, etc. Discontent grew in their ranks, nonetheless. Some displayed a definite lack of love and neighborliness. A few began to speak disparagingly of some of the doctrines being taught. One critic who persisted in boycotting the spiritual gatherings was excommunicated from the Mormon fellowship.

The old journals all record the deaths and births that occurred during the course of the long journey. Clearly infant mortality was higher in those days,

but the loss of children and other loved ones was no less difficult. Four more children died during the Atlantic crossing. One of them had been born only two weeks before. The journals report that on February 14 a child was born “to Brother Jens Hansen’s wife.” Hansen’s wife was Margaret’s sister Sophie, and the child was named Geraldina. We can easily imagine the doubts that must have gone through the minds of the bereaved as they questioned the risks they were taking. The promise of a new life helped to sustain them.

The first sighting of land came on February 15, when Guadeloupe, in the Caribbean Sea, was spotted. Progress slowed at that point, however, as the wind died down and the *Forest Monarch* drifted listlessly in the open sea for days. On February 23, they passed by Jamaica and spotted Cuba farther to the north. Three days of intermittent winds later, they were still drifting by the Cuban coast and a lighthouse beacon could be seen at night. The calm broke on March 5 when a squall hit. Strong gusts sent waves up over the deck of the ship. Another two days passed before they caught sight of the North American coastline and, by that afternoon, they had approached the mouth of the Mississippi River.

A dreadful waiting period followed. Captain Brewer and Forsgren went ashore to arrange for a pilot and a tugboat to safely guide them through twenty-five miles of river estuary to New Orleans. A woman in the Mormon party died in the evening. The next day others in the party buried her body on a small, nearby island. By then, a heavy fog had enveloped the coastline and death continued to haunt them. Rationing of water in the final weeks of the voyage had left some passengers seriously dehydrated. Four more Danes died in the ensuing week as they continued to wait at the mouth of the river. The bells and whistles of approaching steamboats could be heard through the fog as three of the bodies were also buried on the little island; that of a little child was lowered into the sea.

Assistance finally arrived to get them upstream. A couple of tugboats, at first, tried to tow them into the river estuary. But the *Forest Monarch* was sitting too low in the water for safe passage up the shallow river and much of the

boat's ballast, in the form of 14,000 sacks of salt, had to be thrown overboard to raise the level. Then the *Forest Monarch* was lashed to the side of a steamboat which already had another ship lashed to its other side. Passengers from both ships were transferred to the steamboat. When the passengers from the other ship learned that their new neighbors were Mormons, many of them couldn't resist hurling insults. Apparently, some of the Mormons were inclined to respond in kind, making for a less than peaceful trip through the river delta. The new immigrants first stepped onto American soil when the steamboat stopped along the way to replenish its wood supply. They arrived at the New Orleans docks on the morning of March 17, 1853.

A couple of days were required to complete customs and immigration procedures, and to arrange for riverboat travel upstream. At the immigration office a list of all the disembarking passengers was recorded. Jørgen and Margeret Neilsen [*sic*] appear on that old document, along with Maria and Christian.⁵ Two more children died during the wait at New Orleans, bringing the total deaths to seven since the Forsgren Party arrived off the coast of the United States and fourteen since they left Liverpool. (The Latter-day Saints discontinued using the New Orleans route in 1856 due to the inordinate number of deaths which were attributed to the acrid weather conditions and the prevalence of cholera and other communicable diseases.)

During their short stay in the New Orleans area, the LDS passengers were discouraged from venturing into the "ungodly city." One discontented couple, however, chose to leave the group and remain in New Orleans. The rest of the party boarded the *Grand Tower*, a three-decker riverboat. They pulled away from the docks on the evening of March 18 for an eleven day trip up the river to St. Louis. Sights along the way intrigued the passengers: everything from the vastness of the forests and innovative farming techniques to the many black people living and working in the region. To some of the Danes, the potential for development seemed overwhelming. As the riverboat progressed upstream,

108 ³	Jorgen Nielsen	32	male	W. house
109	Margaret - do -	30	female	
110	Maria - do -	4	"	
111	Christian do	2	male	
112	Ann Maria Jorgensen -	18	female	servant
113	Jens Nensen	30	male	seiner
114	Jofie do	35	female	+++
115	Henri do	5	"	
116	Hans do	2	male	
117	Fredrick Jorgensen	33	"	labourer

The Port of New Orleans registry, dated March 19, 1853, records Nielsen (sic) family members and Margaret's sister's family, the Hansens.

it made frequent stops, and space for the passengers became cramped as merchandise and produce being transported to St. Louis stacked up.

After arriving in St. Louis, the Forsgren Party spent three to four weeks getting outfitted for the upcoming trek across the plains and mountains to Salt Lake City. Supplies for a typical wagon train included large quantities of flour, sugar, rice, salt and seed grains; bushel baskets full of beans, pepper, cloves, nutmeg, cinnamon, coffee and tea; rifles, soap, nails, saws, rope and pulley blocks, and extra iron for fashioning on an anvil whatever might be needed to make wagon repairs.⁶ A revolving fund had, by then, been set up by LDS Church members in Utah to help pay travel costs for those who could not afford the supplies. Some members found temporary employment in St. Louis to help with their expenses.

St. Louis was described as a rapidly developing center at the time. The Danes were impressed with the hustle and bustle of the place and the opportunities available for people to better themselves. Working people dressed better than many Danes did back in Denmark when attending church on Sundays. People

regularly ate until they were stuffed, with plenty of fat in their diets. Religious freedom was evident in the many churches springing up in town. But the town had its downside. The newcomers were appalled at the frequency of fires consuming wooden buildings, and the general sanitary conditions were thought to be abhorrent.

A hundred and thirty-five members of the Forsgren Party departed St. Louis on the *Di Vernon* steamboat on April 21. The others would follow just over a week later, on April 30, taking a twenty-four hour ride farther up the Mississippi to the rapidly growing community of Keokuk in southeastern Iowa.

Seven years earlier, Brigham Young had led an exodus out of Nauvoo, only twenty miles upstream on the Illinois side of the river, after repeated threats had been made to the LDS community. The western migration of most of the 20,000 church members who had been living in Nauvoo began in February of 1846. The early starters suffered interminable difficulties getting across Iowa, establishing a trail as they pressed forward in foul weather conditions. Those who waited until late summer to leave were forced out by gun-wielding mobs which proceeded to destroy the recently completed temple at Nauvoo and much of the town. Young had hoped to lead the exiles on to some yet-to-be discovered haven in the Rocky Mountains that year, but was forced by circumstances to lay over with his followers for the winter along the Missouri River. Many of them established a camp known as Winter Quarters, just north of present-day Omaha; others settled along the east side of the river. Then, the following spring, Young set out with an advance party of 148 people in seventy-two wagons, traveling up the Platte River Valley, over the mountains and into the Salt Lake Valley, which was recognized as the Promised Land when they arrived in late July of the year 1847.⁷

Following that initial trek of Mormon pioneers to Utah, a steady stream of pilgrims from among the remaining Mormon population in western Iowa



The Forsgren Party proceeded up the Mississippi River by riverboat to Keokuk, Iowa, then across Iowa in covered wagons.

departed for Utah over the next few years. Others continued to arrive from overseas. Keokuk became a new staging area in 1853 for receiving Mormon immigrants and launching wagon trains, though only about ten parties left from there. After that, Westport, Missouri, and Mormon Grove, Kansas, became the major points of departure for a few years, until the railroad head reached Iowa City, Iowa, in 1856 and became the preferred place from which to venture out.

For the Forsgren Party there was a waiting period of about three weeks at Keokuk. They were part of a large encampment of LDS members—English, Welsh, Americans and the Danes—making final preparations at Keokuk that month. Thirty-four wagons were acquired by the Forsgren Party, along with the oxen needed to pull them—four oxen per wagon. The Danes found the use of yokes to be most unusual, being accustomed to harnesses back in the old country. But they quickly adapted to the new method, as well as to learning the simple commands to which the oxen had been trained to respond. Tents and other supplies were distributed, and captains were appointed to supervise the progress of subgroups within the party. Extra time was spent in congregational worship and spiritual instruction. A long ordeal still lay ahead of them: 400 miles of trail across Iowa, followed by just over 1,000 miles from there to Zion.

During the latter half of May, wagon trains began pulling out of Keokuk. Part of the Forsgren Party prepared to leave on the nineteenth. A small child died

and was buried in the woods near the camp just before they departed. Parents had continued to pay a heavy price in the loss of their children. Seven members had died, mostly children (plus there had been two stillbirths) since the group left New Orleans. Those who pulled out early from Keokuk traveled only two days, to Sugar Creek, then waited for the others to catch up. From nearby their camp, they could see the ruins of the LDS temple in Nauvoo, across the river. On the twenty-seventh the entire party, with all thirty-four wagons, moved ahead. They passed through Dogs Town, Farmington and Springtown (just east of Drakesville), then through Unionville on the ninth of June, following along what would later be known as the (less frequently traveled) northern route of the Mormon Trail in eastern Iowa. Four days later they passed through Chariton, and moved on toward Mount Pisgah. On June 18 they crossed the Middle Branch of the Nodaway River, then arrived at the West Branch on the twentieth.⁸

The traveling was slow and arduous as they moved along at about two miles an hour. Most of the members in the party had to walk and the heavy rain they encountered during the days drenched them. Muddy roads frequently slowed down the wagons. In some places, planks had been placed over boggy stretches to make the road passable. The Danes found the frequent thunderstorms on the plains to be particularly terrifying. The sudden flashes of lighting, the loud booms and reverberating rolls of thunder were unlike anything they had experienced in the old country. A number of times, wagons tipped over when they were on steep inclines. Extra time was spent at river crossings where it was necessary to ferry the wagons across. Some of the campsites along the way presented the added difficulty of finding sufficient firewood. The oxen were freed to graze during the nights, but that occasionally led to problems finding them in the mornings. One of the journal keepers in the party found beauty in the midst of all the difficulties of the journey: the expansive prairie, the delightful displays put on by fireflies at night, and even the colorful snakes seen along the trail fascinated him. The party persisted for a month before pulling in and setting up camp on

the outskirts of Council Bluffs (Kanesville), Iowa, along the east bank of the Missouri River, on June 25.

Council Bluffs was near a place noted on an old Lewis and Clark map and was known as such by early fur traders. After the initial party of Mormons left Winter Quarters and headed out to the Salt Lake Valley, many of those who remained behind moved back across the river to join others who had settled in western Iowa. One of the little settlements they built up was at Council Bluffs, but the place underwent several name changes. For awhile it was called Miller's Hollow but was changed to Kane, then Kanesville, to honor Thomas Kane, a civil rights lawyer who had done much to secure protection and rights for the oppressed LDS community. The population quickly grew to around 6,000 people, most of whom left for Utah during the four years following Brigham Young's migration. By 1853, when the Forsgren Party arrived, the population had declined to around 2,000; and those remaining—mostly Mormon defectors and other non-Mormons—had changed the name back to Council Bluffs in February of that year.

The Danes needed to resupply their provisions at Council Bluffs, as it was to be the last major supply stop for them. A former missionary colleague of Forsgren, George P. Dykes, who happened to be in Council Bluffs at the time, met the wagon train and warned the members about the threat that the population of the town posed. He sternly admonished them to not speak with people in town beyond what they needed to conduct their business, saying there was no place where the devil was more active than in that locale, with people in the town eager to change people's minds about continuing on to Salt Lake Valley. From another source, an old letter an LDS elder sent from Council Bluffs a few months later, we get additional insight into conditions in the town from the perspective of a devout Mormon. He wrote of drunkenness, corruption, debauchery, crime and blasphemy being endemic. The name of the town has rightly been changed to Council Bluffs, he declares, as it is no longer worthy of the name Kanesville.

When he wrote this account, the few LDS members remaining were preparing to leave for Zion shortly. Many in town were defectors, some of whom had been to Salt Lake Valley and had quickly grown disillusioned with developments there. Others were members of small sects that split off from the LDS and advocated alternative doctrines. Altogether it was, in his view, a “hellhole” of controversy and verbal attacks on the LDS movement.⁹

At the same time, Christian Nielsen, who had the less biased view of a newcomer, noted in his journal that there was much about the town that made it an attractive place to settle: There was a demand for people who wanted work; merchants were clearly doing quite well selling to the many travelers, including Mormons, heading west; recently, the townspeople had begun burning bricks to use for building construction; and the climate seemed healthy.

Forsgren was eager to get his flock past all the temptation as quickly as possible, but it took six days for them to get the necessary supplies. Merchants had a reputation for charging exorbitant rates for items in demand. Despite the warnings and the precautions taken, reports circulating in the town must have reached the ears of some in the Forsgren party. During the time they were camped just outside Council Bluffs, the Pedersen family announced that they had had enough of traveling with the Mormons and wanted to remain there.

Another LDS elder, writing to his superiors on July 10, 1853, notes how he watched the Forsgren Company crossing the Missouri River and was impressed by what he saw. “A better organized and more orderly company I never saw start on the plains. They manifested a spirit of order, neatness, enterprise, and perseverance that is truly commendable.”¹⁰ Credit must go to Forsgren for his leadership, but there was more going on among his charges than this LDS elder was able to perceive.

Our ancestor Jørgen Nielsen stirred up quite a scene just as the group was leaving the Council Bluffs area, enough that the resulting controversy is reported in all three of the old journals I have seen. The Forsgren Journal gives us the

most detail, recording how four members of the party testified against Jørgen. One reported that Jørgen alleged “there were liars and slanderers among us, and that it was not better among us than any other place in the world.” Another said Jørgen, “did not feel good among the Saints and was not satisfied.” Others corroborated these statements regarding the conduct of Nielsen and accused him of being “possessed of an evil spirit.” Jørgen is reported to have then made his own views known, saying he no longer wanted to continue with the Mormons. He is said to have given “some excuses which were nothing more than what the spirit of darkness gives to people to support themselves with on such occasions.” Based on this evidence, Forsgren concluded that Jørgen had slandered the Church and transgressed the code of conduct, and recommended he be excommunicated. The LDS members present proceeded to vote unanimously for his dismissal.

The other journals clarify the order of events, though the accounts are not consistent. Jørgen and his family, along with another man, Frederikke Frederickson (and possibly a woman referred to as Sister Rikke), left the Mormon camp near Council Bluffs on June 29 or 30. The Pedersen family seems to have left a day or two earlier, though one journal suggests they all left together. But Jørgen returned on July 1 to demand that a team of oxen he claimed was his be turned over. He was accompanied by two men, one was a Dane from Copenhagen and the other a local butcher who served as a town official. These three tried to take the team Jørgen claimed was his, but LDS members intervened. Later it was alleged that in the ensuing altercation, one of the LDS members, H. J. Christensen, physically assaulted the town official.

Frustrated at his lack of success, Jørgen returned the next day, accompanied by a wagon full of men from town and several armed men on horseback. This time the Mormons made no effort to resist when a number of oxen were taken, though they were not the ones Jørgen claimed were his, which had been chased out into the wild by Christensen. Jørgen’s cohorts proceeded to arrest Christensen, accusing him of the assault the day before and of driving Jørgen’s oxen

out of the camp. He was taken back to town and compelled to pay a fine, then released. The Christian Munk journal reports the excommunication occurred July 3. A court hearing in Council Bluffs regarding the matter was opened on the fourth. The Forsgren journal differs from the others, reporting that when the party completed crossing the Missouri River on July 9, four oxen belonging to Jørgen were left behind. In addition, Forsgren was required to return to Council Bluffs on the twelfth to pay thirty dollars in a final settlement of the dispute with Jørgen Nielsen.

No doubt the loss of a team of oxen was no small matter for members of a wagon train of around 280 people with only thirty-four wagons as they headed across the plains and mountains en route to the Salt Lake Valley. But it is likely Jørgen and Margaret had sold what little property they had in Denmark before leaving and contributed their own money toward the purchase of a team of oxen and other supplies. The fact that Jørgen was able to quickly recruit townsmen, complete strangers, to come to his assistance gives us some insight into the animosity persisting between non-Mormons and LDS members.

In the weeks and months that followed, Jørgen and Margaret settled somewhere in western Iowa, probably in Shelby County. Meanwhile, those remaining in the Forsgren party continued on to Utah. Margaret's sister Sophie and her family went with them. Traveling about fifteen miles a day, they encountered buffalo and Indians, gold diggers returning from California and incredible difficulties. Two people survived being run over by a wagon. Lightning strikes were a major concern, as were prowling wolves and the scarcity of feed for their livestock. Three more members died, none of them children, and two more were born before they arrived in Salt Lake Valley after dark on September 30. Christian Nielsen, one of the journal keepers, reported he saved his wooden shoes for later by walking barefoot most of the way. Many of the members of the Forsgren Party proceeded 150 miles south to the Sanpete Valley soon after arriving in Utah. They were asked to settle in an region where a conflict between

settlers and local Native Americans had claimed fourteen lives in the period just preceding their arrival.

In the years ahead they struggled against Native Americans who fought to keep their claim to the land and against swarms of locusts that ravaged the crops. Nonetheless, the Danish settlers prospered. Communities in the Sanpete Valley became populated with Danes as subsequent immigrant parties occupied adjoining properties. Jens and Sophie Hansen settled in the town of Manti and had six more children. Many of their descendents—including those of Geraldina, the child born during the Atlantic crossing—continue to reside in the Sanpete Valley community.

Nine years after Jørgen Nielsen and Margrethe Pedersdatter came to America, Jørgen's mother and younger sister made the voyage from Denmark, in 1862. Like Jørgen and his family, these two also came with a party of Mormon immigrants headed for Utah.

Jørgen's mother, Marie Christensen (born in 1798), was widowed in 1857. Together with her daughter Ane, she must have decided life in America sounded more promising. They boarded the steamer *Albion* in Copenhagen harbor, along with about 500 other Mormon pilgrims, on April 14, going first to Germany before boarding the *Athena*. They had a most unpleasant forty-seven day crossing of the Atlantic, arriving in New York City, where they boarded a train for Florence, Nebraska.

From there it was a seventy-one day journey across the plains by wagon. Marie succumbed along the way. Details of her death could probably be discovered with additional research. Some time after arriving in Utah, Ane married a fellow traveller named Soren Hansen, whose first wife had died during the journey. Ane became step-mother to his children and bore two more herself: Lucy Annie and Soren Hyrum. There is no evidence of any communication between Ane and her brother in America.¹¹

Chapter Two

FAMILY ROOTS IN DENMARK

At the beginning of my research into Nelson family history, I learned from a number of elderly relatives that our ancestors, George and Margaret Nelson, along with two of their children, came to America with a party of Mormon emigrants from Denmark, arriving in New Orleans during the spring of 1853. It wasn't clear whether they had been LDS members, and there seems to have been some interest in denying that they were. Further information on the lives of the Nelsons in Denmark was sparse. The story of George Nelson, the father figure of the immigrating family, having joined the King's Guard while in Denmark, only to be told at the end of his period training that he was too short to qualify for full induction into the guard unit, has been a favorite piece of oral tradition in the family. I also learned of fascinating stories about George's father, Cornelius, having run off and joined the British Navy and serving under Admiral Horatio Nelson. Family members have also kept alive the puzzling tale of the young daughter left behind in Denmark. No one seemed quite certain why she had been abandoned, though there has been plenty of speculation.

Besides this handful of intriguing stories, there really was not much to go on from the oral tradition for reconstructing a family history in Denmark. People's memories were often vague and unsure. Some thought they had heard

that the family originally came from England; or that maybe the name Nelson was adopted after Cornelius's service in the British Navy. Then again, one report suggested Cornelius was never really in the British Navy but had been a pirate before settling down to life as a saddle and harness maker. Finally, Roskilde was remembered as the place where the family lived or originated from in Denmark.

Starting with these clues, I began to make it a hobby to try to learn more about our family's roots, to solve some of the mysteries and fill in some of the many blanks in our knowledge. Such a quest can lead to more and more questions, and this one was no exception. But during the process, I did learn a lot about where our family came from and what their lives were like before they left Denmark. The quest became all the more real for me when my wife, Joanna, and I planned a vacation around my interest and visited Denmark in the spring of 2000. The results of my research and an account of our observations in the village where the family originated are presented in this chapter.

Armed with the information I had been given about the Nelsons coming to America from Denmark on board a ship full of Mormon immigrants, I went in search of that ship and a record of the ship's passengers. Having a connection with Mormons in one's family background, I quickly learned, can be most helpful while doing genealogical or family history research. It didn't take me long to locate an Internet site listing ships that transported Mormon immigrants to America and to learn that there was only one which carried Danish members of the LDS Church in 1853. That was the *Forest Monarch*, which transported a party of Mormons to New Orleans, arriving in March of that year. A letter to the National Archives in Washington, D.C., requesting a copy of the passenger list that would have been logged at the immigration office bore fruit. I received a photocopy in the mail providing the information needed to begin unraveling one of the riddles that had stumped others in the family who had attempted to trace our family's roots. There was a family of four listed with the surname

“Nielsen” [*sic*], and the given names “Jørgen, 32 yrs.; Margeret [*sic*] 30 yrs.; Maria, 4 yrs.; Christian, 2 yrs” (see page 24). The country they were listed as coming from was Germany, though I concluded this must have been a mistake on the part of the clerk filling out the record (probably because the ship’s owners were German and it was a German shipping company with which they sailed), as was the misspelling of the common Danish name “Nielsen.” The evidence suggested the name “Nelson” was adopted by the family after they settled in the United States, as was the name “George.” Anglicizing of names was common among many nineteenth-century immigrants to this country; though ironically, the name Nelson could be rooted in the Danish name Nielsen, a name Viking colonizers may have introduced to England.

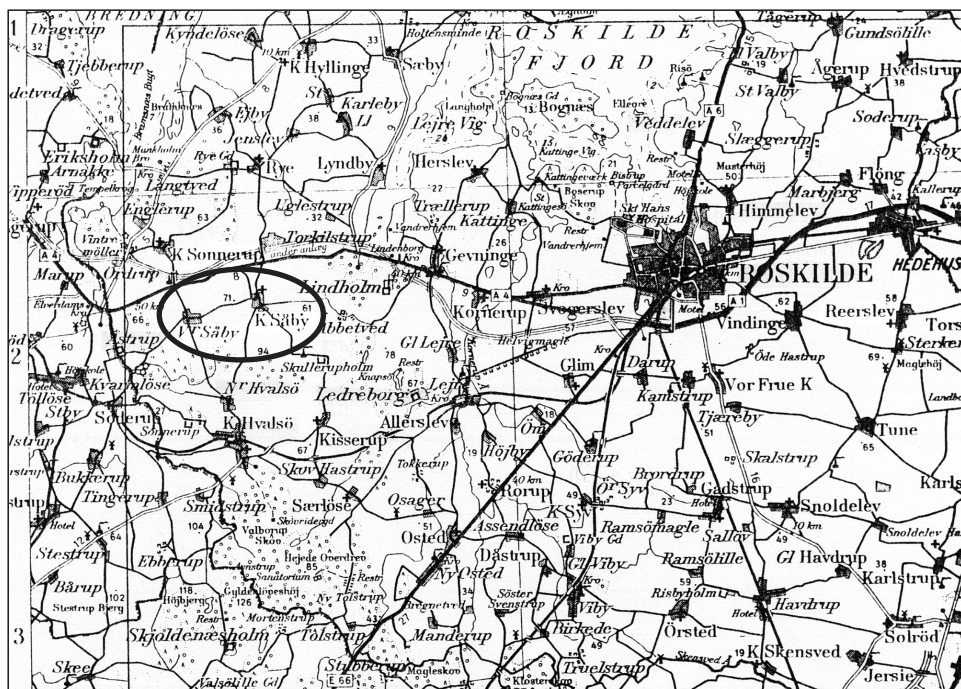
I went next to a local LDS Family History Center with these clues and began checking through the computer databanks the church maintains on genealogical records. Margaret’s ancestry was well represented in the files, as were the descendents of her sister Sophie Hansen, who settled in Utah after having immigrated on the *Forest Monarch*. Jørgen and Margaret were listed, along with their family; however, a more limited ancestry was given for Jørgen. His sister Ane, I learned, also immigrated to Utah at some later point, and a lengthy descendancy chart was available on her family.¹¹ These files, the result of genealogical research done by distant relatives, gave me a big head start on my continuing research.¹²

I then began the more tedious task of ordering microfilms of old Danish church records that are available from the Family History Library in Salt Lake City. I learned enough Danish vocabulary to interpret the records and read the—sometimes indecipherable—handwriting of the parish priests who kept logs on births, deaths, arrivals and departures to the parish, census taking, among other things. There are also old probate records, which in my search proved helpful in a couple cases.

On Jørgen’s side, the family roots lie in a small farming village called Vester

Såby (also spelled Saaby, and in the old days Sauby or Såbye) that lies about ten miles due west of the city of Roskilde and about twenty-seven miles west of Copenhagen. Vester (i.e., Western) Såby is about a mile-and-a-half west of the village of Kirke Såby, where the parish church stands. The name is believed to have been derived from a small lake or marsh (in Danish, *sø*) that used to exist between Vester and Kirke Såby. The “Kirke” (church) in the name Kirke Såby first appears in records around 1400. Open, rolling plains in the region are broken by large forested areas to the southeast of Kirke Såby and to the west of Vester Såby. The soil makes for good agriculture and human habitation in the area dates back to three to four thousand years ago.

There is some interesting history of the Kirke Såby parish area. In the prehistoric period, when the climate in Denmark was warmer, small bands of people farmed and hunted the moose, deer and other wildlife found in the re-



Vester Såby, west of Roskilde, is where the Nielsen/Nelson family lived before emigrating.

gion. Evidence of this ancient era remains in the vicinity of Kirke Sâby. Four old burial mounds, of the kind constructed during the Bronze Age (1,000 B.C.), stand just west of the village. Another lies a little to the north of Vester Sâby. Standing about ten to twelve feet high and being about fifteen feet in diameter, these prominent mounds preside over the landscape giving it an aura of antiquity. Such old burial mounds are not uncommon in parts of Denmark. Some have been excavated by archeologists to reveal coffins made from hollowed-out oaken logs with primitive bronze implements and weapons lying beside the remains of the dead. But many more of these mounds, like those in the Kirke Sâby area, have been left undisturbed by generations of people who have no doubt found them to be a reminder of the brevity of an individual's life in this world.¹³

Some of the local names originated during the Viking era (A.D. 700 to 1000). The name of the small village of Torkilstrup, a mile-and-a-half north of Kirke Sâby, is probably derived from Thor, the Nordic deity. Åstrup, a mile west of Vester Sâby and the location of a village from ancient times, is believed to have been named after Ase, which used to be a popular woman's name among the Vikings. Even the boundaries of the parish (*sogn* in Danish), with some modifications, date from Viking times when a local chief was responsible for the recruitment of military personnel in this demarcated district.

Roman Catholicism came to Denmark by Royal invitation under King Harald Bluetooth in the latter part of the tenth century and helped to quell the pillaging Viking predilections of the Danes. An old runic stone in a place called Jelling, near the eastern coast of Jutland, commemorates Bluetooth's conversion and depicts Christ and a lion struggling against a serpent. There was a rapid proliferation of church construction during the eleventh century, and Sâby was no different in this regard from many regions of Denmark. A wooden church building was probably built before A.D. 1100, with the laborious construction of the still existing stone structure beginning shortly thereafter. This stone church building had twin towers when it was first completed, but one was later removed,

and other modifications were made over the centuries. Mural drawings on the whitewashed vaulted ceiling depict St. George slaying a mythological dragon and the legendary tree of life, perhaps indicating the extent to which Christianity became absorbed into a myriad of previously existing indigenous beliefs and customs. An interesting piece of evidence from the Viking era is found on a large rock which was later incorporated into the foundation of the church. There is an inscription depicting a Viking ship readily discernable on the rock. That piece of granite, plus many of the others used in the construction of the church, is believed to have been brought from the Roskilde area. Given the skewed position of the ship on the rock, it appears the builders unwittingly left it exposed.

Reformation Christianity came to Denmark with the establishment of the Lutheran Church in 1533. The crown at that point determined it was time to loosen the grip the Vatican had been attempting to extend in the region, as well as to confiscate the extensive property holdings the church had acquired. What followed was a concerted effort to introduce greater emphasis on the teaching of Christian doctrine and Bible reading. The old murals on church ceilings in places like Kirke Sâby were whitewashed. But in many respects, life in the church probably continued in its, by then, centuries-old manner. Worship centered on the liturgy of the church. The old granite baptismal font at Kirke Sâby, with a German-made brass basin on the top, continued to be used to initiate newborn children into the life of the church. Generations of Nelson ancestors were baptized there.¹⁴

The economic life of this crossroads community revolved around agriculture. Twenty-some farms existed on the outskirts of the small villages of Kirke Sâby and Vester Sâby. During the Middle Ages, European-type feudalism expanded throughout Denmark, and by A.D. 1600, most of the self-sufficient family farms had been consolidated into large estates. In the Kirke Sâby area, Åstrup, Lindholm and Ryegård were the names of the estates that extended control over the agricultural land and the lives of many people living there. Ledreborg was

also part of the Kirke Sâby parish during this earlier era, though later it was divided off and attached to the neighboring Allerslev parish district.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, 95 percent of the farms in Denmark were owned by 800 estates. The farmers who worked those farms had to pay manorial dues (*landgilde*) to the landowners, plus provide other services (*villein*) to this nobility. However, the role these estates played, including the countervailing influence they had over or against the monarchy, began unraveling following the French Revolution when land reform measures were introduced into Denmark to forestall any revolutionary fervor. Dramatic social changes ensued as the consolidation of farms was reversed. The old estates remained in diminished form, while much of their lands were divided among prominent peasant families that had worked on the estates, giving rise to a new class of farm owners (*gaardman*). Improved farming techniques further increased the efficiency of farms, which became more and more cash-crop operations, rather than self-sufficient family farms. By 1820, over 50 percent of farms were independently owned.

Smaller parcels, three to five acres—not enough to make a living from—were distributed to another emerging social class of smallholder/craftsman (*husmand*). These craftsmen were well represented in the Kirke Sâby area. An old foundry, owned by the royal family, operated nearby during the Middle Ages. A shoe factory began production at a site a mile north of Kirke Sâby during the 1500s. Down to the present, cobblers continue to produce footwear at the place, working out of a building constructed in the eighteenth century. To the southwest of Vester Sâby, along a meandering stream, closer to the village of Soderup, twenty-some water mills used to grind grain. One dating from the sixteenth century remains and sells overpriced flour ground on the old, water-turned millstones to tourists who come in the summer months. Every village had a blacksmith shop. Weavers, saddle makers, carpenters, roofers and other such tradesmen were generally a part of the *husmand* social class.

Homes and other buildings were mostly built with oaken beams joined together to make a framework and roofing rafters. A wattle-and-daub type construction (that is, supple branches and twigs woven together and overlaid with clay) filled in the spaces between the framing beams for the walls. In later periods, burned bricks were used to fill in these spaces. The roofs were made of straw, lashed on about a foot thick. Such roofs were good for about twenty-five years on the north sides and about forty years on the south sides, so long as the material along the ridgeline was changed every four to five years. Inside, the homes had low ceilings of about six feet high and cobblestone or bare wooden floors. A surprising number of these old homes dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries still survive in Denmark and continue to be used as private residences. Quite a few exist in Vester S by, with the oldest one dating from the 1600s.

There is scant record of Nelson ancestry in this context, but it does exist. Churches, under the jurisdiction of the government, began keeping records on parishioners around 1700. In some parishes the records go back a bit further. Unfortunately, a fire burned the parsonage where the old record books were kept in Kirke S by in 1779, destroying all trace of family history before that time. But after this date, the records provide interesting glimpses into the lives of people in the area. Baptism records cite the names of the parents as well as the child, along with the names of witnesses and their occupations. Confirmation records often mention the performance levels of the students in the classes leading up to their first communion. Marriage records note the parents of the bride and her birthplace. Death records occasionally mention the cause of death.

Grave markers are not a good source for genealogists seeking family records in Denmark from before the middle of the nineteenth century, and in some areas even later. Stones were in short supply in many places, Kirke S by included, and they were much more in demand for building foundations and other construction projects. Tombstones were recycled after the passing of a few

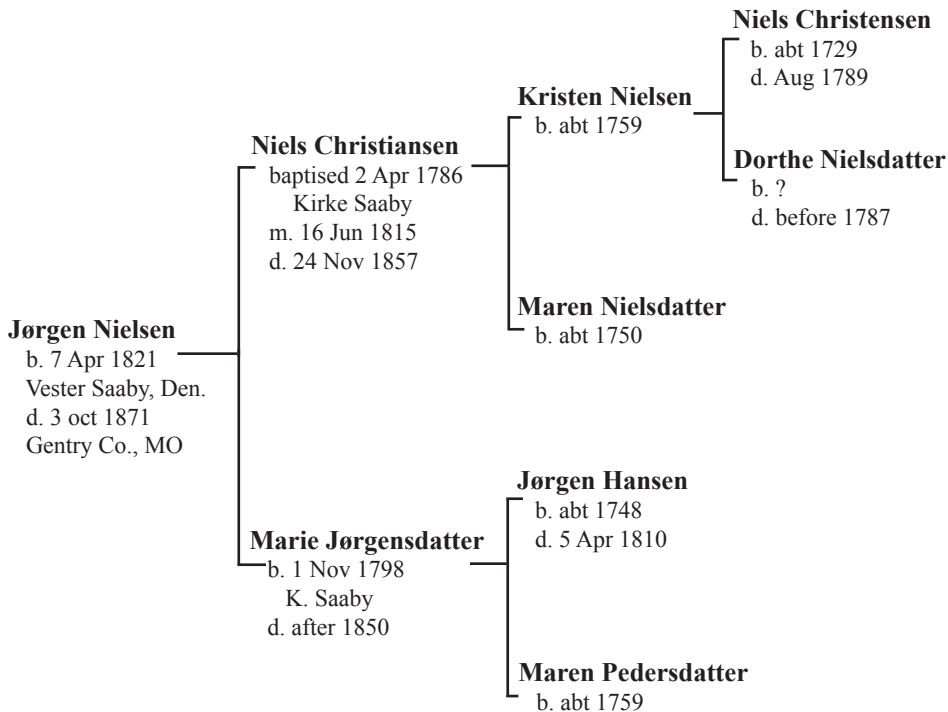
generations, some of them ending up in foundations or bridge abutments. The cemetery (*kirkegaard*) surrounding the church at Kirke Såby has few gravestones from before 1900.

The earliest record we have on Jørgen Nielsen's ancestry comes from a census of the Danish population conducted during early 1787. As the ages of those counted were also recorded, it is from this source that we can locate Jørgen Nielsen's paternal great-grandfather's birth in 1729. He is listed as being a farmer from Vester Såby and his name was Niels Christensen. Given the limited mobility of the lower class populations in Denmark in the preceding centuries, we can assume the family roots in Vester Såby go back further, but we have no way of knowing for sure. Dorthea Fredricksen, born about 1730, appears in other records as being his first wife, and together they had two children. But she must have died before the 1787 census was taken, for on that record Niels is listed as living with "mistress/wife" Karen Olsdatter, age fifty-two, as well as, with Dorthe Nielsdatter, age twenty, a daughter of Niels and Dorthea.

We get a little more insight into this family from a probate record that was filed on November 25, 1789, three-and-a-half months after the August 16 burial of sixty-year-old Niels Christensen. Karen Olsdatter is listed as the widow, having married Niels on September 12, 1787. Also in attendance were Christen Nielsen, age thirty, and Dorthe Nielsdatter, the two children of Niels from his first marriage. Then follows an inventory of the Niels Christensen estate and outstanding debts. We can conclude he was anything but a wealthy person. The most valuable asset listed is a six-year-old cow, and the total estate, minus the debts he owed, comes to a little more than the value of two cows. As a farmer he probably owned property at an earlier point in his life, but this seems to have been sold by the time of his death or possibly had already been transferred to his son.

The son, Christen (sometimes spelled Kristen), was born about 1759 and, like his father, was a farmer (*gaardman*) in Vester Såby. Details on his life are,

Ancestry of Jørgen Nielsen



again, sparse. He also was married twice. It is unclear who his first wife was, but together they had a daughter named Birthe Kristensdatter, born about 1777. By the time of the 1787 census, Christen was living with another woman, Maren Nielsdatter, who gave birth to Niels Kristensen (later spelled Christensen or Christiansen) at the end of March 1786. The baptism of the child was celebrated on April 2.

Fourteen years later, on the 1801 census, Christen and Maren appear to be living in the village of Sonnerup, a mile-and-a-half north of Vester Sâby. By then, they had another son who was three years old. Their first son, Niels,

who was sixteen years old at that point, is listed as still living in Vester Såby and working as a servant for a Peder Jørgensen. Having the same name as his paternal grandfather—as was Danish custom for the eldest son—this is the Niels Christensen who fathered Jørgen (George Nelson) and supposedly served in the British Navy.

On a number of the old parish records, this Niels Christensen (1786–1857) is identified as a saddle maker, which is pretty good evidence that this is the right person, the one who has been referred to in the family as Cornelius Nelson. A couple of Nelson relatives in the United States, Ava Kenny and Nancy Horst, have small leather handbags which, they were told, were made by Jørgen's father, a harness maker, and were brought over from Denmark when the family immigrated. There is, interestingly, an old house on the Åstrup estate, about a mile-and-a-half west of Vester Såby, known as the saddler's home (*sadelmagerhuset*). Given there generally was not more than one saddler in a community, it is quite possible that this old house, painted with the mustard yellow color used in former days to distinguish buildings belonging to the Åstrup estate, is where Niels lived.

What to make of the stories that have been handed down regarding Niels Christensen's service in the British Navy, which I alluded to at the beginning of this chapter, remains a bit of a puzzle. My best source on this legend was Ava Kenny, who heard of it from her father, George A. Nelson. George probably heard the story from his father, Cornelius Nelson (1854–1949), a son of Jørgen Nielsen. Given that George A. Nelson took a keen interest in gathering historical and genealogical data on the family, wrote articles for local history journals, and was, at one point, the president of the Columbia County Historical Society in Oregon, we can't lightly dismiss the credibility of this intriguing account. Vague recollections of some sort of connection to Lord Nelson come from other members of the family as well.

In Ava's recounting of the story, Niels was involved in an altercation with

a nobleman who, along with others, came trampling through the family's farm field on horseback while on a foxhunt. Niels managed to catch hold of the man, pull him off his horse, and then beat him up. Given the nobleman's status, Niels realized the jeopardy he had gotten himself into and immediately ran into hiding. He proceeded on over to the coast where, at the time, British Navy ships under the command of Horatio Nelson were anchored offshore. Seeing an opportunity to escape his pursuers, Niels volunteered his services to the British Navy, was taken on board one of the ships, and remained for an undetermined period in the British Navy. When he returned to Denmark is unclear.

Minor difficulties exist in this account. First, I have been informed that fox hunting never was a sport among the aristocracy in Denmark—there just weren't any foxes. There was, however, plenty of hunting on horseback, using dogs to chase after deer, wild boars and hares, though mostly just hares by the nineteenth century. Complaints coming from farmers about the destruction of farm fields were common during this period. Second, Horatio Nelson's celebrated attack on the Danish fleet anchored at Copenhagen occurred on April 2, 1801. Niels would have been only fifteen at the time—perhaps a bit young to be admitted to the British Navy. (Four years later, Lord Admiral Nelson was mortally wounded in the battle of Trafalgar, off the coast of Spain, when ships under his command won a resounding victory over the combined French and Spanish Navies.)

There remains, nonetheless, room in this scenario for Niels to have been a member of the British Navy. The conflict between Britain and Denmark grew out of the ongoing French Revolutionary war and the Napoleonic war that pitted France against Britain and much of the rest of Europe. Though the Danes remained technically neutral in the conflict, the profitable Danish trade with France was hurting Britain, and the British Navy, beginning as early as 1793, tried to put a stop to it. The Danes persisted, using armed convoys to protect their merchant ships from British warships. Nelson's attack on the Danish fleet at Copenhagen was aimed at halting the Dane's maritime trade, which was sec-

and only to Britain's. Confronted with an overwhelming force, the Danes sued for peace after five hours of bombardment to prevent a complete destruction of their fleet. A condition of the cease-fire required that the Danes withdraw from the Armed Neutral Alliance they had with Sweden and Russia.

Hostilities did not cease between Denmark and Britain afterward, as it began to appear more likely that Denmark would enter a formal alliance with France. The Danish-British conflict simmered until fighting broke out again in September of 1807. At that point, a British fleet under the command of Admiral Gambier sailed past Helsingør and through the narrow strait separating Denmark and Sweden. From there, the British quickly moved on to again surround the Danish fleet at Copenhagen. At the same time, an army of 31,000 British troops landed on Danish soil under the command of Viscount Wellesley (later the Duke of Wellington) and marched on Copenhagen from the south and the north. With the British Navy attacking from the sea and British artillery batteries firing into the city from land, the four-day conflict that broke out on September 2 laid waste to much of Copenhagen. When it was over, the British Navy sailed away with what remained of the once-proud Danish merchant fleet; and in the months following, the British took near complete control of shipping in the North Atlantic and the Baltic Sea.

Given the duration of this ongoing conflict between Britain and Denmark, one can assume there were plenty of times when the British anchored their superior warships off the coast of Denmark to make their presence known in an intimidating manner. Would they have taken on board a young farmer fleeing retribution from local noblemen? I have yet to find any documentation in Danish records that supports this story. There is a gap in the information that can be gleaned from the church logs on Niels Christensen. He shows up on the 1801 census, then doesn't appear again until his marriage to Marie Jørgensdatter, on June 16, 1815. But given that there was no census taken between 1801 and 1834, this gap is not so unusual. Could Niels have been off serving in the British Navy during part of this period? Or, could he have been up to something else?

Another intriguing possibility comes to us on a thin shred of evidence. There used to be discussions in the Cornelius Nelson branch of the family in Oregon—for awhile it was a bit of a joke—about how George A. Nelson had begun to lose interest in the subject of family history when he learned that his great-grandfather Cornelius Nelson (aka, Niels Christensen) had been a pirate—not a member of Admiral Nelson’s Navy. No one has any recollection of where this other account came from or just when it first came to light. Yet, this is not an altogether outlandish possibility. Following the humiliating defeat at the hands of the British in 1807 and continuing until 1814, there was an “unofficial” assigning by the Danish government of “privateer permits,” giving Danish ship owners permission to mount guns on their boats and prey on British merchant ships. Ostensibly this was a form of piracy, though apparently international conventions of the time did not recognize it as such if it was sanctioned by the government of a country. Hundreds of gunboats were deployed and at least a dozen of these privateer ships operated out of the Roskilde Fjord, not far from Niels Christensen’s home village. For someone trying to evade retaliation from local aristocrats, joining the crew on one of these ships could conceivably have been a way out. Rather than being a member of the British Navy, Niels would have found himself trying to evade British warships while mounting attacks on British merchant ships.

Considering the evidence we have to work with, this scenario is speculative. It remains unclear when or from where George A. Nelson learned of this other historical account of his great-grandfather. Near the end of his life he wrote a letter bequeathing the records he had gathered on the family’s history to his children. In that brief missive he notes that “Cornelius Nelson [Niels Christensen] was a harness maker by trade and came from England. Served under Lord Nelson the British Admiral.” If George A. ever believed his great-grandfather was a privateer/pirate, by the end of his life he must have returned to the belief that Niels served in the British Navy.¹⁵

Another factor we have to take into account is the need of descendants to explain how our Danish immigrant ancestors had a British surname. Some association with Admiral Nelson and the British Navy seems to have originated early on, and people have been inclined to think that is how the family name came to be Nelson. According to some who knew him, George A. was proud of the name Nelson and fervent in believing the family roots lay in England, not Scandinavia. However, the documentation I have seen in the old Danish church records convinced me that Niels Christensen did not come from England, though it does not entirely rule out the possibility that he might have spent some time there. Further, a surname did not exist in the family until after the family's immigration to America, when Jørgen Nielsen began calling himself George Nelson, with his wife and children adopting the same last name. Even then, Jørgen signed his name "Jorgen Nelson" on a number of old documents that have been preserved, suggesting he wasn't altogether comfortable with his new name. Just what the unlikely connection was with Admiral Nelson, if there ever actually was one, continues to remain a mystery.

More certain, as noted above, is that Niels married Marie Jørgensdatter in June of 1815 and settled in the Vester Såby area. Marie was the eighth of ten children belonging to Jørgen Hansen, a farmer in Vester Såby, and Maren Pedersdatter. She was baptized in Kirke Såby on "22 post Trinity," as it appears in the old church record, in 1798. That would be November 4. The actual day of birth was not always recorded in the early church records, but we can assume it was a week or so earlier. Marie grew up in Vester Såby and her father died when she was eleven years old. She married Niels, who was twelve years her senior, when she was sixteen.

Their first child, Jørgen Nielsen, was born on May 18, 1816, and christened on Ascension Day. Danish custom was to name the first male child after his paternal grandfather, in this case, Kristen. An exception was made here and Jørgen was named after his mother's recently deceased father. Unfortunately, little Jørgen only lived four months, dying on September 22.

A second son was born nearly five year later, on April 7, 1821, and—as was not unusual in Denmark during that period—was given the same name as his deceased brother, Jørgen Nielsen. This is our immigrant ancestor (aka, George Nelson). A daughter, Ane, was born on April 24, 1828; another son, Christen, was born May 10, 1831; and a second daughter, Maren, was born April 22, 1835. These were the children of Niels and Marie. All of them were born in Vester Såby and baptized in the church at nearby Kirke Såby.

When the census was taken in 1801, the population of the Kirke Såby parish district was 870 people in 204 family units. This included everyone living in Kirke Såby village, plus those in the nearby villages of Vester Såby, Torkildstrup and Abbetved. We can assume that around 200 people lived in Vester Såby during the years Jørgen and his siblings were growing up.

The Åstrup estate, just west of Vester Såby, where Niels Christensen probably worked as a saddler, employed much of Vester Såby's population before 1800. The beginning of this estate dates to around 1550 when the Krabbe family, connected to the church in Roskilde, first began developing the farm. Stones from a dismantled Dominican monastery in Roskilde ended up in early buildings constructed at Åstrup. After that, the estate changed owners a half dozen times over the next couple of centuries. Bartholin Eichel was the lord of the manor in 1788 when a redistribution of a portion of the estate property was made to farm workers. He is honored for being ahead of his time in instituting land reform. A monument was erected in 1794 to commemorate this changeover and still stands near the old Åstrup manor house.¹⁶

Reportedly, there were ninety head of cattle and thirty some horses kept at Åstrup during the early 1800s. Those horses, plus others belonging to local villagers, would account for there being a house set aside for a saddler on the estate. If Niels Christensen in fact occupied this position, he would have enjoyed a decent life during a period of social change in which many people lost out and ended up in the poor houses.

Åstrup changed hands several more times before the place was given to Frederik Wilhelm Dannemand in 1842. Dannemand was an illegitimate son of the Danish King Frederick VI, who reigned from 1808-1839, and the king's mistress, Bente Frederikke Rafted. As a gesture of concern for his offspring, the king acquired Åstrup and gave it to his son.¹⁷

In this rustic, rural context, Jørgen Nielsen grew up having a dark complexion, blue eyes and auburn hair.¹⁸ The national School Law of 1814 made education compulsory for children from age seven until they completed confirmation. The old straw-roofed school building where Jørgen attended classes still exists in Vester Såby and now serves as a private residence. Jørgen shows up in the church's confirmation records in 1835, with a notation that his marks were "very good." A few years later is when we can assume a significant turn of events in his life occurred, which we know of through credible oral tradition from multiple branches of the family in the United States, though I have yet to find any written documentation from Denmark to support this account.

The best telling of the story, again, is the version I heard from Ava Kenny, based on what she heard from her father, George A. Nelson. Jørgen, we are told, was recruited into the King's Guard in Denmark. Being part of the King's Guard required a lengthy and stringent training period and, for those who made the grade, carried a certain amount of prestige. Even to today the Royal Guard continues to display its colorful and precise discipline in daily changing-of-the-guard ceremonies in front of the royal palace (Amalienborg Slot) in Copenhagen and at the summer palace in Fredensborg. When Jørgen was recruited, however, he was a fraction of an inch shorter than the minimum height required of guardsmen. Given that he was young and presumably still growing, he was admitted, with the recruiting officers assuming that by the time the training period was over he would have grown enough to meet the minimum requirement. It is not clear how long the training lasted, but the oral tradition speaks of him excelling in the training, particularly in swordsmanship. Nonetheless, when the training

was over, to his great disappointment, he still was not tall enough to qualify for being a guardsman and was dismissed from service. [His Union Army records in the United States note that he was five foot ten inches tall.]

Back in Vester Såby, Jørgen took up the blacksmith trade (*smed*). There is an old house in the middle of the village (Tulipanvej 2) that has been documented to have existed from at least as far back as 1776 and is said to have been the blacksmith's home, with a shop next to it where horses were shod and farm implements and wagon wheels were fashioned. I am inclined to believe Jørgen would have apprenticed under the smith who lived there. Documentation of his having been a smith shows up in the record of his wedding, and on the 1845 and 1850 census records.

At the age of twenty-two, Jørgen married Margrethe Pedersdatter on October 7, 1843. A noteworthy discrepancy in his age appears in this record. The church marriage book lists him as being twenty-three years old, which would place his birth in 1820. That differs from the April 7, 1821, date that shows on his birth record. On the 1834 census, he is listed along with his parents and siblings as being thirteen years old. If the census was taken in February, which was the customary time of year for the census, this would also place his birth in 1820. The 1820 date seems to have remained in Jørgen's mind as the year he was born and is what shows up on his cemetery monument in Gentry County, Missouri. Discrepancies in the ages given in these old records are not uncommon. Keeping track of exactly how old one was does not seem to have been so important to people in those days.

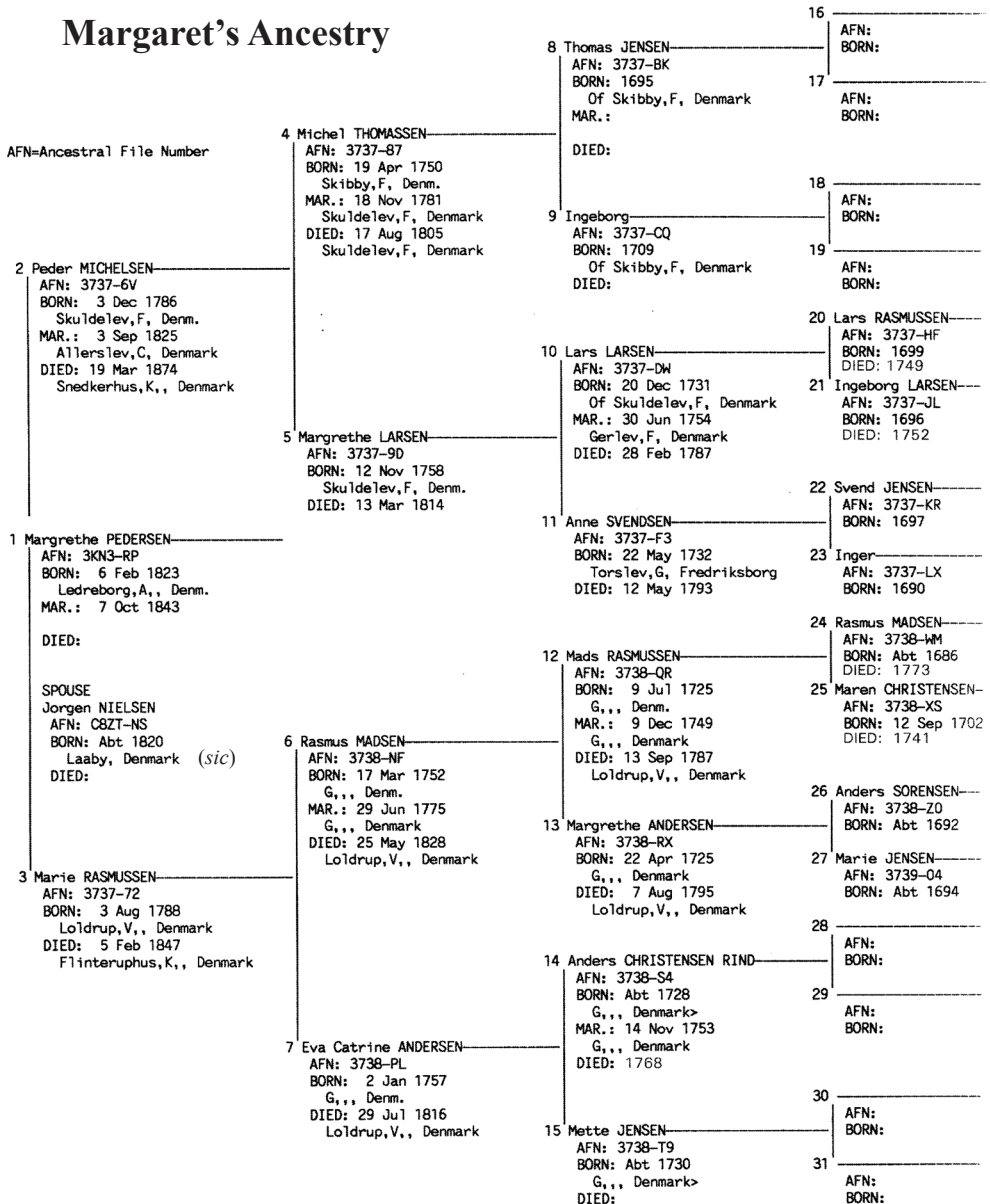
Margrethe (later known as Margaret) had a fascinating family background. Her father's side of the family lived in Fredericksborg County, mostly in the little communities of Skibby and Skuldelev, about ten miles north of Kirke Såby. Her mother's side of the family was from Viborg County in Jutland. Her father and her mother ended up working as servants at the Ledreborg Estate, about three-and-a-half miles southeast of Kirke Såby. Her father, Peder Michelsen

(1786–1874), worked as a farmhand at the estate and seems to have been married earlier and had a son, Jacob Pedersen, born at Ledreborg on September 20, 1817. When Margaret was born on February 6, 1823, Peder Michelsen appears in the record at the Allerslev parish as being the “alleged father.” Margaret’s mother, Marie Rasmusdatter, may not yet have been working at Ledreborg at that point. But she is listed two-and-a-half years later, like Peder, as working for Count Holstein at Ledreborg when the two of them were married on September 3, 1825. His age is given as thirty-eight and her age is thirty-six [actually it was thirty-seven].¹⁹

The Ledreborg Estate, on whose ground Margrethe grew up, continues to enjoy prominence among noteworthy places in Denmark and is a popular tourist destination. The history of the estate extends to 1661, when the farms in the area were amalgamated and given by the king to the magistrate of Copenhagen. Soon after, it passed to Henrik Müller as an indemnification for money he had loaned to the king during the Swedish War. Müller built the first manor house there and called his estate, Lejregård. In 1741, Johan Ludvig Holstein bought it from Müller’s heirs and renamed it Ledreborg. Holstein was born in Mecklenburg, Germany, but the family he came from contributed significantly to building ties between the German nobility and Danish royalty. His father acquired high office as a close associate of the Danish King Frederick IV. Holstein served as secretary of the crown prince who later became King Christian IV in 1730. Afterward, he served as first minister in the Home Council and was granted the Order of the Elephant in 1750. Under Johan Holstein’s supervision, most of the structures that still exist on the estate were built, including the beautiful baroque/rococo style manor house, the expansive gardens, plus the four-and-a-half mile long, tree-lined driveway that extends east toward Roskilde. Ledreborg was given the status of a manor in 1764, and served as proof in the minds of many of the Holstein family’s commitment to Denmark. Count Christian Edzard Holstein (1778–1853) was the resident lord of the manor during the time our forebears lived and worked on the estate.²⁰

Margaret's Ancestry

AFN=Ancestral File Number



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A month after the marriage of Margrethe's parents, her mother, Marie, gave birth at Ledreborg to another daughter, Pauline Marie, on October 1, 1825. A third daughter, Charlotte Sophie Dorthea, also born at Ledreborg, was added to the family on January 16, 1828. Fifteen years later when Margrethe married Jørgen, her father is mentioned in the record as being from Flintenborgh, a nearby village that no longer exists. Before her wedding, Margrethe had moved to Torkilstrup, a little north of Kirke Såby.

In the census taken early in 1845, Jørgen and Margrethe appear living as a family unit. A servant living with them, not named, is perhaps Margrethe's sister Sophie. The first child born to Jørgen and Margrethe, Birthe Marie Jørgensdatter, was born August 25, 1845. But little Birthe only lived two weeks before she died. A second child, also given the name Birthe Marie, was born January 26, 1847. Sophie is listed as a witness at her christening. Another daughter, born on January 12, 1849, was named Marie Jørgensdatter. The 1850 census shows four members in the family. A son was born into the family on January 21, 1851, and was given the name Christian Ludvig Jørgensen. The Ludvig name probably came from Johan Ludvig Holstein, the first count of Ledreborg.

In the meantime, Margrethe's mother died on February 5, 1847, and Jørgen's brother, Christian, died at age seventeen on January 9, 1849. Jørgen's parents seem to have retired by the time the 1850 census was taken. Niels (born 1786) is listed as being a lodger, pensioner and saddler. Apparently, he had sold his small parcel of property by then, perhaps to the person with whom he and Marie were lodging. Given that he is still called a saddler, he may have continued working part time. Niels survived until November 24, 1857.

Significant changes were occurring in Denmark during this period. Democratic ideas became increasingly influential: First with the elections of advisory councils representing the different geographical parts of Denmark; following that, in 1837, town councils and, in 1841, county and parish councils were elected. Calls for rights and freedoms became more strident. Frederick VII as-

sumed the throne in 1848 and earned the title “The People’s King” by quickly ushering in a constitutional monarchy in June of 1849. Elections of a two-house legislature followed, with all male householders over the age of thirty permitted to vote. Freedom of the press and religious liberty were granted under the new constitution.

Religious changes were marginal for the country, but significant in our family’s history. Baptist and Methodist missionaries had begun working in Denmark well before the new religious freedom was enshrined in the constitution. They found that not everyone was in favor of having other religious groups competing with the established Lutheran Church. One Baptist missionary, Peter Mönster, started proselytizing in the early 1840s and was repeatedly thrown in jail for his unauthorized activities. By 1850, he had succeeded in building a following of converts in a couple of rural areas. People in the north part of Jutland, around Aalborg, were particularly responsive, as were many people in and around Tølløse, a little community just three miles southwest of Vester Såby. Small Baptist congregations began forming in neighboring villages, including one in Kirke Såby. Tølløse has remained a headquarters of a Baptist denomination ever since. A search through the Baptist membership records for Kirke Såby in the seminary library at Tølløse did not reveal the names of any of our forebears, but there is an interesting connection here, nonetheless.

Not long after Peter Mönster began seeing his efforts pay off, missionaries from a new religious group entered the picture. Mönster, eager for allies in his struggle against the intolerance he had been facing from some quarters, welcomed the newcomers and permitted them to teach to the emerging Baptist congregations. For a few months, it appears, they all got along well, until these new missionaries began teaching doctrines that were not familiar to Mönster. By then, many of the Baptist members had come to find the new missionaries from America to be more persuasive. When Mönster decided he could not accept the new teachings and asked these other missionaries to leave his congregations, many of the Baptist members left with them.

These newly arrived missionaries from America represented the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They were Peter O. Hansen, who arrived in Copenhagen in April of 1850, and Erastus Snow and George Dykes, who arrived on June 11. Their compatriot John Forsgren, a Swede, continued on to Sweden, but was banished from that country for his proselytizing efforts in September, and rejoined the others working in Denmark. They came with early drafts of Hansen's translations of the *Book of Mormon* and the *Doctrine and Covenants* and, in keeping with the Mormon doctrine of the Gathering, aimed to recruit converts to join the growing communities of LDS members in Utah. In August of that first year, they baptized twenty-six people into LDS membership, most of them from Baptist congregations. A year later their membership totals were around 1,000, with many more still coming from Baptist circles.

The connection with the Baptist churches helps explain how our ancestors, though from a small rural community, were among the early converts to the LDS in Denmark and in the first large group of Mormons to emigrate from Scandinavia. Jørgen and Margrethe's family may not have joined the Baptist church, but they more than likely had friends who did and later convinced them to listen to Mormon teachings.

It has been suggested that Margrethe was more committed to the LDS beliefs than Jørgen. Joining up with the Mormons at that point in Denmark was not something to be taken lightly, however. People used to say, "to join the Mormons was to have one's windows broken" by crowds of intimidators bent on discouraging people from adopting the new faith. Freedom of religion was guaranteed in the new constitution, but outside of the large urban areas there was little interest on the part of local authorities in enforcing that freedom or in protecting LDS elders who sometimes got carried away while railing against the failings of the Lutheran Church of Denmark. Lutheran clergy and the press stirred up plenty of opposition to the new movement by spreading slanderous stories that had long circulated in the United States about the Mormons. On a

number of occasions, the harassment turned to violence and Mormon elders were seriously injured. Efforts by John Forsgren to get a congregation started in Roskilde came to an abrupt halt after the third meeting when a crowd of demonstrators drove the Mormons out of town. Forsgren ended up in protective police custody for a brief period.

The LDS missionaries persisted. In the fall of 1850, a delegation of Mormons had an audience with the king of Denmark, which led to increased tolerance for the movement in Copenhagen, if not elsewhere. The following May, the LDS missionaries managed to get 3,000 copies printed of a Danish translation of the *Book of Mormon*. Plans to direct the new converts toward America continued, and at the end of January 1852, the first small group of Danish Mormon emigrants left for Utah. Before the close of the century, 30,000 Scandinavian Mormons would follow them.²¹

My search for records of our forebears in the early Danish LDS membership rolls came up empty. LDS records from those first few years seem to be incomplete. What I did find, however, while searching through the Kirke Såby Church log, which contains listings of people who departed from the parish, provided the earliest evidence of our ancestors having been associated with the LDS. The entry was dated December 22, 1852, which cannot be the day they left Kirke Såby—as they sailed from Copenhagen on December 20—but must be when the parish priest recorded the information. Whether this indicates that they left clandestinely, with word of their departure being passed onto the priest later, is a possibility. Listed as leaving the parish are:

Jørgen Nielsen, 31 years, *husmand*
Margethe Pedersdatter, 29, wife
Marie Jørgensdatter, 4, child
Jørgen [*sic*] Jørgensen, child [Christian Ludvig?]
Jens Hansen, 30
Sophie Pedersdatter, 25, wife
Karen Marie Jensdatter, 4, child

The column in the log where the destination of their move is recorded reads: Mormon area, Utah, North America. Birthe, the oldest daughter of Jørgen and Margrethe, is not listed, which probably means arrangements had already been made for her to stay with someone else. No record of her departure from the parish appears between 1850 and the end of 1852, suggesting she was left with someone in the Kirke Såby area. Sophie was Margrethe's sister; her husband was Jens Hansen. Their youngest child, Hans Christian, who departed with them, does not appear in the record.

There were no other people who left from Kirke Såby that week, but we can assume this small party of pilgrims met up with LDS members from Tølløse and other neighboring communities. They probably traveled in wagons to Roskilde. From there they more than likely took the train, as rail service had opened in 1847. After, perhaps, one night spent in Copenhagen, they boarded the *Obotrit* on December 20. Together they ventured forth to a different world that would open up a new life for them.

Having spent a considerable time ferreting out information on Nelson family roots in Denmark, I couldn't help wanting to see the places that were already beginning to seem familiar to me. There is much to see in Denmark, but Kirke Såby, Vester Såby, Åstrup and Ledreborg were the places I wanted to see most

of all. Joanna, always eager for adventure, was easily persuaded to come along on the journey.

We spent three weeks in Denmark in April and May of 2000. The weather can be forty degrees and rainy that time of year, but we were fortunate and had beautiful sunny skies the whole time. The hospitality of friends in Copenhagen, Nicoli and Maria Techow, made the first ten days of our stay delightful. After that we mostly moved from one youth hostel to another, enjoying sights in different parts of the country. We covered a lot of Denmark, from Helsingør in the northeast, to Ribe in the far west, but it was the week we spent poking around where my roots lie that was most meaningful to me. For others who would like to visit the Nelson ancestral homeland, I would like to offer some insights into what to expect.

If one has any experience traveling in foreign countries, Denmark will present few difficult challenges. Many Danes speak English, so communication is not a big problem. But if you have the Danish/Nelson look, you might, like me, be mistaken for a local and have people address you in Danish. Public transportation is excellent; we had little difficulty getting around by train or bus. If we ever go again, we will bring our bicycles and take advantage of the extensive network of bike trails, the many campsites and relatively easy terrain that could make for a great way to spend a vacation.

On our first Sunday in Denmark, Joanna and I caught a train from Copenhagen to Roskilde. There, we changed trains and boarded one heading toward Kalundborg. At the second stop, Kirke Hvalsø, we got off and waited for a local bus. Kirke Såby was less than a five minute ride up the road. We had hoped to get there in time to drop in on the morning church service, but, as it turned out, it started at 9:30 a.m., not eleven. Few people were milling about, which was fine with us; we just wanted to meander and get a feel for the place.

The church is the most imposing structure in the small community, with a red tile roof and bright whitewashed stone walls, surrounded by gravestones

and a low perimeter wall. I got caught up in imagining being there 150 years ago. Later we strolled along the road going west to Vester Såby. Much about that village looks as it probably did a hundred years ago. Enjoying the countryside, we continued to the north by foot for another mile-and-a-half to Kirke Sonnerup. The lush green barley in the broad open fields was about eight inches tall; nearby rapeseed fields were ablaze with brilliant yellow flowers. Ancient burial mounds could be seen in some of those open spaces. It was evident that restoring old houses and then maintaining them as private residences has become popular among some Danes. Towering, white, modern windmills were spinning on the horizons. The smell of manure from the large indoor hog farms that operate in that region was pervasive. I was just trying to feel my roots.

We poked around Kirke Såby for a couple more days and made use of the local history archive in Kirke Hvalsø. Most enjoyable was a tour a local resident in Vester Såby, Bent Godfredsen, took us on. Bent, along with his wife and family, has lived in the old blacksmith's house since he moved into the community thirty years ago. He has also taken a keen interest in local history, so he was eager to share his knowledge with us. After hearing of my roots in Vester Såby, he took us on a stroll around the village and made it more personal by pointing out where "your great-great-great-grandfather went to school," in the old building that was used as a school until 1811; and "where your great-great-grandfather attended classes," in the third school building used in Vester Såby. After a short drive over to Kirke Såby, he showed us the inside of the church. The whitewash on the ceiling was removed during a restoration project in 1968 revealing the beautiful murals that predate the reformation. Bent's enthusiasm about the history of the place was wonderful. He then took us out to see Åstrup and the old flour mill near Solderup. It was late in the evening when he dropped us off at the train station in Kirke Hvalsø. By then, I was beginning to feel a restored connection to my ancestral homeland.

We next spent most of a day visiting Ledreborg. To get there, one has to take

the same train out of Roskilde then get off at the first stop, a community called Lejre. In the summer a bus operates from the train station over to Ledreborg, which is about a mile away. We preferred to walk. The nearby Lejre Archaeological Experimental Centre is also a popular tourist destination in the summer, when a handful of Danish families volunteer to live in a reconstructed Iron Age village for the benefit of those who want to observe how the Danes lived in prehistoric times. The Ledreborg manor house, full of oil paintings, tapestries and antique furniture—little changed from when it was built 240 years ago—is well worth a visit. The current count, Knud Holstein, lives in Copenhagen, but his fourth daughter and her family reside at Ledreborg, the eighth and ninth generations of Holsteins to occupy the manor house. What we enjoyed most were the trails that wind around through the gardens and adjoining wooded areas. A little farther to the south, we paused awhile at the pleasant little church known as Kirke Allerslev, where Margrethe was christened.

If just being able to picture in our minds where our family roots lie has something to do with shaping our identity and sense of well-being, I would have to say I came away inspired by the idyllic rural scenes, the beauty of the rolling countryside and the simple country life that we found in and around Vester Sâby.

Chapter Three

SETTLING IN THE UNITED STATES

Following the conflict between Jørgen Nielsen and other members of the Forsgren Party, and Jørgen's subsequent excommunication from the LDS church, our forebears settled in western Iowa in July of 1853. Wagon trains heading for the gold fields of California and the Oregon Territory, plus Mormon parties departing for Salt Lake Valley would have provided plenty of work for someone trained in the blacksmith trade; and we can assume that Jørgen, hereafter referred to as George Nelson, had little trouble finding work. Nonetheless, life for this new immigrant family proved to be a difficult struggle.

The family seems to have first settled in Shelby County, Iowa, thirty-some miles northeast of Council Bluffs, purchasing a place in the Galland's Grove township (now known simply as Grove township). People of European-American descent began settling in the region around 1850, and Galland's Grove (which no longer exists) was the first settlement in the county. Later, during the 1860s and 1870s, Galland's Grove was an active center of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is still unclear whether the Nelsons shifted their affiliation to this emerging LDS group that rejected the leadership of Brigham Young. Shelby County also became a popular area among Danish immigrants, though there were only a few Danish families in the county in the mid-1850s.

Cornelius Nelson, a second son, was born in Shelby County on September 8, 1854. The family can be found recorded as living in Shelby County on the Iowa census taken early in 1856. George Nelson is listed as “John Nelson,” age thirty-five, from Denmark, a three-year resident of Iowa, a naturalized voter and member of the local militia, a blacksmith and a property owner. The name John was probably the census takers rendering of Jørgen. This is undoubtedly the right person, given the names and ages of his wife and children, though Maria is spelled “Mariah” and Cornelius is rendered as “Nealse”—one-year-old and born in Iowa.

The family must have moved to Crescent City shortly after the census was taken, as another child, initially named Crescent, though later known as Chrisanna (sometimes spelled with one n) was born there on February 20, 1856. There is some later documentation regarding her birth that offers some interesting details. After her father’s death from injuries sustained in military training during the Civil War, she was entitled to pension funds. A number of affidavits have been preserved in George Nelson’s pension file in the National Archives in Washington, D.C., testifying to Chrisanna’s birth and parentage. One signed by her brother Christian L. Nelson on March 16, 1888, notes that

his sister Chrisana was born in Crescent City, Iowa, that she was the first white child born in said town. That she was named from the name of the town, Crescent but afterwards [she persisted] in writing her name Chrisana instead of Crescent. That he remembered the day of her birth distinctly but can not give the exact day or month, being quite young at the time. But that he made the entry of the date of her birth in the family bible as given him by his mother Margaret, who is now dead....

A second general affidavit in this file regarding Chrisanna was signed by a Dr. John H. Hansen on December 30, 1889. He testified:

I was personally and intimately acquainted with George Nelson his wife Margret and their Daughter Crescent (I am informed she is now called Christna). I resided in their house in Crescent Iowa in the year 1857 in the month of July and afterwards. They then had a daughter a nursing child from one year to one and a half year old, a girl named Crescent because she was the first child born in the village of Crescent. Mr George Nelson, his wife Margret were living together as man and wife and were known to my family as such for years before though not to me before time stated. They were honest kindhearted and industrious people and bore a good character in Denmark by report, and to my knowledge at Crescent.

Crescent, first called Brownelle's Grove and later known as Crescent City, is six miles north of Council Bluffs. The community was one of the many settlements founded by LDS members fleeing violence in Illinois. The Nelson family lived there from just before Chrisanna's birth in February of 1856 to sometime in 1858. George A., in telling about his father's childhood (that is Cornelius's), wrote of the family living in Kanessville, though in doing so he probably was naming the nearest large town.

His father, George Nelson, was living at Kanessville, Iowa, when my father was a small boy. Here my father...began to help in building and repairing wagons, first by putting the nuts on the bolts of the wagon and other simple jobs. As he grew older, he helped on the more complicated blacksmith work, such as the forging of the irons and putting the more complicated parts of the wagons together....The skills in his (George's) trades as blacksmith, bridge builder, and military life came into good use after he came to America. Besides his blacksmith work, he built the first bridge across the Grand River in Iowa at James Landing....The great wagon trains were moving steadily to the west over the various trails. My father was able to see these trains go by year after year, crossing the plains to the far west.

Evidence on the family becomes more plentiful after they moved to Gentry County, Missouri, about a hundred miles southeast of Council Bluffs. What prompted this move is not altogether clear, though there is a word-of-mouth tradition suggesting that there were Mormons who sought revenge on George Nelson for his defection from the LDS movement. Whether this is what led them to move to Missouri is really only speculative, but there are some engaging details worth consideration. This account was most dramatically expressed to me by Margie Walker Deering, a granddaughter of Chrisanna Nelson Walker, when I spoke with her in Missouri. Before I raised the topic in our conversation of George's defection from the Mormons, Margie exclaimed that she had often heard from members of the family that the "Mormons sent an avenging angel to kill George," but she had never been informed any details as to why.

Aside from providing an interesting bit of corroborating evidence regarding George's defection, Margie's words left me wondering what could have given rise to such a colorful bit of legend. Later while reading about that era, I learned there were reports of Mormon assassination squads known as "Danites," sometimes referred to as "Destroying Angels," who settled scores with enemies of the LDS; though allegations, rumors and embellishments quickly outpaced what substance there was to these claims. There are reports of a number of unsolved murders in the Kaneshville area in the early 1850s being attributed to Danites.

In another branch of the family, that of Cornelius Nelson, a number of people told me they had heard stories of George Nelson arriving home on his horse one evening and family members going out to greet him as he dismounted. At that moment, everyone heard the distinct sound of a rifle being cocked nearby. George immediately jumped back on his horse and fled.²² Again, we are left with more mystery, for what has been passed down contains no details about when or where the event took place. We can only surmise that an episode like this may have given rise to stories of an assassin, which became an avenging angel.

In another affidavit in George Nelson's Union Army pension file, a B.F.

Sales claimed to have been, since 1858, a neighbor of the Nelsons in Gentry County, Missouri. The affidavit was signed thirty-one years later, so there may be some room for error, but for sure, the Nelsons moved from Iowa to Missouri around this time. A third son, George Washington Nelson, was born to George and Margaret in Gentry County on January 25, 1860. On the 1860 census for the Huggins Township of Gentry County, the Nelson family is listed, with a few of the names and ages garbled.

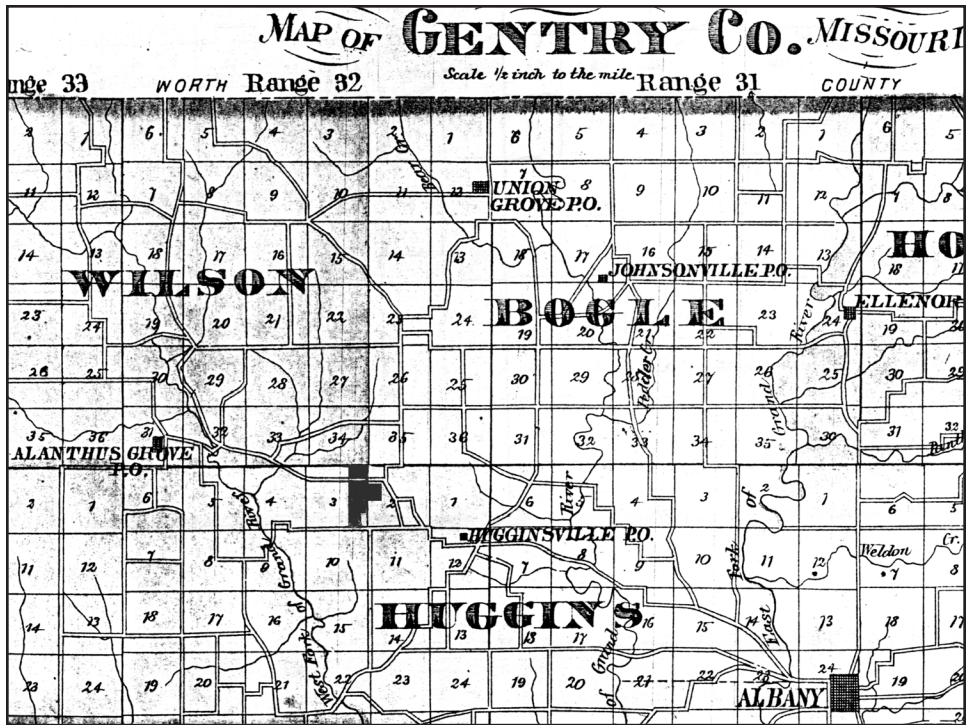
The family settled on a parcel of land roughly ten miles west of the county seat of Albany (known as Athens until 1857). Alanthus, three miles farther to the west, was the nearest community to where they set up home. The Huggins township, situated between the east and west forks of the Grand River, contains a fair amount of bottom land and, at that time, about a third of it was wooded. Settlers had first arrived in the township in the early 1840s. John Huggins, for whom the township was named, came in 1845 and later established a post office and a country store at a crossroads a mile-and-a-half east of where the Nelsons purchased property. The store operated out of a frame room that was added to the log cabin where the Frank Sales family lived. A stagecoach traveling north from Stanberry used to stop at this sparsely populated site, which was known as Hugginsville (though later, around 1895, it was changed to Voyage to avoid confusion with Higginsville, Missouri). Huggins, who for a brief period served as the judge in the county, also set aside two acres nearby for a cemetery and a chapel. A small frame church building was constructed in 1854 and was known in the early days as the Hugginsville Chapel. Circuit-riding Methodist ministers made periodic trips to the chapel to deliver sermons and minister to church members.²³

The Nelson properties present a bit of a puzzle in surviving records. A tornado ripped apart the county courthouse in Albany in 1883 and destroyed many of the old records from before that time, leaving only scattered clues with which to reconstruct property transactions. The Nelsons must have purchased

their property, as the Homestead Act did not pass until 1862. The place they selected was not a choice parcel, and if they had expected life to improve after moving down from Iowa, they were in for some big disappointments. The earliest record we have of Nelson properties is actually a copy of a deed of sale handed down through the family indicating George and Margaret tried to sell 160 acres in Huggins township in September of 1860. The sale apparently was not completed because the properties listed are the same as those in the family years later. Given that the asking price was \$1,200 for the property, while the county tax assessor's book in 1861 valued the same parcels plus sixty additional acres owned by the Nelsons at \$540, probably explains why the sale fell through.²⁴ We might also conclude from this that George and Margaret were not happy with the property they had acquired in Gentry County. Making any profits from farming the clayish soil proved difficult. Years of frustrated efforts to divest themselves of these properties without incurring a deep loss lay in store for Nelson family members.

What the Nelson's had in property holdings at one point totaled 222 acres, including six acres listed as "improved" and one house.²⁵ Improved could mean it had a fence around it. The house was probably a simple structure, not much more than a shack. Electricity, we must remember, was eighty years in the future for rural areas like this. A creek, which dries up during the summer, runs through the southwest corner of this property, and the land slopes down gently toward the creek. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, a road going from Hugginsville to Alanthus ran right through the spread. Today, county road F passes a few hundred yards to the east and Saddlesoap Hill Road borders it on the south.²⁶

On an 1877 map of the county showing property owners, the name "Margaret Wilson" appears on these parcels, which I have concluded is a mistake made by the map makers. George Nelson died in 1871, and the properties would thereafter have been in Margaret Nelson's name.²⁷ The next available map is

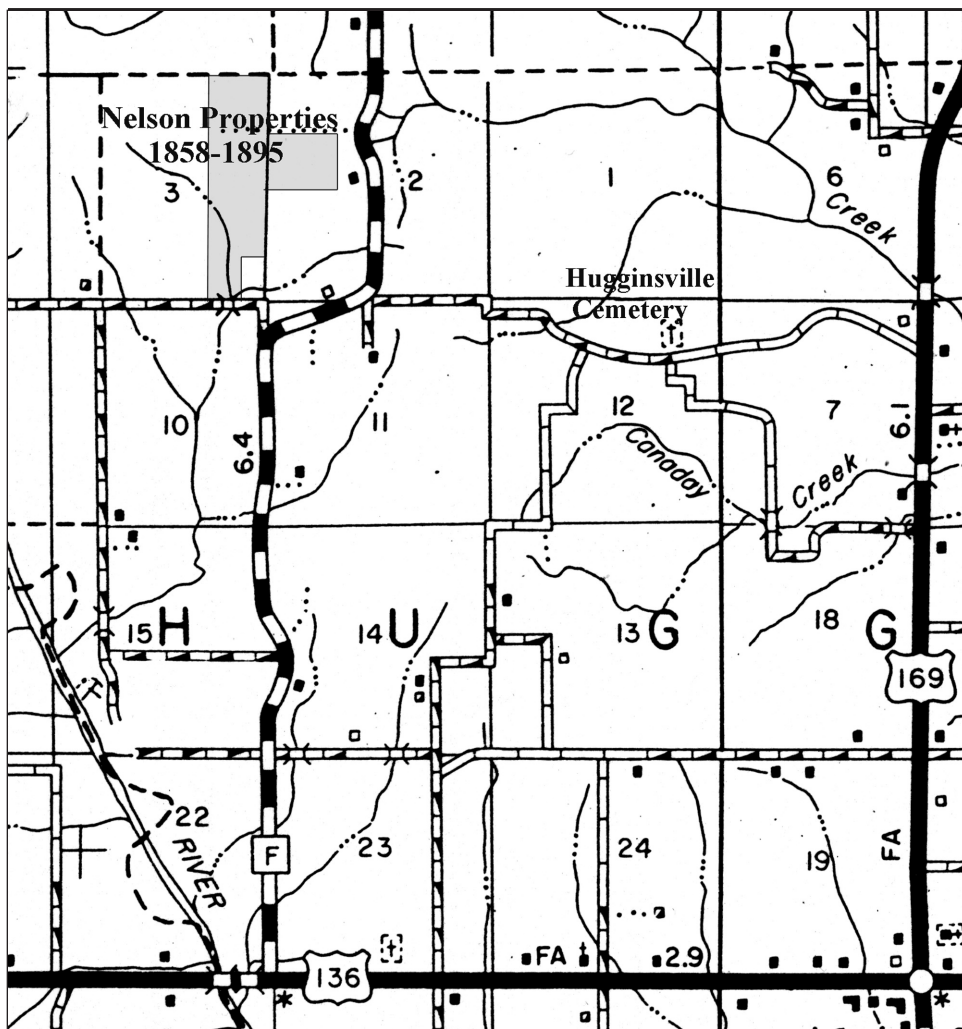


A portion of an 1877 map of Gentry County, Missouri. The Nelson properties (blocked out) lay in sections two and three in the Huggins Township.

from 1896, after Margaret’s death, and C.L. Nelson, G.W. Nelson and Green Walker (Chrisanna’s husband) are listed as owners of 181 acres of the same adjoining parcels on that map.²⁸

It appears the Nelson family struggled to make ends meet after moving to Missouri. George probably returned to his blacksmith trade to keep the farm afloat. But there were other, more serious difficulties that arose following the onset of the Civil War.

In the midst of growing conflicts over the issue of slavery, Missouri was admitted to the union in 1821 as a “compromise state.” Many people moved to Missouri from southern states, and many who came from the Midwest had



Where the Nelson properties were is indicated here on a contemporary map of central Gentry County. The old Hugginsville Cemetery is to the east, on Folgate Road.

previously lived in the South. There were plenty of others whose loyalties were with the North. As a result, when the Civil War broke out in 1861, Missouri became a divided and conflicted region, with the Grand River (running diagonally across the state, from the northwest to the southeast) forming a rough dividing line between the factions. Considerable conflict occurred in Missouri during the first year of the war, more than in Virginia and West Virginia combined.

There were few, if any, slave owners in Gentry County, Missouri, before the war and most people's sympathies lay with the Union forces when the war began. One account that has come down through the family suggests George was appalled at the way he saw enslaved African Americans being treated when the family first set foot on American soil in New Orleans, and vowed that if given the opportunity he would do what he could to change things.²⁹ However, the biggest threat residents of Gentry County faced during the war was actually from bandits, who took advantage of the breakdown of law-and-order and wreaked havoc across the state. A half dozen murders were reportedly perpetrated in Gentry County during the war years. Local militias known as Home Guard units were common in Missouri. Organized under the command of General Lyon, they were deployed to protect local citizens against attacks by roving outlaws and enemy guerilla detachments. The Gentry County Home Guards, locally organized and under the command of Colonel Manlove Cranor, were, additionally, assigned guard duty along the Hannibal and St. Joseph railroad line. The closest the people of Gentry County came to witnessing a battle was in the summer of 1861 when the Gentry County Home Guards, under the command of Colonel Cranor, confronted Confederate forces commanded by Colonel Patton just northeast of Alanthus on what is known as Pius Ridge. Fortunately for the local residents, the two commanding officers met under "compromise tree" and worked out an understanding that avoided conflict.³⁰

There was a George Nelson from Gentry County who served under Captain Stockton in Company A of Colonel Cranor's militia. Additional evidence that

this was our ancestor comes from a letter Christian L. Nelson wrote years later when responding to some written questions, noting his father had served in the Civil War under Colonel Cranor. No details were provided on the extent of his service.³¹

According to records I found in the National Archive, a George Nelson joined this unit in Gentry County on August 29, 1861, and was discharged twenty-one days later. On September 17, two days before Nelson was discharged, the Gentry County Home Guards were involved in combat at Blue Mills Landing, along with the Iowa Third Infantry. The Union forces lost eleven men in the skirmish and another thirty-nine were wounded. The National Archives record gives no details of why George was discharged or if he was even involved in this battle.³²

There are oral reports that have come down through the family about George having been in the cavalry and serving under General Grant, that he participated as a color bearer in Sherman's march to the sea, and that he was injured during a charge in the midst of combat while serving as a color bearer, but I have heard nothing about his being in combat at Blue Mills Landing. Nonetheless, it is probably true he was in a local militia unit early in the war before he joined the Thirty-fifth Missouri Regiment of the Union Army.

Less ambiguous evidence that we have of George's involvement in the Civil War offers a more modest portrait than what some of the oral traditions have suggested. Records preserved in the National Archives show he enlisted in St. Joseph, Missouri, on August 21, 1862, for a three-year stint of service and was assigned to Company B of the Thirty-fifth Missouri Regiment of the United States Volunteers, an infantry unit under the command of Captain Alexander Scott and Colonel Foster. Given the military training George had received in Denmark with the King's Guards, oral reports kept alive in the family about his superior performance in training are credible. He is said to have excelled particularly in swordsmanship, quickly outmaneuvering the drill instructor, as

well as displaying superb defensive skills when using a shield to protect himself. George A. Nelson, a grandson of George, wrote of him becoming “a drill sergeant in a Missouri Company of the Union Army as he was the best trained military man in the community where the company was organized.”³³ Assigned to bear the colors for Company B, he was given the rank of sergeant.

Color guard units during the Civil War generally consisted of ten to fifteen men who bore the national, state and regimental flags. Placed near the center of the regiment, they served as a reference point during military maneuvers and a rallying point if a retreat occurred. Keeping the colors aloft was critical to maintaining the morale of the regiment during combat. Defending the colors—which had particular symbolic importance—from capture by the enemy was also a crucial task of the bearers. These soldiers were frequently targeted by enemy sharpshooters, and others in the color guard were trained to immediately hoist the colors again if one of their comrades fell while carrying one of the flags. Casualty rates among color bearers were high. But it was during training, not in combat, that tragedy struck for George, thus ending his military service soon after it began.

Preserved in George Nelson’s pension file at the National Archive in Washington, D.C., is a firsthand description, dictated and signed by George, of how his injury occurred.³⁴ The letter was written by the Buchanan County clerk as part of a petition for increased pension benefits due to George’s continued disability:

Applicant being the color sergt of the 35th Mo Infantry was on Battalion Drill with his regiment in November 1862 at Jefferson City, Mo. Applicant in the performance of his duty was bearing the regimental colors at the center of his regiment. Said regiment was engaged in a sham fight with an artillery company being under the command of his Col. That said regiment was ordered to charge on the said Battery and in so doing was ordered to go at a double quick step down a hill, over a deep ditch and up another hill. Applicant in attempting

to leap the said ditch to keep in line with his regiment failed to jump to the opposite side of the ditch because the wind was blowing very hard and the colors were very heavy. Applicant in making an effort to reach the opposite said [*sic*] of said ditch as aforesaid strained himself and ruptured himself and caused the hernia described in his said application heretofore filed.

In the aftermath of this incident, George was taken to Cairo, Illinois, to recover from his injury. Twenty-five days after he was hurt, on December 18, 1862, he was given a Certificate of Disability for Discharge. The reason given for his disability is a rupture “caused by leaping a ditch while on drill at Jefferson City, Mo. This happened on the 22nd day of November 1862.” The injury is described as a “scrotal hernia of the left side, which entirely disqualifies him to perform the duties of a soldier. Said injury was received while in the line of his duty.” It is not altogether clear why, but George must have remained on the disabled list for another month. On January 13, 1863, he was given a second Certificate of Disability for Discharge, which reiterated most of what was on the first certificate.³⁵ We can assume that after this he made his way back to his home and family in Gentry County, less than five months after he had enlisted, as a man who never again was able to enjoy full physical health.

Life back on the farm must have been excruciatingly difficult for him. Margaret bore a new child, Elizabeth, on March 30 of that year, but four-and-a-half months later on August 15 this new baby girl died. With his impairment, George was limited in what he could do in the blacksmith shop. For a pension he began receiving four dollars a month, which was hardly adequate. He made repeated attempts to get an increase in pension payments. Friends and neighbors signed affidavits testifying to the extent of his disablement, letters that were filed away in his government pension file. One report submitted by a doctor, G.R. Crockill, noted that George was “suffering from a scrotal hernia. Bowel is gradually pressing into scrotum so as to be much in his way in walking. It has also incapacitated him from working at his trade to a considerable extent.

It is on the increase at this time. Dis[ability] ¾.” Following this last report, his pension was raised to six dollars per month in June of 1867. Interestingly, it was about this time in medical history that surgical techniques were developed in Europe to correct hernias, but there were few doctors trained to perform the technique in the United States.

With the help of their children and neighbors, George and Margaret struggled to keep their farm going. We are left to imagine what a troubling time they had. Yet, they managed to add to their family. Another son, patriotically named Abraham Lincoln Nelson, was born on December 16, 1865. A little more than two years later, on March 31, 1868, when Margaret was forty-five years old, they had another daughter, who they also named Elizabeth. Like the first Elizabeth, this one died young as well, on February 28, 1869.

At one time there was talk of moving to California. With George directing the work, his son Cornelius cut down a large oak tree on their farm. George told people they were going to make wagons out of that old oak and use them to move to California.³⁶ The dream may have helped to keep his spirits up, but his body kept failing him.

Life was getting more and more painful for George. He was at risk of his small intestine becoming strangulated as it increasingly descended down through the rupture in his abdomen. That clearly is what finally caused his death. We have an account of his demise given in an affidavit recorded fifteen years later and signed by an acquaintance, B.F. Burroughs, who was present when George died on October 3, 1871. Burroughs testified that,

Nelson was pulling up prairie hay on witness fathers land when he was taken sick a short time before his death. That he complained of his bowels hurting him and took off his shoes. Witness says that he took him [to] town (about 6 miles distance) in a spring wagon, that during the journey [to] town he continually complained of his bowels hurting him. Then he was present when the said Nelson died. That he noticed before his death that those attending

him put poultices on his abdomen. That it has always been his understanding that he died from rupture.³⁷

George was laid to rest alongside his two recently deceased daughters in the cemetery next to the little chapel in Hugginsville. Margaret was left with six children, three of whom were still minors. Mary was twenty-two and seems to have been living at that point in a different residence, as she is listed separately in the 1870 census. Christian was twenty and in the years following assumed responsibility for the family farm. Cornelius was seventeen and eager to move on. Chrisanna was fifteen, George W. was eleven, and Abe was six. (These three minor-age children qualified for entitlement benefits when their father died of his injury, and later filed applications and accompanying affidavits to support their claims. But there is no evidence that they actually received any assistance.)³⁸ George and Abe would have been still attending school at the Center Grove School that was about a mile southwest of where they lived. (A later school, built near where the original one stood on Saddlesoap Hill Road, is now crumbling.) A seventh surviving child, Birthe, twenty-four years old and still in Denmark, had kept in touch with her family in America with occasional letters.

A couple of years later, two of the grown Nelson kids, Mary and Cornelius, pulled up stakes, leaving behind the daily struggles the family was experiencing in Gentry County to seek their fortunes out west. Both found spouses in California. Their presence was sorely missed, as was their help in caring for their aged mother and the family farm. Those remaining in Missouri muddled along, often caught in indecision over just what they wanted to do. There were about sixty acres of cultivatable land on the farm, but weather conditions frequently defeated the best efforts of Christian and his younger brothers, straining relations between them. Yet, as long as their mother was still living, they felt bound to that piece of the earth.

We begin to get a little clearer picture of what was transpiring in the fam-

ily after 1880. The brothers and sisters in the family occasionally corresponded with each other, and Cornelius, out in California, saved the letters he received from that date forward.³⁹ More details from these letters will be given in the next chapter, but I present here what could be deciphered from them about Margaret's last years.

Margaret appears to have suffered from tuberculosis and gradually weakened toward the end of her life, though her condition would sometimes improve for brief periods. Chrisanna and George W. both spoke of her illness and occasional improvements in letters sent in the spring of 1880. Her illness was compounded by grief when word arrived that her daughter Mary had died in California on March 26, 1880. In his convoluted spelling and grammar, George wrote that this is what "was on mother sickend Hart and Her feble frame, it apirse that ther is mor trubles and sorow on this lo ground Below times is Hard." The following summer Chrisanna wrote "we are all wel but mother is poorly." Christian writes in November that "mother her helth is vary poor she is bead fast the most of the time." Her condition worsens through the winter. In March of 1882, Christian again writes, saying "Mother she is vary poorly She has ben con find to her bed al winter the docter sais that her lungs is affected. But he thinks that she will Get up a gin when warm wether sets in She is a little Better then She was. She donte Coff as Much as she did."

On May 10, George wrote that he thought the end was near. "mother She is vary Low this night i am faid She wont Last meney Days more She has faild day By day tel she has got So week that she cant handel her Body or feet and her throat is so sore that she cant Eat Iney thing Like meet". Chrisanna, who stayed by her bedside most of the time, reported later that in the final weeks what little talking Margaret was able to do was in the Danish language. She died on May 19, 1882.

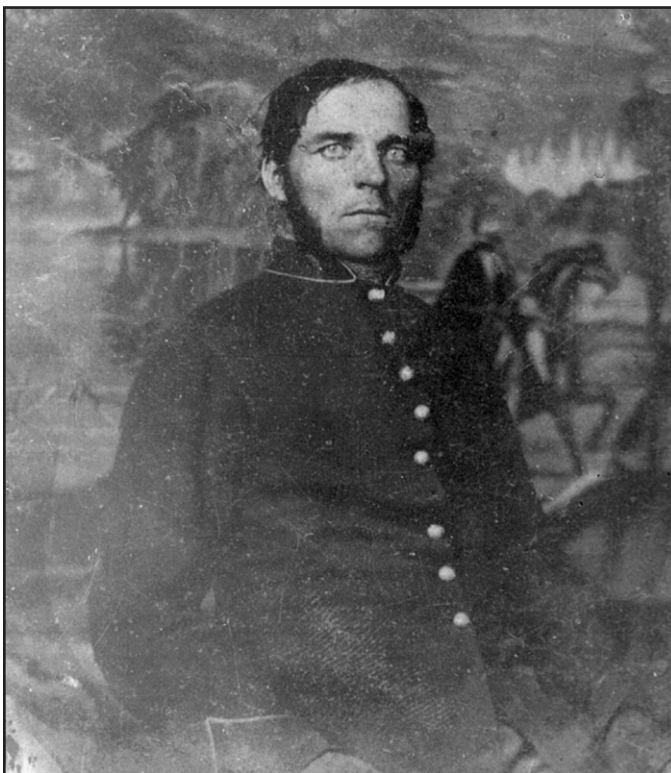
A couple of days later, George wrote to inform his brother Cornelius and his sister-in-law of the sad news:

Der sister and Brother I seat myself this Evening to inform you that Our der mother is dead She dide Fridey the 19th twenty minet after one O Clock She was sincebile to the Last She was Barid Saturday Between 10 and One o Clock She Dide hapy She told me a few dayes before she deide that she was tird of life that death would be sweet to her it was a Biter Day i sall neve forget the Last look at the meeting hous and then she was lored in the gave to be seen no more on Erth it is ofel hard to grive I don't think mothe had an eneme in the world all her old frends came and seen her when she was lying sick and they all loved her o she was a Loving mother the took her corps in the meeting hous and the minester read the 15 chapter of first Corinth and then they sung the Famer him i would not Live Always and then the minester Deliverd a prare and then she was carrade to the Grave and then they lore her in the Grave to rest tel the Sun of man Shall com to geather in home his Jurell [?] I must close I cant write iney mor I Feel so so Bad Home is no more Home For me we ar all well as could Be Expected under the sad misfortion

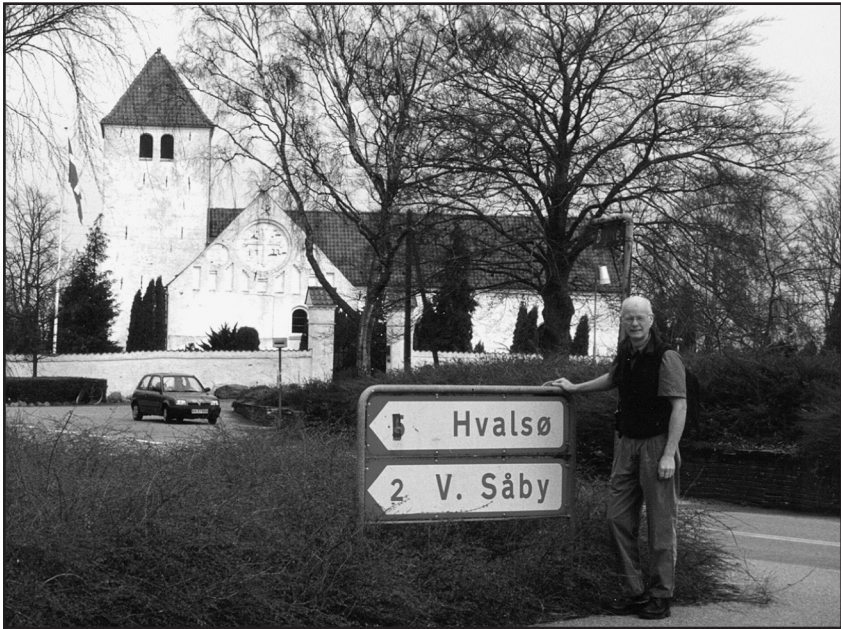
So no more at the present From Geo Nelson to Mr and Mrs Cornelious Nelson Good By Write Often For we ar Lonsom

Christian wrote to Cornelius a few months later to say that another memorial service for their mother was planned for the twentieth of August, with a Church of God minister from Stanberry presiding. He also asked if Cornelius would help with the costs of a monument to place over the gravesite of family members buried in the Hugginsville cemetery. The subject came up again thirteen years later when Christian was in the midst of selling off the family properties in Missouri. For \$60 “We had a Monument put up over Father Mother and our to sisters Graves.” That short pedestal still stands near the north end of the cemetery. The original Methodist chapel that once stood nearby was replaced by a newer church building in 1884. That second church was used until around 1948. For years afterward it was the last of what remained of the once

lively crossroads known as Hugginsville. Damaged by storms and plundered by vandals, it was dismantled in 1974. Folgate Road, which runs by the cemetery, was improved and graveled in 1991, making access to the site off state highway 169 relatively easy. It is a quiet, peaceful, somewhat desolate place, with only a couple of distant buildings in sight, spread out on expansive, grassy hillsides interspersed with wooded areas.

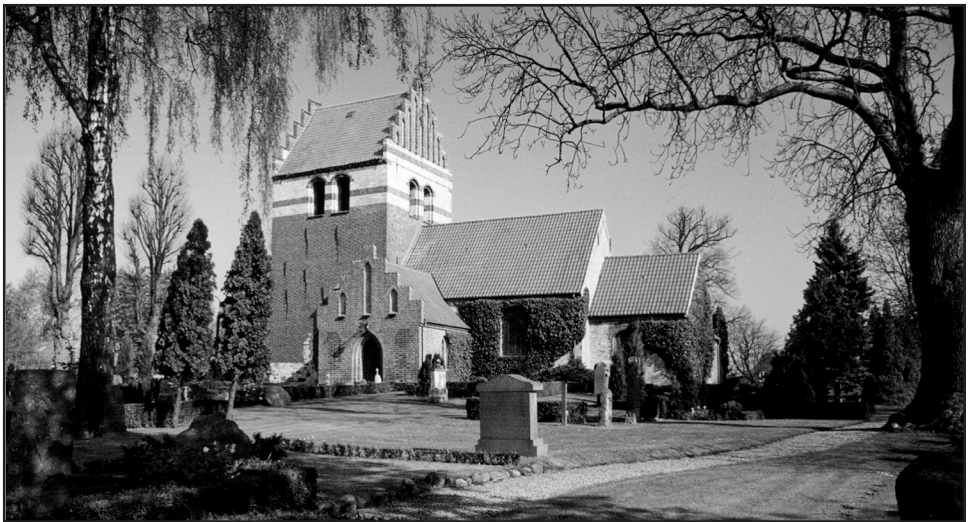


George Nelson immigrated to the United States from Denmark in 1853, along with his wife Margaret and two of their children. He joined the Union Army in 1862 and was injured during a training exercise. This is the only photo we have of him and there are no photos of Margaret. Photo courtesy of Hesse Watts





Kirke Såby in Denmark, **top left**, built in the twelfth century, ten miles west of the city of Roskilde, is where the Nelson ancestors attended church, baptised their children, were married and buried their dead. The nearby village of Vester Såby, **bottom left**, is where they lived, working as tradesmen and farmers. The Ledreborg manor house, **above**, built in the 1740s by Count Johan Ludvig Holstein, is where Margaret Nelson's parents worked as servants when she was a child. A beautiful little church building a mile away at Allerslev, **below**, is where Margaret was baptised after her birth on February 6, 1823.





Mary Nelson Halck was born in Denmark in 1849. She was the eldest of the Nelson children to immigrate to America. At age twenty-four, she left home in Missouri and travelled to California, marrying Julius Halck soon thereafter. Together they had two children before Mary died in the gold mining town of Sonora in March of 1880.



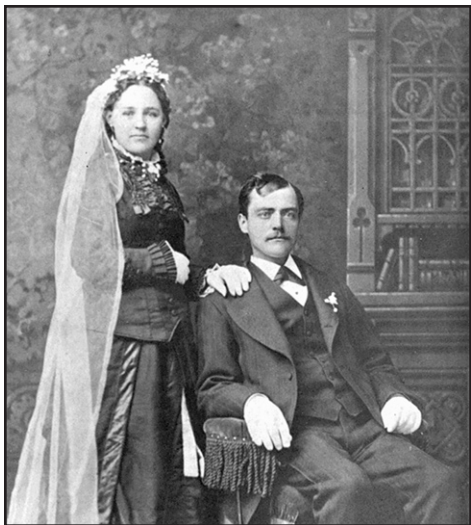
The Christian and Mary Nelson Family. Christian (1851–1923), the oldest of George and Margaret’s sons, maintained the family farm in Missouri until 1897, then moved with his family to a farm near Silesia, Montana. Pictured above, at their family home in Montana about 1908, are: in the back row, left, Bertha, Christian C. (“Lum”), Lillian, Clarence; middle row, Dan, Mary E., Christian L., Mary May; front row, Wiltha Fanny, Roy, Clara, Malinda. Photo courtesy of Winston Nelson



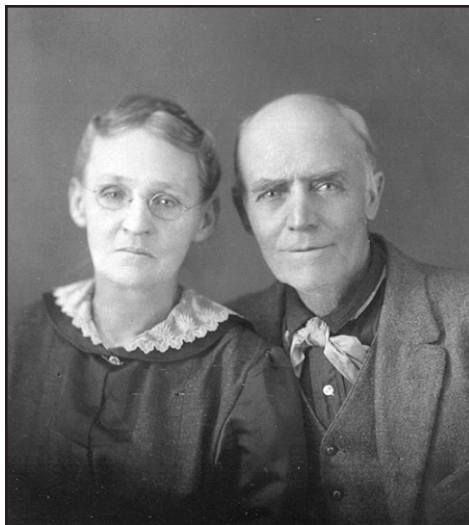
The Christian and Mary Nelson Family in Montana around 1913, after a number of rooms had been added onto their original log cabin. There are four generations represented in this photo. The white bearded gentleman in the middle is William Whitely, Mary Christian's father, who was visiting from Nebraska. To the right of him is Anton Jensen, holding Harold, then Lillian (who was married to Anton), Daniel, Christian L. and Mary. From the left, in the front, are Ray Jensen, Roy Nelson, Earl "Bud" Jensen, and Roy Jensen; in back are Clara, Malinda Jensen, Jim Jensen and Fanny. Photo courtesy of Hesse Watts

The Nelson siblings gathered for a photo on the occasion of Lum's 50th wedding anniversary, 1962. In the back are Clara Green, Roy, Fanny Smith and Lum. In front are Clarence, Lillian Jensen, Dan, and Mary McMillen. Photo courtesy of Charlotte Baxtrom





Anna Amelia Sutherland and Cornelius Nelson were married in Sonora, California, on December 12, 1880. Photo courtesy of Irene Groom



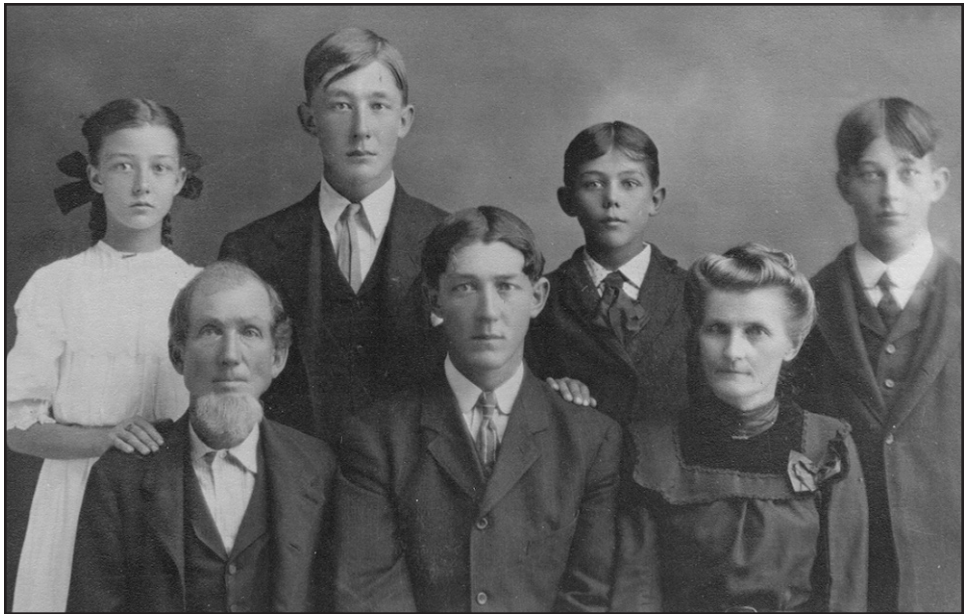
Anna (1862–1922) and Cornelius (1854–1949), near the end of Anna's life. Photo courtesy of Ava Kenny



Cornelius and Anna and their six children. In the back row, from the left, are Walter, Charles, Lillian, George, Mabel and Clarence, ca. 1905. Photo courtesy of Dale Nelson



The Cornelius and Anna Nelson family homesteaded on Dixie Mountain, northwest of Portland, Oregon, in 1889. Pictured here are Cornelius, Anna, Clarence, Lillian, Walter and Mabel in front of the original log cabin in which the family lived in Oregon. Photo courtesy of Elsie Nelson Cornelius



Chrisanna Nelson married Anthony Green Walker in 1886 and together they had five children: Minnie Ellen, Anthony Green (“Tuff”), Jr., Oliver Teller (“Ollie”), Earl Homer (“Mac”) and Quincy Monroe (seated between his parents in the front). Photo courtesy of Irene Groom



In addition to raising her own children, Chrisanna raised Anthony’s children from an earlier marriage. Pictured here are, from the left, Fannie Angelico, Franklin, Cleo Patra, Anthony Green, Sr., Phetna (“Toby”) and Philip Chester Walker. Photo courtesy of Irene Green

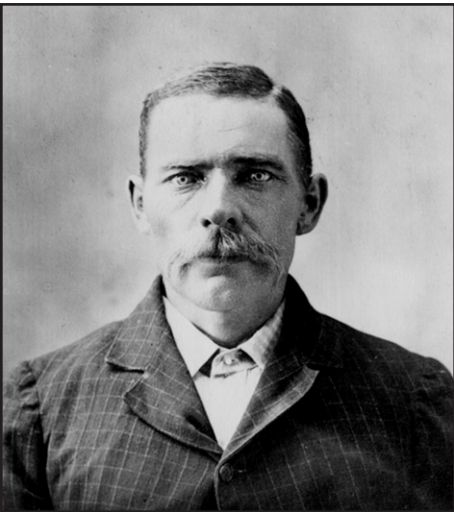


Chrisanna Nelson Walker, pictured here with her daughter Minnie, lived out her life in Gentry County, Missouri, near the old Nelson farm. Most of her children remained in Gentry County as well, including her son A.G., Jr., better known as "Tuff." **Below**, Tuff poses with his crew in front of his steam powered tractor and threshing machine. Photos courtesy of Irene Groom





In 1901, when the photo above was taken, the George Washington Nelson family was living in Nodaway County, NW Missouri. Pictured here are, from the left, Olia, Martha, Bertha, Cornelia, Floyd, Margaret, Laura, baby Olive, George, Jr., and George, Sr. Photo courtesy of Charlotte Baxtrom



George W. Nelson, 1901, Stanberry, Missouri. Photo courtesy of Charlotte Baxtrom



Laura Alice Nelson, 1907, Tologa, Oklahoma. Photo courtesy of Charlotte Baxtrom



George and Laura Alice moved their family to Oklahoma in 1901, then to New Mexico around 1908, and finally to Cortez, Colorado in 1917. Pictured here in Cortez are: From left back row: Floyd Nelson (age 30, wearing necktie); Ethyl Nelson; George Nelson Jr (20); Martha Nelson Ownbey (24); Ina Ownbey (child); Charlie Ownbey (36); Bertha Nelson Shenold (25); Aline Shenold (child in front of Bertha); Jim Shenold (33); 2nd row from back: Anna Nelson (14, wearing white blouse with black tie); Easter Hazel (11); Mary Ownbey (3); Lois Shenold (3); Olive Nelson (17); Cornelia Palmer (28); Margaret (32); Laura Alice (52); Ferrel Nelson (child); George W Nelson Sr. (58); Front row: Guy Palmer (6); George Ownbey (5); Alice Palmer (4); Richard Nelson (8). Photo courtesy of Nancy Horst

Nelson Kids reunion in November of 1941, in Cortez, Colorado. In the back row, from the left are: Olive, Anna, Ola, Martha, Bertha, Easter, Margaret, Cornelia. Front row: Richard, Floyd, George "Wash."
Photo courtesy of Charlotte Baxtrom





Abraham Lincoln Nelson (1865–1950) moved to Colorado early in life, then to Dixie Mountain, Oregon, in 1890, where he homesteaded nearby his brother Cornelius's place. He married Fidelia ("Deal") Ryckman in 1892. Fidelia's family was one of the first to homestead in the Dixie Mountain region, northwest of Portland.

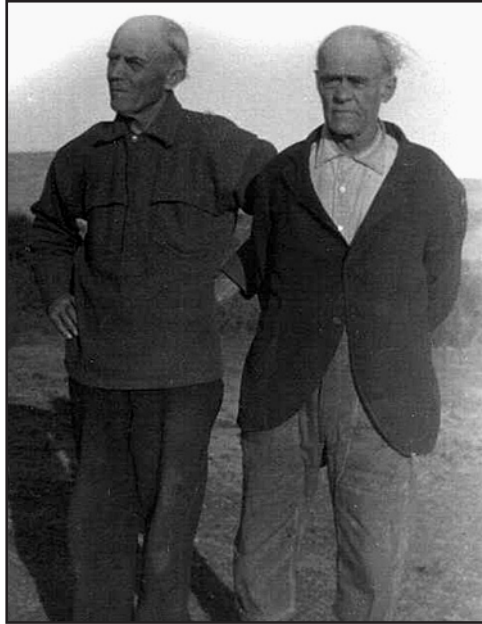
Together Abe and Fidelia had twelve children. Raymond, the youngest, is seen just behind Abe and Fidelia in this photo that was taken around 1921. Photo courtesy of Ray





The Abe and Fidelia Nelson family around 1918. In the back row, from the left: Oscar, George, Roy and Elmer; middle row: Ray (held by Fidelia), Fidelia, Lucy, Myrtle; front row: Tom (held by Abe) Abe, Lewis, Albert. Photo courtesy of Ray Nelson, Jr.

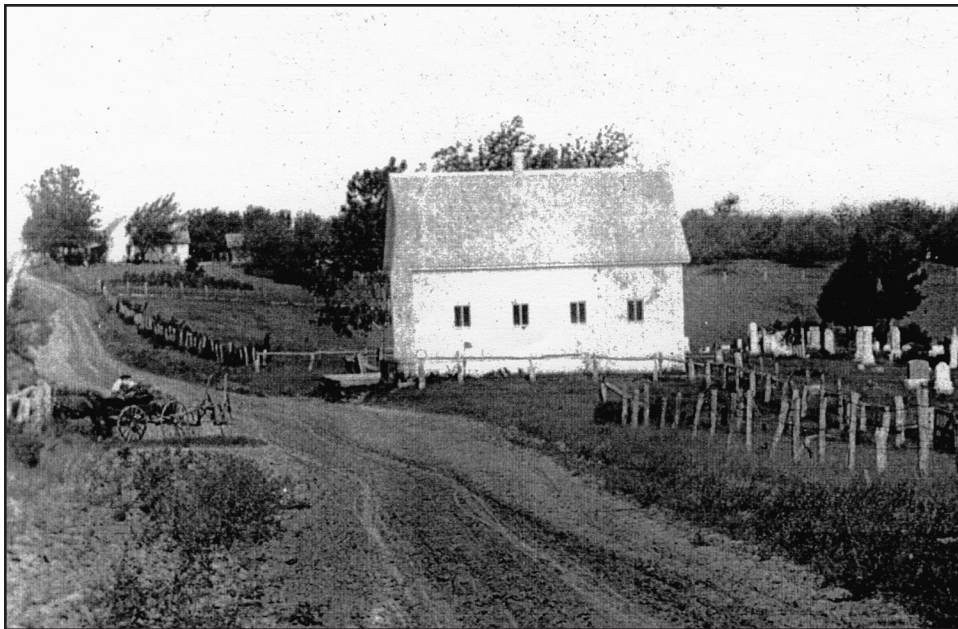
Near the end of Christian's life in 1923, these two elderly Nelson brothers, Cornelius and Christian, met again in Washington after nearly 50 years of separation. They had stayed in touch during the intervening years. Letters Cornelius received from his siblings have been preserved. Photo courtesy of Maggie Applegate



Around 1920, Maggie Verkuyl, a daughter of Marie ("Mary") Nelson Halk (1849–1880), visited her aunts and uncles in Oregon. Maggie is in the center, Cornelius and Anna are on the left, Abe and Fidelia are on the right, and two grandchildren of Cornelius and Anna, Aloa and Liberty Dixon, are in front. Photo courtesy of Irene Groom



Nelson kids and their schoolmates at the Wallace School on Dixie Mountain, Oregon, 1905. Both Abe and Cornelius Nelson's kids attended this one room log cabin school. From the left are: Roy Nelson, Walter Zimmerman, Einer Berggren, Oscar Nelson, Elmer Nelson, John Zimmerman, Jennie Brooks (the teacher), Mia Berggren, Mabel Nelson, Lillian Nelson, holding baby Myrtella Nelson, Clarence Nelson, Walter Nelson, Eva Berggren and Gunner Berggren. Photo courtesy of Dale Nelson



In 1858, the Nelson family moved from Iowa to Gentry County, Missouri, and settled near this rural settlement known as Hugginsville. The church building pictured above was built in 1884 and dismantled in 1974. An earlier log cabin church structure had occupied the same location. The Hugginsville Cemetery, just north of the church site, remains. Photo courtesy of Lester Pierce

The Nelson cemetery monument at Hugginsville still marks the graves of George and Margaret Nelson, two of their daughters (both named Elizabeth) and an unnamed infant son of Christian and Mary Nelson. Lloyd Neal, Irene Groom and Jack E. Nelson visited the site in 1998. Photo by Joanna Nelson



Chapter Four

THE FAMILY DISPERSES

By the end of the 1800s the Nelson family would be spread out from Missouri to California, and from Colorado to Oregon and Montana, plus the branch of the family still in Denmark. Missouri proved to be discouraging for most of George and Margaret's offspring, and the opportunity to venture forth in search of better conditions on new frontiers was enticing at that point in America's history. There remained a family bond, nonetheless, one we can see traces of in old letters that have been preserved.

Most of the old letters we have are those, as mentioned in the last chapter, that Cornelius received from his brothers and his sister Chrisanna. These letters almost invariably display a simple schoolhouse learning in their composition. "Dear Brother, i take my pen in hand to let you no that We Are All Well hoping these few lins may find you the Same when they com to hand." This introduction might be followed by news of tragedy or hardship, but the form seldom deviated from what had been drilled into the Nelson kids in the oneroom school they had attended. Grammar and spelling drills must not have been near as stringent as today, and if their handwriting was ever good, years of infrequent practice made for tortured scribbling. The letters are, with a few exceptions, brief, though at times eloquent in expressing the struggles our pioneering forebears faced. "Times is hard" or "Times is vary dull" was a frequent refrain, dampening any romantic

notions we might entertain about life on the frontier. “Well i Cant think of iny thing more to rite hoping to hear from you soon,” was a typical conclusion.

In this chapter I try to reconstruct from these old letters plus oral sources and other available documents what took place in the lives of the Nelson siblings. For the sake of coherence, I look at each of the seven Nelsons who grew to adulthood in separate subsections. At the end of these respective subsections, I offer glimpses into the lives of their children and some of their grandchildren, inasmuch as I have been able to garner information on these people. In this expanding family tree there is some fascinating diversity. Most of these families earned their living the hard, honest way, as farmers, coal miners, blacksmiths, schoolteachers, truck drivers or loggers. One family traveled in one of the last covered wagons to enter Oregon. Another family headed to Colorado in search of a buried treasure. A couple of Nelsons tried their hand at moonshining for awhile during the years of Prohibition. There was also a shoot-out that pitted two of the Nelson brothers and other posse members against a bandit. It all makes for some engaging family lore.

Birthe Marie Jørgensdatter Hansen (26 February 1847–21 May 1899)

BIRTHE remained an integral part of the family, even though three of her brothers and one of her sisters never met her, due to occasional correspondence between her and her family in America. When Margaret died, her will directed that her estate be divided equally among all of her children, including Birthe, and the surviving offspring of Mary. But there is much about Birthe’s life that remains a mystery.

Later generations of the family in America have often speculated on just why she was left behind in Denmark when the family emigrated. The most

likely scenario is that, as was not that uncommon at the time, she was left with a wealthy family to serve as a form of collateral for money loaned to Jørgen and Margrethe. It was also not unusual for young girls to be employed as domestic servants in exchange for room and board with the family they worked for, plus educational benefits. The suggestion that this sort of arrangement was made for Birthe has been passed down orally. There are also vague recollections of an attempt made by Jørgen to steal her away on the eve of their departure, but the family she was staying with hid her to prevent it from happening. This latter part could well be an embellishment serving to diminish the parent's responsibility, particularly when the child was never redeemed and arrangements for her to join her family in the United States were never completed. We are left to wonder what it must have been like for a child just under six years old to suddenly find herself abandoned in the old country, while her parents, brother and sister set off for America.

Records from Denmark give us some clues of what became of her after the departure of the family. She shows up first on the 1860 census for the village of Veddelev in the Himmelev parish, just north of the city of Roskilde on a peninsula jutting out into the fjord. She is listed as Birthe Marie Jørgensdatter, 14 [*sic*], from K. Såby, living with a married couple by the names of Hans Nielsen and Kirsten Larsdatter; along with Kirsten's parents; Hans's twenty-year-old sister; and an unrelated eighteen-year-old single man by the name of John Mortensen. There is no clear relation between Birthe and these people. Hans shows up on an earlier Himmelev parish census living with his parents, Niels Pedersen and Kirsten Kristoffersdatter.

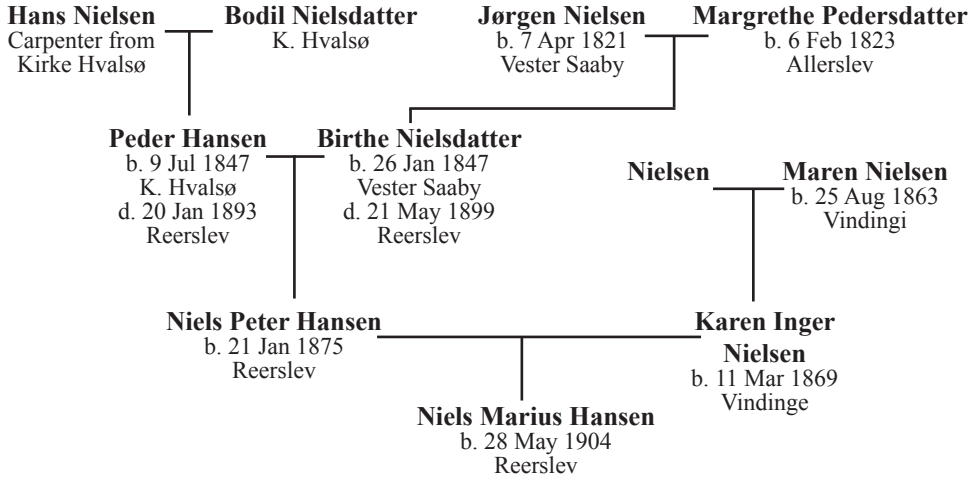
On April 17, 1874, Birthe married Peder Hansen, who was a twenty-six year-old carpenter, and the son of a carpenter, from Kirke Hvalsø, a small community just a few miles south of Kirke Såby. This suggests Birthe stayed in contact with people from her home village area, though the wedding was held in the church at Himmelev. An interesting detail given in the marriage record is

that the two witnesses representing the bride and groom were both named Hans Nielsen, one being the head of the household Birthe had been living in and the other was Peder's father.

Birthe and Peder moved to Reerslev in October of the same year and show up in the record of new arrivals in the Reerslev parish. An address for them that Christian Nelson later passes on in a letter to his brother Cornelius is Reerslev Mark (a field on the outskirts of the village of Reerslev), Hedehusen Station (the nearest railway station, a few miles to the north). Hedehusen continues to serve as a railway station on the line that runs between Copenhagen and Roskilde, just three to four miles east of Roskilde.

Glimpses of this family's subsequent history show up in the old records from Reerslev. They had a son they named Niels Peter Hansen on January 21, 1875. The use of patrilineal family names was spreading in Denmark, as evidenced in his name: his last name is Hansen, not Pedersen. A second son was born nine years later on September 26, 1884, and named Jens Jørgen Hansen. But Jens only lived for seventeen days, until October 13. A brief mention of the birth and death of this second child appears in a letter Christian sent to Cornelius in June of 1885, when Christian reports he had received a letter from "Birty" earlier that spring containing the sad news. In the census records for 1880 and 1890, a family of three—Peder, Birthe and Niels Peter—appears. A record of the death of Peder occurs on January 20, 1893. Birthe survives until May 21, 1899. In the 1901 census, Niels is listed as living with a wife, Karen [Inger] Nielsen (born March 11, 1869). Karen a few years later gave birth to a child, Niels Marius Hansen, on May 28, 1904. When a census was taken in 1906, Niels Peder Hansen (a different spelling from Peter) and Karen Inger Hansen (she had taken his family name) were listed with their child, Niels Marius, as well as Karen's mother, and what appears to be Karen's younger brother. A final record I have seen, the 1911 census for Reerslev, lists this same family minus Karen's brother. To protect people's privacy the Danish government restricts access to

The Family of Birthe (Nielsdatter) Hansen



more recent records from the nineteenth century, so I have yet to learn what became of Niels Marius, and whether he had any offspring.

As I mentioned above, there was correspondence between Birthe and family members in the United States. Christian refers in his correspondence to Cornelius to seven letters received from Birthe, but he shares very little of what these letters contained. The first allusion to a letter is in September of 1881, when Christian notes in passing that there had been no letter from Denmark for eighteen months. This means a letter came before Margaret died, and we can assume there was previous correspondence between Birthe and her parents. Another letter arrived around March of 1882, but Christian tells Cornelius he has not yet had it translated from Danish. The next reference to a letter from Birthe is in June 1885, where we learn of the death of Birthe's second child. In July of 1886, Christian tells Cornelius he plans to send photos of the family to Birthe, but he says he has had no new letters. Sometime later that year, Christian writes to his brother that all is well in Denmark and "Sister Bertey" wants to get letters

from others in the family. Christian includes her address in his note to Cornelius. One year later, Christian reminds Cornelius to write to her, saying he has had no new letter, but Birthe wants to know why others don't write. The fifth letter from Denmark arrived early in 1892, and Christian reported Birthe wanted to know what had been done with her part of the estate and had communicated all was well in Denmark. A year later, Birthe's husband died, but there is no word of the news being passed on to her siblings in America. The next news from her came in the fall of 1895, when she responded to Christian, telling him to send her money from the sale of the estate in the form of a bank draft. A final reference to correspondence from Birthe is made by Christian in January of 1896, when he reports to his brother that "Birthey got her money."

At least one old letter from Birthe has been preserved, and it is possible there are more buried in among family records somewhere. The one that has recently come to light was saved by Easter Hazel Baker (born April 1, 1907), the surviving, youngest daughter of George W. Nelson.⁴⁰ It was written to Christian, but there is no date given. The content suggests it was written shortly after Birthe received news of Margaret's death (May 19, 1882), and it does not appear to be one of the letters that Christian told Cornelius about receiving. The original is in Danish and is damaged and unreadable in places. In translation it reads as follows, with ellipses marking the unreadable damaged spots:

Dear Brother, I would like to tell you that we have received a letter from you. Johannes Mortensen is dead and... have written a letter for us last year and we have received it. It is sad to hear that mother was dead but she was so weakened so there was nothing else than death to think of. You want to hear how we are in Denmark. We have 20 tourndre of land.... 5 cows and 2 horses and our expense [lease payment]...will be four tourne of grain...and we can get a harvest...tourndre [plus] seed grain. We have had six Rigsdaler for one tourndre seed. It is about three mark for one pound butter and we

have 3 English mile for the nearest market town and that is Roskilde. I would like to hear about your harvest and hear about the prices you have...on corn grain and how many toundre land you have cultivated, and how the land was before cultivation. Now I will finish these lines with kindly regards to all off you. There are no changes for us since you wrote last time.

This letter opens a small window giving us some understanding of Birthe's life in Denmark. Johannes Mortensen is probably the person listed in the 1860 census who was living with the same family Birthe was staying with at the time. He must have been someone the family knew from earlier on, as she writes as though Christian knows who she is speaking about. Twenty toundre of land is about 32.5 acres, suggesting that Birthe and Peter leased and farmed a reasonably sized piece of property for small-time farmers in Denmark. Five cows and two horses enabled them to sell milk and butter, and gave them a team with which to work the farm fields. A Danish *rigsdaler* was equivalent to about half a U.S. dollar at the time. One sees evidence of a growing cash crop economy in these figures, a change that significantly altered agriculture in Denmark in the nineteenth century and led to improved lives for farmers. All in all, Birthe and Peter were doing rather well, probably better than Birthe's siblings were doing in America.

During our recent trip to Denmark, I tried to locate people who might be distant relatives in this branch of the family. I was hoping there might be oral traditions passed down through generations of Hansens that might help clear up some of the mystery surrounding Birthe's life. Hansen, like Nielsen, is one of the most common names in Denmark, which made the search more difficult. There are about eight Hansen families in Reerslev, which is now a sprawling suburb of Roskilde. A Danish friend helped me make phone calls to some of those Hansen residents of Reerslev. We were put in touch with the eldest Hansen in the community. He told us there were only a few families still living in in the

area that had been there from the early part of the twentieth century. The people we were searching for were unfamiliar to him.

I have yet to determine if Birthe's grandson, Niels Marius Hansen, grew up and had children. But if there are surviving descendants in this family I feel confident that, given the growing interest in genealogical research and the manner in which the Internet has opened up communication between people searching for relatives, it won't be too long before we make contact. People on that side of the family would probably like to know more about what became of the people who left their daughter behind in Denmark when they emigrated to America.

Marie "Mary" Nelson Halck (12 January 1849–26 March 1880)

MARY was almost four years old when the family came to America, and she probably retained memories of the old country and the journey from Denmark to the New World. When she was born on January 12, 1849, she was given the name Marie Jørgensdatter, though later she was known as Mary Nelson. Details about her life are scarce. We have nothing about her childhood, though we can assume she completed her schooling in the one-room school just south of the Nelson farm in Gentry County, Missouri. She appears in a separate entry on the 1870 census for Gentry County, suggesting that at age twenty-two she was maintaining her own residence—probably another house on the family farm.

This young woman must have been adventurous. At the age of twenty-four and still single, she boarded a train, most likely in St. Joseph, Missouri, and headed to California. The evidence is not clear, but she may have talked her younger brother, nineteen-year-old Cornelius, into going with her. The trans-

continental railway was completed in 1869, and it was 1873 when Mary found out what it was like to ride the new rails to the West Coast.

The next record we have of her is a marriage license that was granted on December 27, 1873, in Stanislaus County, California. A marriage ceremony was performed three days later, probably in Modesto, presided over by the justice of the peace. The groom was forty-two-year-old Julius L. Halck. Julius, according to oral tradition among his descendents, was a native of Denmark and was in the merchant marines when he jumped ship in San Francisco in 1853. After that, he eventually made his way up to the gold mining area around Sonora, California. Given that Halck is not a Danish name there may be some confusion of traditions in this account. He does show up in the “Miners and Business Men’s Directory” of Tuolumne County in 1856, working as a miner in Poverty Flat, five miles south of Sonora, and listed as coming from New York. How Mary and Julius met is unclear, though as a twenty-four-year-old single women, she probably encountered plenty of suitors after arriving in California in the wake of the gold rush.⁴¹

Nine months later, on October 3, 1874, Margaret E. Halck was born in San Pedro, a small gold-mining center near Sonora. The family seems to have moved to Sonora shortly after Margaret’s birth. A second daughter, Bertha Mary Halck, was born in Sonora three years later, on December 11, 1877.

Sonora, thirty-five miles southeast of where gold was first discovered at Sutter’s Fort, was still a center of gold mining fever when Mary and Julius moved there. In the early days, it had been a violent environment with Mexican miners pitted against “American” gold seekers. By the 1870s there was still a lot of gold mining going on, but more and more people were finding farming, ranching and sawmills to be a more secure form of livelihood.

Tragedy began to stalk the family a few years after they moved to Sonora. Mary died at age thirty-one on March 26, 1880. Her brother Cornelius was living in Sonora at the time and communicated the news to their mother and his

brothers and sister in Missouri. She was buried in the Old City Cemetery in Sonora under a tombstone that reads, "Mary wife of Julius Halck, born in Wester Sovebye, Denmark." (If the "v" in Sovebye is understood to be a "u," this is a close phonetic spelling of the Danish pronunciation of Såby.)

Chrisanna responded in a letter to Cornelius pleading with him to tell Mr. Halck to not give his children away; for if he did, she feared they could end up being mistreated. Life without a mother must have been difficult for young children in a frontier gold mining community. Whatever illness struck down Mary may have been the same one that killed her youngest daughter less than a year later when Bertha died on December 8, 1881, three days before her fourth birthday.

A letter from Julius to Christian dated February 23, 1884, has been preserved. He assures Christian that "Maggie" and he are enjoying the best of health. Christian had begged him to come visit Missouri, maybe even to settle and help with the family farm. Julius responds by suggesting that Christian and his family should come visit California. He tells of grain fields stretching out as far as the eye can see and of other wonders that would convince Christian to never want to return to Missouri.

Julius remarried three or four years later to a woman named Anna M. Grau. Anna remained childless but she raised Margaret. We hear in the correspondence between Christian and Cornelius of Julius having trouble in his mining operation, fearing that his partner was trying to swindle him out of everything, but no details are given. He remained in the Sonora area and died there at the age of seventy-seven in February of 1908.

Meanwhile, Margaret grew to be a bright young girl, graduating from the nine years of schooling available then as the top student in the county. A story passed down through the family tells how she diligently did her homework while herding cattle for her father. After graduating she taught school for several years in the Charles Flat community near Sonora before getting married.

Margaret (3 October 1874–1968) married Arie Verkuyl (pronounced Verkyle) in 1896 and had six children, one of whom died in infancy and three who lived to be nonagenarians, that is, into their nineties. Those that survived to adulthood were: Julius Verkuyl (20 May 1897–4 February 1989), who served in the Navy during WWI and worked in the woods during his younger years, then ran a cattle ranch in the Charles Flat area near Sonora; Anna Jennet Verkuyl (23 October 1898–15 November 1993); Mary Verkuyl Hall (1903–1974); Margaret Verkuyl Green (5 March 1905–2 February 1998); and Matthew H. Verkuyl (29 August 1908–6 April 1989).

This branch of the family was not forgotten after the early death of Mary. When the family farm in Missouri was sold, an equitable share of the proceeds were sent to Margaret. To her aunt and uncles, she was known as Maggie, and she visited her uncles Cornelius and Abraham in Oregon sometime around 1920. There are a couple of old photos taken during this visit that have been passed down through Chrisanna's family. Margaret survived until 1968 and was laid to rest in the Shaws Flat Cemetery near Sonora. One of her grandsons, Leonard Verkuyl, represented this branch of the extended family of Nelson descendents at a reunion held in Branson, Missouri, in June of 2000.

Christian Louis Nelson (22 January 1851–24 June 1923)

THE YOUNG CHILD born in Vester Såby on January 22, 1851, and named Christian Ludvig Jørgensen was probably named after his great grandfather on his father's side, but the recently deceased king of Denmark, Christian VIII (d. 1848), may also have influenced the choice of his name. His Germanic middle

name, Ludvig, later changed to Louis (and sometimes spelled Lewis), was probably taken from Count Johan Ludvig Holstein (1694–1763), the well-remembered developer of the Ledreborg estate, where Margaret's parents worked as servants when she was growing up. To his brothers and sisters he was known as Chris.

Following the death of their father, Christian became the central figure in the Nelson family. He is the one who stayed and managed the family farm in Gentry County for nearly twenty-five years. Even after their mother died, Christian held on to the old properties until Abe was old enough to inherit his portion, and in hopes of getting a better price. He was appointed the executor of Margaret's estate, and oversaw the division and final sale of the properties and an equitable distribution of the proceeds. For him it was often a thankless task.

The letters Christian wrote to Cornelius span from 1880 to 1896. There are twenty-one of these letters of which I have been able to get copies. For some years we hear nothing, but the entire corpus, together with comments made by his brothers and sister in their letters, and other data on his family, gives us a portrait of Christian between ages twenty-nine and forty-five.

He comes across as a family man, and someone who would prefer to tinker with machines and work in a blacksmith shop than manage a farm. His brother George alleged that Christian wasn't much of a farmer and let the fencing on the place run down, preferring to monkey around with mowers and threshing machines than to tend to the farming. In his defense, he didn't have the best soil to work with and the weather was forever undercutting his efforts. His frustration at not being able to do more comes across repeatedly in his correspondence.

As early as 1881 he talked about wanting to leave the old farm and, like his brother Cornelius, seek better prospects out west. But his loyalty to his mother, even though they didn't always see eye to eye, and family ties with his in-laws kept him bound to the farm in Gentry County. That old farm became an albatross around his neck. Repeated crop failures drove him to despair, and on the rare year when the harvest was a success, prices would plummet and leave him

dumbfounded. He loved to quote prices to support his pessimism. “Tim[e]s is vary hard hear cattle is the chepest that I ever seen them fat rams is ony 2 cts per pound in St Louis a man can by a good farm for 14 [to] 15 dollars [per acre] Heffers calf is only worth from 5.00 to 6.00 dollars corn is worth 46 cts wheat 50 oats 25...” “Tims is vary dull hear” is one of his favorite lines. In March of 1882 he wrote, “You wanted to now whither I was satisfide to stay in missouri I am not satisfide in missouri But I will stay a year or two.” Four years later he tells Cornelius, “I don’t think we could get 10 dallars per acor. There is no land seling in this country. Times is vary dull....I would like to sell out and go whare I can get land cheape. This country is getting arder hear ever year so a poor man can not make eney thing.”

Family life was a better source of satisfaction for him, even though it foted came with a heavy toll. Christian married Mary Elizabeth Whiteley on Christmas Day 1878. She had been raised in the nearby community of Stanberry. The Whiteley family was related to the people who founded the White Sewing Machine Company, which gave the family hopes of some great inheritance which would save them from the brink of poverty, but that never happened. Mary suffered from epilepsy throughout her life. We never hear Christian complain about this, but a granddaughter, Bonnie Mitchell, reported to me that it interfered with her raising children and often limited her ability to do the cooking and other household chores. George let Cornelius know he didn’t care much for Christian’s in-laws, but Christian seemed to be able to take them in stride.

Infant mortality cost this family dearly while they were still in Missouri. Their first child, an unnamed little boy, died a few hours after birth in August of 1879. A year later, Christian proudly wrote to his brother, “i got a pare of nice Girls since you heard from us [Lillian and Rosy], they was borne on the 4th of July.” The next child, Bessie Estella, born July 27, 1882, only lived one year. A few years later, Christian again expressed his satisfaction, writing “We have Got two as fine little girls as eney body and our boy is 10 months olde and he

was 25 lbs but he cant walk but can croll al over the hous.” Daniel Webster had been born on August 3, 1884. He was followed by Clarence (born August 1, 1886) and Mary May (born February 22, 1888). Still, more tragedy lay in store for the family. Margaret Etta was born November 1, 1889, and died four years later. Then two months after her death, thirteen-year-old Rosy Ellen, one of the twins, died. Christian Columbus (known as “Lum,” born September 25, 1891), Bertha Leanna (born December 29, 1893) and Malinda Alice (born October 29, 1895) were also added to the family while they were living in Missouri.

In the midst of all the hardship, this family appears to have found some comfort in religion. Stanberry, Missouri, from 1888 to 1949, was the headquarters for the Church of God (Seventh Day). This sectarian group grew out of the Adventist movement of the early nineteenth century but rejected the authority of Ellen G. White, the founder of the Seventh Day Adventists church. Members believed in the imminent return of Christ in fulfillment of biblical prophecy—a view that was found in many Protestant groups at the time—and, more distinctly, in the need to set aside the Sabbath, Saturday and not Sunday, as the day of rest and worship. The church was influential in northwest Missouri. Chrisanna’s family and that of George W. were active in this church as well.

Christian carried on an exchange through the mail with Cornelius on the matter of Sabbath worship, and in one lengthy document we get a good picture of the depth of Christian’s commitment to Church of God teachings. He disparages creeds as a source of doctrine and quotes scripture to support his view: “Jesus never Give us Eney Comand for Sunday Keeping and the man that sais they did donte reade the Bible....I Beleve in the Bible and that should be our Guide you asked me when was Sunday changed I say that Sunday was never changed there is no such a day spoking of in the Book of God it Got its name from hetherns who worshipt the sun...” Apparently, most of Christian’s family was affiliated with the Church of God (Seventh Day) and continued to be even after the family moved to Montana. Lum told his children that he was baptized

into the church on a cold winter day when the ice on the pond had to be cut away before the outdoor baptism service could proceed.

As the years dragged by, Christian grew more eager to leave the old farm behind and move out west. By the 1890s, all his brothers had moved elsewhere. He debated going to Oregon or to Washington. Still, he held out for a good price on the farm. He was asking twenty dollars per acre, but after successive years of crop failures, no one was buying land in Gentry County and there were plenty of others trying to sell. First, there were problems finding a buyer; then, there was the matter of the missing deeds. He writes in one letter to Cornelius, "We have got the patton But we have not got al of the olde deeds and I don't [think] they can be found When the War broke out there was an old reable had some of the deeds and he run off with them if al agree on the plan that I have proposed I will go to Albany and see what cind of a title we can give for the land we have had Peaceable position 30 years." Details on the sale, initiated sometime in 1894, are sparse in the correspondence that has survived. Not until the fall of 1895 was the transaction completed and the paperwork settled. Even so, it was the old owners, with the properties divided between Christian, Chrisanna and George, who showed up on the county map published in 1896. There is some evidence, as we will see, that a portion of the old place was kept in the family awhile longer. When money was sent by bank draft to the interested parties, each person received around \$445 as his or her share

The last letter we have from Christian in Missouri is dated January 20, 1896, and he is eager to move on. He reports that Birthe, in Denmark, received her money. In Gentry County, though, "Tims is vary dull." He can't resist listing prices again: "Corn is worth 15 cts per Bu, Potatos 20 to 25 per Bu, hogs 3.25 per hundred lbs hay about 6,00 per tun taxes is hye I do not know what will becom of us al I think it would be a good plan to go to washington." The following year he was on his way to Montana.

New land was made available to homesteaders about this time in Montana

after Indian reservations were demarcated. The railway company, eager to recoup the costs of construction, promoted the desirability of farm lands in that part of the country to potential settlers. Christian must have seen it as his chance to get a new start. He also suffered, like his mother, from TB, and the promise of a drier climate in Montana was an added attraction.

Christian and his two eldest sons, Daniel and Clarence, headed out to Montana, riding in a boxcar on a train in early 1897. They took with them their livestock, a wagon, tools and enough building materials to construct a small cabin. Billings is probably where they disembarked, then they scouted out the country southwest of there, selecting a piece of property in an area known as Poverty Flat, along Rock Creek, near Silesia. The land was purchased from an Indian named Push Elk, who had earlier served as a scout for a U.S. military unit that had been stationed in the area under the command of General Custer. Christian, Dan and Clarence then set about building a cabin, a simple structure having a dirt floor on the inside. Once that job was completed, the two boys returned to Missouri to get the rest of the family.

The family rode in an “immigrant carriage” on the train headed west. There was some mixup over how many were allowed on the train, and they had to sneak a few members of the family on board. In Omaha, six-year-old Lum almost got left behind when the train pulled out after dark. He had never seen street lamps before and was down at one end of the railway station staring in fascination at the bright light fixture when the train began rolling.

The first winter the family spent in Montana must have been an ordeal. There was not enough room in the small cabin, so Lillian and the boys had to sleep in a tent set up alongside it. With temperatures plummeting to below zero during cold winter nights, they had to have been hardy to have survived. Even those crowded into the little dirt floor cabin around a small wood-burning stove were not altogether protected from the chilling wind blowing in through the cracks in the hastily built structure.

On March 26 of the following year, 1898, a new child, Wiltha Fanny, joined the family in that cramped little cabin. Two more children were born in the following years: Clara Malinda (born November 15, 1900) and Roy William (born December 3, 1903), which made for a family of twelve. Hard labor paid off for them. An addition to the cabin was completed by 1900 and a second was built in 1903.

The Crow Indian reservation was just forty miles east of where the family settled and these Native American people were frequently seen in the area. Fanny wrote years later of being afraid of them during her childhood. On one occasion when Indians came to the Nelson home, she hid under the table, only to be discovered—to everyone's amusement. The Indians often wanted help in securing meat for their diets and other foodstuff. Later on, baseball teams were organized and the Nelson boys competed against a team from the reservation. A basket of apples was awarded to the winners.

Located east of the Rocky Mountains, the region around Silesia gets little rainfall, but after constructing ditches it was possible to irrigate their rocky farm fields using water from the creek. Christian also made ends meet working as a blacksmith, a trade he learned from his father. Some of his grandchildren remember most distinctly his large, callused hands. He could pick hot coals out of the forge with his bare fingers when he wanted to light his pipe. We are reminded of a couple of lines in a poem by Longfellow, "The smith, a mighty man is he / With large and sinewy hands." Christian passed his knowledge of blacksmithing onto his sons as well, and reportedly Lum quit school after third grade to work in the shop with his father. Together they shod horses, fabricated hammers and other tools, and repaired wagons and farm equipment.

The climate in Montana must have been good for Christian and Mary Elizabeth. They made at least one extended trip south to Thermopolis, Wyoming, to spend time at the mineral springs in hopes of getting relief from their ailments. But Fanny reported years later that Christian eventually recovered

completely from the TB that had plagued him for so long. He survived until June 24, 1923. Mary had died two years earlier. They were laid to rest in the Rockvale Cemetery.

By the time of their parents' deaths, this family was already spreading out. Some of them moved to Washington, others remained in Montana. The oldest, Lillian (4 July 1880–21 September 1968), married a Danish immigrant named Anton Jensen in July of 1898. Anton had homesteaded in Edgar, Montana, in 1893. Together they had eight children: Malinda Margaret Orr, James Christian Jensen, Ray Jensen, Earl "Bud" Homer Jensen, Roy Elmor Jensen, Harold Jensen, Louise Florence Jensen and Eva Mae Ungafug. Anton died in 1927, but Lillian continued to live on the old homestead up into the 1960s. In 1962, she was honored with a certificate from the secretary of the interior, Steward L. Udall, for being the only person in Montana still occupying an original family homestead. She was, in fact, still living in the original house that Anton had built, though some major modifications had been made to the structure.

Daniel Webster Nelson (3 August 1884–21 September 1964) married a sister of Anton Jensen, named Kirsten Marie, and together they had five children: Cleo Daniel Nelson, Elsie Marie Treml, Carl Thomas Nelson, an unnamed infant, and Christina May Hayes. Dan farmed in Fromberg, Montana, and worked for the railroad most of his life. In his later years, after the death of Kirsten, he married a woman named Dicie. The two of them are remembered for having spent the autumn of their lives romantically traveling around the country, camping along the way most of the time.

Clarence Franklin Nelson (1 August 1886–31 October 1971) married Olive Moon in 1911. While he worked a farm near Olympia, Washington, she bore five children. One of the children died in infancy and two died in a drowning accident in their youth. Violet, Velma and Wesley were the names of three of them.

Mary May (22 February 1888–2 September 1963) married William "Mac" McMillen on February 22, 1904. They lived and farmed in the Silesia, Montana,

area and raised eight children: George, John, Ira David Emma, Victor “Dutch,” Edna, Edith, Mary Ellen and Ethel.

Christian Columbus, better known as “Lum,” married Clara Viola McClintock in 1912. Together they had ten children: Walter Theodore, Arthur Lewis, Ethel Margaret Locke, Dorthy Ellen Wieland, Evelyn Nelson, Ruth Josephine Hecker, Jean Marjorie Harris, Clara Mae “Bonnie” Mitchell, Robert “Bob” Christian and Mary Louise Weishaar. Lum farmed in Montana and worked for the railroad company.

Bertha Leanna (29 December 1893–5 February 1960) cared for her ailing mother during her youth and taught some school. She then moved to Oregon near where her uncles Cornelius and Abraham had settled outside of Portland. There she taught school in the community of Pumpkin Ridge before marrying her cousin Walter in 1919. Afterward, Bertha and Walter mostly lived in Scappoose, Oregon, and Walter ran a nearby logging company with his brother. Their first child, Theodore, died in infancy. A second son, Dale Walter Nelson, still lives in Oregon.

Malinda Alice (29 October 1895–24 April 1936) married Loran Haynes in 1913. Together they had a farm in Washington and raised eight children: Clifford, Jean, Bob, Chet, Fred, Paul, Evelyn and Ray. Malinda died of influenza shortly after the birth of her eighth child.

Wiltha Fanny (26 March 1898–1995) remained with her parents and cared for them until both had passed away. Then she rented out the family farm and moved down to Oregon to be near her sister Bertha. In Oregon she met Alexander Smith and married him in 1928. Alex worked construction, so they moved around a lot. They had three children: Betty Ottni, Wally and Les (a twin with Wally).

Clara Malinda (15 November 1900–1 November 1983) married Oren Greene in 1923 and moved to Monroe, Washington. They had two children: Bill and Aletha.

Roy William Nelson (3 December 1903 - 20 May 2002) was, at the turn of the millennium, one of two surviving grandchildren of George and Margaret Nelson, before his death in 2002 at age ninety-nine. He married Edna R. Clements in 1927. Early in life he herded sheep, then farmed for awhile, before working for Carbon County, Montana, as a laborer for many years. His passions were writing poetry and documenting local Rockvale history, as well as assisting in maintaining Edna's extensive flower garden. Together they had five children: Louise Harvey, Tom, Harold, Larry (a twin with Harold) and Donna Meehan.

Cornelius Nelson (8 September 1854–1 October 1949)

CORNELIUS was born in Shelby County, Iowa, on September 8, 1854. His son George Allen Nelson wrote of Cornelius's early childhood near Council Bluffs, where his father worked as a blacksmith. When he was four the family relocated to Gentry County, Missouri. Then, a few years after his father's death in 1871, Cornelius moved to California, and twelve years later he headed to Oregon.

To his brothers and sisters he was known as Niels (they generally spelled it Neles). His move to California was probably in the fall of 1874. Evidence of this comes from Cornelius's old accounts book. The first dated entry in the book is for October 1874, recording a job done in California. A letter from his brother George W., written October 2, 1881, speaks of it being seven years to the day since these two brothers parted. Later, Cornelius told his son George A. that it took him two weeks on a mixed immigrant and freight train to make the trip. If this date is correct, he would have been greeted by his sister Mary, who had married since he last saw her, once he arrived in California and made his way to Sonora.

The old accounts book in which Cornelius recorded his employment and business dealings over the next thirty some years tells us what he did in and around Sonora. His early jobs involved cutting firewood and selling it to gold miners. He spent many weeks working for \$1.50 a day, doing roadwork, hauling hay or working in a blacksmith shop. Some of his time was spent farming as well; he made money selling wheat and wheat hay that he grew on a farm six miles out of Sonora.

His most promising job seems to have been working for a blacksmith by the name of Julius Sutherland in Sonora. Sutherland had joined the gold rush in the spring of 1849 at the age of twenty-one, only to contract smallpox while crossing the plains en route to California. Abandoned in a tent by others in the wagon train he had traveled with, he managed to recover from his illness with the help of nearby Indians who brought him food daily. Undeterred in his quest to go to California, he first returned home to Michigan, then, in 1852, took a boat down the Mississippi and a ship around the Cape to San Francisco. By the time Cornelius began working for him, he had worked in a half-dozen mining communities and had recently settled back in Sonora, marketing a reputable mining pick that he produced in his shop.

Cornelius must have gotten along well with Sutherland, and even better with his daughter Anna Amelia (12 February 1862–13 February 1922). Anna was described by her sister as a woman with a “frail and delicate constitution,” having nearly died, then been incapacitated for several months at age twelve. But she also possessed the “kindest and gentlest disposition.” Cornelius and Anna were married on December 12, 1880. Their first child, George Allen, was born January 31, 1882, followed two years later by Charles Leroy, born February 4, 1884.

About the time of Charles’s birth, Anna’s brother Ed Sutherland moved to Scholls, Oregon, twenty-some miles southwest of Portland, and set up a blacksmith shop. He sent word back to family members in Sonora of promising

prospects, and soon Cornelius and Anna began preparing to move. George A. Nelson was four years old and remembered the adventure vividly. Into his old age he liked to tell people he had come to Oregon on one of the last covered wagons to enter the region. (A year after they made the trip, the railway was completed between Sacramento and Portland.) In what follows, and after a little editing, I allow George to tell the story.⁴²

After spending about twelve years in California, [Cornelius] was now outfitting his own wagons for a trip to Oregon. He was now back at his old trade of working on covered wagons, ably assisted in this by his father-in-law, Julius A. Sutherland, also a skilled blacksmith.

Two wagons were prepared, the heavy lumber wagon that my father was to drive with the heavier load, and the other one, a heavy spring wagon, which my grandfather [Sutherland] was to drive. They were both old wagons, but they were thoroughly overhauled and put in first class shape for the trip north. Bows were fitted over the beds of the wagons and canvas covered these to make the typical covered wagon. The wagons having been prepared in this manner gave no trouble whatsoever on the month-and-a-half trip that it took to reach the destination in Oregon.

Food supplies were also gathered and taken along for camp cooking along the way. These were put in convenient boxes in the back end of the heavy wagon, where it would be handy for mother to get at them to do the cooking over the campfire.

An early morning start was made and we were off on the road to Oregon, following the dusty roads along the Sacramento Valley. During the middle of the day and afternoon, the heat was quite intense and made traveling uncomfortable. At evening the camp was made and the cool breezes from the Pacific moderated the temperature to where it was more comfortable. After a night's sleep, preparations were made early in the morning for another start and another day of slow traveling at about two miles per hour. When we came to rivers they had to be forded if they were shallow enough, or crossed

by ferries that were propelled by oar or by the current, as some ferries were manipulated in such a way as to take advantage of the current. This line of travel was followed day after day until we began to get into the foothills of the mountains around Red Bluff and Redding and beyond.

Camping was always an event, especially for me, as I had a chance to get out of the wagon and run about with more freedom, enjoying the scenery and amusing myself with whatever was going on. There was always the problem of finding a place to camp where there was water for cooking and for the horses. Campfire wood had to be gathered and the fire started, on which Mother cooked the meals. She would then get her utensils out of the box in the back of the wagon and the food for making the evening meal. My father and grandfather would be busy watering and unharnessing the horses, then currying them to see that they were clean and free from sweat marks and putting on the nose-bags to feed them their grain. Then these were removed and they were given a supply of hay for completing their feed. By that time Mother had completed supper and we would all gather around with hearty appetites. While this was being done and afterward, there was the hum of conversation and recounting of the events of the day, and contemplating the roads and problems ahead for the following day. Then there were the wagons to grease to keep them in running order, the horses to be watered again, and all the ties inspected for the night. Finally, we bedded down. Grandfather slept in the spring wagon, and Father and Mother and we two small boys slept in the large wagon.

In the morning Father and Grandfather would get up and build the campfire, then begin the round of chores, feeding and watering the horses, and currying and harnessing them, and getting ready for the day's journey. Mother would get up and prepare the breakfast of bacon and eggs and cereal, or cook hotcakes over the campfire and boil the coffee. Then the small fry were called so they could get their breakfast and be ready to start when the wagons were ready to roll. There were no modern conveniences on this camping trip. Instead of warm water to wash in we were more apt to have a

washcloth dipped in the creek and the faces of my brother and myself were washed with this cold water. This usually brought forth a lusty howl. After it was all over with, we would then have our breakfast and, with everything ready, we would start another day's journey, slowly winding our way along the narrow wagon road around the hills and through the valleys. Little did any of us think that in making this wagon trip in 1886, we were riding with the last covered wagons.

For a century covered wagons had rolled westward. These covered-wagon days were the most momentous in the history of the nation. They were undertaken by hardy men and women who endured the long arduous treks across the deserts and mountains, faced hostile Indians, forded dangerous streams, crossed almost impassable mountains, and faced hunger and thirst and starvation. Through this they developed into a hardy race of pioneers who were determined to survive no matter what the odds, and most of them did. However, some fell by the wayside and were left to sleep their eternal sleep along the trek west.

Traveling along in covered wagons, little did we realize that within a few years all of this would change, that the turn of the century would usher in a new age of the motor car, which would travel with the speed of the wind and bring with it the modern paved highway over which we could travel at the rate of forty or fifty or more miles per hour on a cushioned seat, with ease and comfort.

Early in the trip, my grandfather Sutherland was anxious to hurry the teams along and try to get through as soon as possible. He would trot his team with the lighter wagon and get ahead of my father's heavier wagon and load. Grandfather had always been eager to get things done in a hurry. My father told him that the teams would not stand it. He insisted that it was better to take a steady gait and make the best of each day—that the teams would keep in better condition for the rough mountain roads ahead.

Traveling north, we went through Red Bluff and Redding, then past the snow-capped Mount Shasta, which showed up in its grandeur off to the east.

This was a magnificent view, and with our slow travel over these mountain roads, we were in sight of this mountain for some time and could view its beauty from several angles.

As we began to climb into the mountainous district, travel became slower and more difficult. It was necessary to rest the teams quite often on the steep hills. Sometimes it was necessary for both teams to be put on one wagon and pull it up first, then go back after the other wagon. This was easier on the horses but slowed our traveling.

Camping out in the mountains, with the autumn season advancing, we needed larger campfires in the evenings and mornings and warmer clothing. My brother, Charlie, and I amused ourselves around the campfire as small boys will, and asked innumerable questions about everything that came to our attention. Mother would sing to us some of the old songs, such as “The Dying Cowboy” or “The Spanish Cavalier.” She was a good singer and it was pleasing to listen to her. Then we would turn in for the night in our beds in the wagons and sleep soundly until early the next morning, when I would be awakened for breakfast and find my mother, father and grandfather getting the teams ready and breakfast cooked in preparation for starting on the day’s travel.

After several days of slow traveling in the difficult Siskiyou Mountains, we crossed over the summit and into the Oregon country. The first thing I remembered after crossing into Oregon was that an old bachelor named Tom Mason who lived on our farm near Sonora had instilled into my young mind that all the girls in Oregon had webs between their toes. So as soon as we crossed the line, the first girl that I saw was walking barefoot besides the road. I called to my mother in a loud voice that I could not see any webs between that girl’s toes. The girl overheard this, much to her amazement and surprise, and the older folks had the laugh on me for having believed the tall story that Tom Mason had told me.

After we crossed over the Oregon line, it began to rain, as it was getting up to about the first part of October. We had traveled in the heat and dust

of California during much of the month of September; now we were in the mud and rain of Oregon, and it continued to rained intermittently during the balance of our trip to Scholls.

As it got colder, Mother and we boys could stay inside the wagon, sheltered from the wind and rain and wrapped up to keep warm. It was necessary for Father and Grandfather, however, to sit on the front seats of their respective wagons, which were sheltered from the rain to a certain extent but some would blow in on them, and they were also exposed to the chilling winds. Such were the rigors of travel in those days.

I can remember Father as he looked in those days, with his dark complexion, tanned by years of exposure to the California sun. He had real dark brown hair, almost black, and he wore a sandy mustache. He was then in the prime of life at thirty-two years of age and in the best of physical condition for standing a trip of this kind.

Grandfather was then fifty-nine years of age, and while able to stand the trip fairly well, it tired him considerably. He had streaks of gray in his dark hair and in his short stubby chin whiskers, which he always wore. But he did not wear a mustache. He had to endure the chill air of the mornings and cool days sitting on the seat of the covered wagon as we drove north through southern Oregon and the Willamette Valley.

At Ashland, we struck the Jesse Applegate immigrant road, which had been traveled first in 1846, forty years before we made the trip. The road was still primitive, passable but that was about all. We made our way up through Medford and Grants Pass, maintaining a speed of about two miles per hour and an average of about twenty miles per day.

Grandfather, who had been very energetic in wanting to get up early in the morning, began to tire. He started to sleep later in the mornings, while my father got up and built the fires and took care of the teams. The teams were still in good condition, and Father could at his age maintain the same pace for himself in keeping the outfit going.

It was now autumn in Oregon. The hills and forest were covered with the

coloring leaves of the season, now being scattered with the autumn winds. Migratory birds from the north were flying south. These were of great interest to us, as we could see large bands of geese winging their way toward the more moderate climate.

We reached Roseburg and ferried across the river at this point. When we reached Eugene, there was a terrific rainstorm coming down, making it practically impossible to camp outside. So we made arrangements to stop at a livery stable where we could get the teams and wagons in out of the rain, and did our best to camp under these conditions. Our bedding and most everything we had was damp or wet, and we had a most miserable time during the night at that place.

After the storm was over the next day, we proceeded north through the state capital at Salem, then across the Willamette River again above Salem. We then made our way up to Newberg, on the west side of the river, and pulled over the hill north of Newberg through tall timber that was on both sides of the road. Heavy timber continued down to the bridge at Scholls, which we crossed, arriving at my uncle Ed Sutherland and family's place at the other end of the bridge. After forty days of travel, with only one day's stop-over for rest, we had completed our journey with the last covered wagons.

The Nelson family found accommodations in Scholls and lived there for three years. We can assume Cornelius initially found work in his brother-in-law's blacksmith shop. Anna bore a daughter, Lillian May, on May 10, 1888. By then, Cornelius was scouting around for homestead. Most of the fertile land in the valleys had already been claimed, but homesteads were being made available in the hills, and Cornelius found a place to his liking twenty miles northwest of Portland. At the time this area, later known as Dixie Mountain, was covered with a dense evergreen forest, much of it old growth timber. The place he selected was on top of the ridge. Spread out below to the north was the town of Scappoose, about five miles away, the Columbia River beyond that, and, in the

distance, beautiful Mount St. Helens, Mount Adams, and Mount Rainer. “A magnificent panorama—a view always to admire and remember,” as George A. Nelson described it.⁴³

Only a few dozen families had ventured onto the mountain to lay claim to homesteads when Cornelius went to work clearing four or five acres, planting pasture grass, and building a log cabin and a barn on a spread that became known as Dixie Ranch. He spent much of 1889 getting things ready for his family. In the late fall, a couple months after Anna gave birth to a second daughter, Mabel, on September 9, the family made the move. Again, George Allen is our best source on all of this. He could remember, and later wrote about, the trip the family made in a couple of wagons, with all their possessions, up muddy roads to their new home. It took them two days to cover the twenty-six miles. Shortly after they got settled in, six feet of snow fell, followed by freezing rain, which brought down hundreds of trees across the road. Their supplies were nearly exhausted before they were able to go for more.

Cornelius and Anna spent most of the rest of their lives on Dixie Mountain. Cornelius kept busy farming, selling cream and firewood, and occasionally breeding livestock for others in the community. Rainy days were spent shaving shingles which were sold in Portland. For ten years, he served as the postmaster in the community. He was also one of the more active members in the little church that was constructed nearby. Anna gave birth to two more sons, Walter Lincoln (born February 2, 1891) and Clarence Decalvis (born March 31, 1893). She also, at some point, gave birth to stillborn twins. Later, she developed a reputation for being a skilled midwife, assisting with the births of many of the children on the mountain. It wasn't until 1916 that they moved out of their log cabin and into a larger, two-storied, Colonial-style home on their homestead property.

Anna died the day after her sixtieth birthday in 1922 and was laid to rest in nearby Mountain View Cemetery. Cornelius survived for another twenty-seven years, assisting his son Charles in growing strawberries on the old homestead

and adjoining properties. As he grew older he needed assistance and lived for about ten years in a small cottage built just for him behind the nearby home of his son Clarence. He often spent the winter with his son George in Saint Helens, Oregon, and spent extended periods with his daughter Mabel, who lived in Portland. Around 1942 he was transferred to a rest home in Hillsboro. He lived until 1949 and died at age ninety-five on October 1.

There are old photos of a reunion between Cornelius and his brother Christian at a family gathering in Washington. They both look like rugged old characters who have experienced a lot of life. These photos must have been taken near the end of Christian's life, perhaps around the time Cornelius's son Walter married Christian's daughter Bertha in 1919, or shortly after Anna's death in 1922. For these two brothers, it had been nearly fifty years since they had seen each other. Regretfully, there was no recording device available to capture their words as they reminisced about their lives.

Five of the six children of Cornelius and Anna remained in Oregon, as have many in the next generation. George A. Nelson (31 January 1882–28 July 1961), always a bit of a scholar with a keen interest in history, forestry and agriculture, graduated with a bachelor of science degree from Oregon Agricultural College (later Oregon State University) with the qualifications needed to become a county agricultural agent. He took an interest in dairy farming and spent several years managing a farm in the Salem area before going to work as a county agent. After an initial stint in Wahkaikum County, George spent twenty-three years as agricultural agent for Columbia County. Aside from his involvement in such studies as those aimed at testing cattle for TB, perfecting potato-seed raising and enhancing sheep grazing, he helped organize the Columbia County Historical Society. He was the first vice president of the organization and later served as president.⁴⁴ In 1910 he married Clarice Dixon. Together they had four children: Meiles "Alford," Velma, Eldred "Elk" and Ava. Following the death of Clarice in 1953, George married Iellenn McCully. He lived to be seventy-nine years old, passing away in 1961.

Charlie (4 February 1884–March 1981), like his older brother, pursued a college education at Oregon Agricultural College, majoring in mechanical engineering. Following graduation, he taught grammar school in Mountaindale, Oregon, for about three years, then returned to college to earn the credentials needed to teach high school. He was, after that, principal of the high school in Madras, Oregon, for a number of years. In the meantime, he married and divorced Alma Hershberger and married Farrie Mabel. He had no offspring; but together with Farrie, he raised her niece, Josephine Wallace. Teaching proved to be discouraging for him, and in 1929 he moved back to Dixie Mountain and built a home next to the old homestead. For years afterward he raised strawberries for a living, cultivating thirty to forty acres. He also kept a family tradition alive by doing blacksmithing out a shop he built next to his home. People in living on Dixie Mountain remember him as a cheerful storyteller and the leader in the community in his later years. He lived to be ninety-seven years old and was laid to rest in 1981.

Lillian (10 May 1888–5 January 1945) married a college friend of her older brothers and a nephew of Clarice named Ezra Dixon in 1910 and moved to Burke, Idaho. They had two daughters, Aloa Jewel and Liberty Mabeile, affectionately known in their childhood years as “Titter” and “Totter,” though Liberty later acquired the nicknames “Dixie” and “Sister.” Long years of separation while Ezra was serving in the military led to a divorce. Ezra joined the LDS church, and Lillian developed interests in Eastern religions. He later became a professor at Oregon State University, while she remained in Idaho running a boarding house for miners and brewing moonshine to make ends meet. She died in 1945 at age fifty-six and was buried in Wallace, Idaho.

Mabel (9 September 1889–20 November 1939), the fourth child of Cornelius and Anna, moved down to Portland after marrying Harry Clay. That marriage was not successful, however, and she later married Lawn Freeman, a barber, best remembered for his staunch Democratic party affiliation. Mabel had no children.

She loved to read and compose poetry. Cornelius spent long periods in her home in his later years, but in the end he outlived her by ten years.

Walter Lincoln (2 February 1891–9 August 1983) was the fifth of the Nelson children. Like his siblings, he completed eight years of education in the one-room schoolhouse on Dixie Mountain. Though he never attended high school, he did manage to get admitted to Oregon State College where he took courses for a year. After that, he spent most of his life operating a logging business with his younger brother, Clarence. They started out working with a team of horses, hauling logs down to a mill in Scappoose. Eventually, they employed fifteen to twenty men and kept five trucks busy hauling logs off Dixie Mountain. At age twenty-eight he married his cousin, Bertha Leanna, a daughter of Christian Louis Nelson. Bertha had moved down from Montana and was active in teaching school near where Walter had grown up. For awhile after their marriage, they lived on Dixie Mountain but later moved down to the town of Scappoose. Their first son died in infancy. A second son, Dale Walter, resides in Oregon, after a career working in the timber industry. Walter lived until 1983 and died at age ninety-two.

Clarence (31 March 1893–31 October 1983) was the youngest in the family. Eight years of one-room schooling was all the formal education he ever received. At a young age he went to work in logging camps in Washington, then served a stint in the Army at the end of World War I. After that, he and his brother started their own logging business. They did well enough, particularly during World War II, when lumber prices were high, to be able to enjoy a good retirement. Clarence, meanwhile, married Grace Logan in 1922. They had three children, Elsie, C. Donald, and Leona, who they raised while living on Dixie Mountain. During their retirement, they did a fair amount of traveling. Two of their children worked in foreign missions, and Clarence and Grace assisted Don and his family in Africa, where Don worked as a doctor at a mission hospital in the Congo, and Leona and her family, who had an educational ministry in

Peru. Clarence lived to be ninety years old, passing away a few months after his brother Walter died.

Chrisanna Nelson Walker
(20 February 1856–8 May 1943)

CHRISANNA was the only child of George and Margaret Nelson to live out her life in Missouri. Born in Crescent City, Iowa, she was the first European American child born in that community. The name Chrisanna was derived from Crescent, though her brothers called her Kissy, and later in life she was known as Aunt Kizzy. When she was two, her parents moved the family to Gentry County, Missouri, where she spent the remainder of her life. Her father died of his wartime injuries when she was just fifteen years old, and after that she dutifully cared for her mother until Margaret's death in 1882.

She had a difficult time recovering from the loss of her mother. To her brother Cornelius she wrote a few months later, "i have had the lonsamus time this summer i ever had in my life since mother died i tell you that i feel the loss of my mother it is home no more like it use to be." Seven months later, in February of 1883, she expressed her grief and despair again. "i am so lonesom this winter it seems as tho i can not stand it." She lamented that the family had become so scattered.

Chrisanna, at age thirty, finally found some consolation when she married a man eleven years her senior who had been widowed twice. Anthony Green Walker (16 July 1845–22 December 1918) came with six children, one from his first marriage and five from his second (a sixth had died in infancy). The oldest one, Samuel Wesley Walker, was eighteen years old when Chrisanna and An-

thony married on March 31, 1886. The others, Robert, Fannie Angelico, Phetna “Toby,” Cleo Patry and Philip Chester, ranged from age two to twelve. Chrisanna took over responsibility for helping to raise these kids. She also bore Anthony five more children: Quincy Monroe (born February 2, 1887), Anthony Green, Jr. “Tuff” (born April 9, 1891), Earl Homer “Mac” (born October 25, 1893), Minnie Ellen (born September 15, 1895) and Oliver Teller (born September 4, 1897). Needless to say, she must have been a busy woman but apparently not too occupied to refuse to help raise a couple of Anthony’s nieces and nephews as well.

Anthony was a farmer, but his real passion seems to have been his commitment to the Church of God (Seventh Day). He held a General Conference position in the church for a while. Christian commented to Cornelius in a letter that he thought Chrisanna had found herself a good husband. “they have not got much of this worlds goods I think that they get a long well and that is better then welth.” Family life seems to have been good, with a lot of musical talent in the family and a passion for baseball. Grandchildren remember family get-togethers as occasions full of merriment.

During the early years of their marriage, Anthony and Chrisanna lived on his property, about six-and-a-half miles northeast of where Chrisanna had grown up. Around 1896 they traded that place for some better bottomland along the Grand River, several miles to the south of the old Nelson farm. They built a home up on the hillside and cleared the trees off the more suitable farmland below. This farm, now on Walker Road, remains in the Walker family.

A near-tragic accident involving Chrisanna in March of 1895 was reported by Christian to Cornelius. Christian said Chrisanna was nearly killed. She had gone to visit her brother George, traveling in a horse-drawn wagon, along with one of her stepchildren, her son Quincy, and a baby, probably Earl Homer. At the time, Christian was there at George’s helping him shingle the roof. When Chrisanna and the children started back home, something spooked the team of

horses causing them to take off running wildly. The older kids leaped out of the wagon and were unhurt. Chrisanna had the baby in her lap and was thrown out of the wagon. The baby came through unscathed, but Chrisanna ended up with a six-inch-long gash that exposed her skull from the crown of her head to just above her right eye. A doctor was summoned and he stitched her up. Afterward, she spent a week at George's recovering from the ordeal.

Anthony died on December 22, 1918, thirty minutes after receiving word that his son Earl "Mac" had survived the war in Europe and would be returning home. Chrisanna lived until May 8, 1943. She stayed on the Walker farm, accompanied for many years by her son Oliver. She was known to advise women to not marry older men, as the prospect of years of widowhood was not favorable. Nonetheless, she did remain active. Attending the annual Church of God summer camp meetings in Stanberry was a big event for her. Members of the Walker family love the story of how she would always insist that someone take \$100 out of the bank for her to take to the camp meetings. People would tell her she didn't need that much money for a week of camp meetings, but her will always prevailed. Invariably she came home at the end of camp with ninety-nine dollars. She liked her glass of wine before going to bed and could be a bit ornery at times in her old age. None will deny that as a mother and a step-mother, she left a remarkable legacy.

Her grown children all remained in Missouri, as have many of her grandchildren. Quincy (2 February 1887–4 March 1940) became an ordained minister in the Church of God and led the Pleasant Hill church north of Stanberry. For a time, he was vice president of the Missouri Conference of the church and also served on the Executive Board of the General Conference. He married Nora Elsie Williamson on February 8, 1914. They had no children.

Anthony Green, Jr. (9 April 1891–27 April 1957), more commonly known as "Tuff," spent most of his life farming in Gentry County. He owned a threshing machine and kept a crew busy during harvest season. Old photos of him and

his machine still exist. He married Laura Grace Richards on January 2, 1916. Together they had two children, Margie Helen Deering and Arlis Rex. Tuff was an active member of the Masonic Lodge.

Earl Homer (25 October 1893–5 February 1958), known to his friends as “Mac,” was a decorated veteran of World War I. He was involved in five major battles in Europe, mainly serving as a supply wagon driver. After the war he married Cecil Ona Morrison on April 24, 1920. They had two sons, Elvis, known as “Brad,” and Alfred G., known as “A.G.” Mac lived until February 5, 1958.

Minnie Ellen (15 September 1895–12 December 1976) married Lloyd Neal on January 10, 1915. Together they operated the General Store in Darlington, Missouri, for awhile before moving to Council Bluffs, Iowa, where Lloyd worked at the Chase Candy Factory. But by the early 1920s, they were back in Gentry County where Lloyd managed the Neal family farm and cared for his aged parents. They had three children, Irene Wave Groom, Cleo Everett Neal, and Lloyd Neal, Jr. Minnie later divorced Lloyd and married a man named Austin. For many years she worked in the Church of God publishing house in Stanberry, Missouri, and helped organize church sponsored events. She also had a reputation as a talented seamstress. Minnie lived to be eighty-one.

Oliver (4 September 1897–24 January 1967), the youngest of Chrisanna’s children, was known to his friends as “Ollie” or “Dick.” He spent most of his working life as a farmer near Center Grove in Gentry County and cared for his mother when she was old. He married Inez Gunter on January 2, 1921, and they had two daughters: Gwendolyn Irene, who died in infancy, and Anna Mae McConkey. His grandchildren and great-grandchildren live in Gentry County, maintaining a connection to the family’s roots.

George Washington Nelson (25 January 1860–13 January 1925)

GEORGE W. was the first of the Nelson children born in Gentry County, Missouri. He grew up to be a rugged, sizable man, six-foot-five-inches tall and weighing 200 pounds. His brother Christian wrote of him being “as big as a skind hors[e].” He was also a restless fellow, spending his life in search of a better livelihood, and moving repeatedly from one state to another.

George left home when he was around eighteen, finding farm jobs in Iowa and elsewhere to support himself. He was a good worker but capable of overdoing it. He tells his brother Cornelius in a letter that during the summer of his eighteenth year he became seriously overheated while harvesting crops and suffered from bad health for years afterward.

At the age of twenty, he moved to Quitman, Nodaway County, Missouri, about forty miles west of the Nelson family farm near Alanthus. He was still in good enough shape to pick up jobs when he needed one and it was in Quitman that he learned about coal mining. Though he never really liked mining coal, it was always steady, available work, paying two dollars a day, and he returned to it again and again. For the following six years, digging coal was his mainstay in Quitman.

He was, nonetheless, not content with life. “Hard work and har[d]ships is my Lot.” He didn’t always get along well with his brother Christian and disliked Christian’s in-laws, so his visits to Gentry County were infrequent. His health continued to be a problem, for which he speaks of taking a trip south (probably to Eureka Springs) in search of helpful therapy. He contemplated going to California to join his brother Cornelius, but could not get enough money together. Reporting to Cornelius that he wouldn’t be making it, he wrote, “i will send you my potograf so you can see How ugly i am.” By then he seems to have purchased

a small farm near Quitman, but he continued to look for better prospects. In his spare time he tinkered with an invention, trying to come up with an innovative harrow for use on farm fields. We hear of him going to Colorado in search of someone who would pay him for his patent once he finished the project; there is no word of a successful sale. Another trip to Colorado, and maybe New Mexico, ensued during the spring of the following year, 1882. By May of that year he was back in Gentry County, informing Cornelius in a letter that “i have been walking around in the warld and have not Bin settled no place...But i will stay home as long as mother Lives and then i don’t know what i do...i Don’t like this contry her it no place for a foreman.”

His mother died a few weeks later, and with tortured grammar, yet eloquent expressiveness, he wrote to inform his brother Cornelius of her death. Even with his tough exterior, George appears to have been an exceptionally sensitive man. In his lonely moments he missed his brother Cornelius, writing at one point, “I hope we ma see ech others faces agen Before we Leave this lo grownd of sorrow.” He confided to Cornelius that what he really wanted was to find a wife, but being a coal digger, besides being unhealthy, made it hard to convince women that he was a jolly fellow.

Three years later he was still in Quitman, Missouri, but his fortunes were turning. On the twenty-fifth of October, 1885, he married nineteen-year-old Laura Alice Collins (22 July 1866– 8 November 1941). He called her Alice. She was raised in Iowa, the youngest in a family of twelve children. Her family roots stretch back to Virginia. One of her great-great-grandmothers was a Cherokee Indian.

Together they spent another year in Quitman and started a family. Margaret was born on October 19, 1886. By then, however, George had pretty much set his sights on Colorado. He worked out a plan with his youngest brother, twenty-one-year-old Abe, for moving out and homesteading in Colorado. George was to go first and get things set up, then Abe would bring Alice and the baby along in the

spring. The next we hear of him is in February of 1887. He had taken out a claim on 160 acres near Colorado Springs and was feeling optimistic. The property he managed to acquire must have been a choice piece of land, with tillable soil, plenty of timber to cut for building materials and a market for goods not too far away. He even managed to acquire an adjoining 160 acres to add to his estate. Everything he had heard suggested that the winters were mild and the summer growing seasons were long. After years of trying to beat the odds in Missouri, it must have seemed wonderful to him, a place he began to think of as home. His brother Abe took out a homestead claim nearby later in the summer and built a cabin for himself but often came over to visit at George's place.

By the spring of 1888, George was having second thoughts. "My wife don't Like this cuntry. But for my pert I like it vary will But I Don't know whither I will stay her or not." A couple of months later, we hear, "I Like this cuntry Vary will so far as times and soil consurns but our health is not good ...we haf to Docter our Body all the time hir Ears and nose is in a Bad state." We learn later that Alice was suffering from rheumatism and what she called the "new ralga." Being pregnant probably didn't help, and a son, Floyd, was born on September 2, 1888. Alice complained of there being no fruits and vegetables in the country and attributed their health problems to poor diet. The family mostly lived on potatos while they were in Colorado. They finally concluded that staying would probably kill them. George found a buyer for his spread that fall. He wrote a discouraging letter to Cornelius that December, saying:

we ar not vary well and have not Bin for som time....i guess we will Leave this part of the Cuntry as we all have such Bad health ther have Bin som of us sick almost all the time we have Bin Living on Oure Land and Docters chargs such a high price that thes keep me Behind hand all this time and a meener set of people then our nabers is never Lived so to take it all in concideration it is no place for a man with a famley to give in so i will Pull my stakes out of hir in a few Days i Don't know just wher we will stop a yet i will write just as soon as we get seteld

Their departure was delayed, as the buyer was late in arriving from Ohio to take charge of the place they sold; but we learn from Abe that George must have done quite well in the sale of his 320 acres. With their dreams dashed, they moved back to Nodaway County, Missouri, as Laura Alice didn't want to go anywhere else. Shortly thereafter, they took possession of Laura's parents' eighty-acre farm, promising that they would look after Martha Collins in her declining years.⁴⁵

Another child, Cornelia Jane, joined the family on October 21, 1890, in Nodaway County. The family's health problems persisted. Sore eyes, in addition to rheumatism, continued to plague Alice. George resorted to something he had tried years earlier and moved the family down to Ureka Springs, Arkansas (in the northwest corner of the state), hoping to find some relief for his suffering wife.

For the next few years, George and Alice seem to have spent time off and on in Arkansas, between life in Missouri. Christian writes to Cornelius early in 1893, saying George had been in Arkansas, but their next two children, Bertha Mary (born February 24, 1893) and Martha Ellen (born October 30, 1894) joined them in Quitman. Three more children, Olia May (born October 24, 1896), George W., Jr. (born December 26, 1898) and Olive Grace (born August 28, 1901) entered the world in Gentry County. The family was also recorded in the 1900 census for the Huggins Township of Gentry County. We can assume George settled back into farming for five to six years in Gentry County on a small portion of the old Nelson family farm still remaining in the family, or perhaps he rented property nearby. Laura Alice's mother lived with them there until her death in January of 1898.

A number of moves followed. Around 1901 the family moved to Oklahoma, in what was still considered to be Indian territory. They lived near the Canadian River between Taloga and Putnam, in the remote central-east part of the state. Cornelia, the third oldest child, told a journalist years later that the river was

“either bone dry or readying itself for a 10 foot high wall of water flash flooding its way down stream.” The births of George and Alice’s ninth and tenth children, Anna Amelia (born March 28, 1904) and Easter Hazel (born April 1, 1907), occurred there in Taloga, Dewey County, Oklahoma. About 1910, the family moved to Tucumcari, in east-central New Mexico. Cornelia, nineteen years old when that move took place, recounted the journey. “It took us a month to get out there from Oklahoma. I was put in charge of driving one of the teams—we had two 2-horse [teams] and one 4-horse team—and it was bitter cold and blowing a terrible dust the whole trip.” They moved along at ten miles a day through a desolate, uninhabited region of north Texas, passing numerous skeletons of cattle that had died of thirst at dried-up watering holes. Once settled onto a farm near Tucumcari, the family grew, among other things, a variety of grass used in weaving baskets. Cornelia would later recall bitter struggles between George and local cattlemen who would cut his wire fences and let their livestock in to graze on his farm fields.⁴⁶ The youngest child in the family, Richard Harlow (born July 26, 1910) was born in Tucumcari.

There was one last move for this family, in 1917, and the story passed down through the family of what prompted it is an intriguing piece of oral history.⁴⁷ George, while living in Tucumcari, took into his home a fatally wounded young man and cared for him during his final days. The young man confessed to George that he had been involved, along with two other men, in a stagecoach robbery in the southwest corner of Colorado between Mancos and Cortez. They had made a safe getaway, carrying bags containing gold bars with them. But in the days following, while hiding out, they had encountered hostile Indians. A shoot-out ensued in which the other two bandits were killed. The young man George took in and cared for had made his way down into New Mexico afterward and across the state to Tucumcari before his wound made it impossible for him to continue. Realizing his end was at hand, he drew a map showing where he and his partners

in crime had hidden the loot before the shoot-out with the Indians. He gave the map to the good Samaritan who had done what he could to help him.

George was convinced the dying man had told the truth and began making plans to move to Montezuma County, Colorado. His son-in-law Charles Ownbey began dreaming of buried treasure as well and sold the homestead he and Martha had acquired near Tucumcari. The whole family packed up everything and loaded it all onto three wagons. After two weeks of traveling, they arrived in Cortez, Colorado.

George and Charles spent considerable time in the first weeks searching for the exact location on the hand-drawn map. A canyon with a peculiar rock formation, a lone pine tree and a clear view of Ute Mountain were the defining landmarks George had been told about. Once they found a place that best fit the description they had been given, they arranged to purchase the property. The search then began for the hidden treasure. Their enthusiasm must have waned when it was not immediately found, but they persisted, spending hours and hours of their spare time in the following years combing the area for signs of the hidden loot. The most that was ever found was an old pair of saddlebags hidden under a rock. Whether someone else beat them to it or the whole thing was a hoax or the gold still lies buried someplace in that canyon remains a mystery.

Even without the promised gold, there must have been enough in Montezuma County to make it an attractive place to settle. Or maybe the family had just come too far in search of the good life to think of moving again. They ended up living in Lakeview, several miles north of Cortez. George went back into mining to make a living, which wasn't an attractive option for him as a young man and probably was much less to his liking as he got older.

Mining is what finally killed George W. Nelson, twelve days before his sixty-fifth birthday. An old photo exists of the coal mine shaft in which George worked along with other men, including his son George, Jr., known as "Wash." The shaft was called the Bloom mine, located six miles east of Cortez. A few

days after the accident that took George's life, his daughter Margaret conveyed the sad news in a letter to relatives back in Missouri. Margaret wrote:

he was killed in coal mine on the 13 of Jan 1925 a large Rock fell on him and crushed him the Dr seaid he diden think he every new what hurt him they seaid thir wasent a bone in his body that wasent broken his face wasent Mashed only Bruised no bones broke. Wash had just left the mine about 5 minuits before the rest was comeing out some of the boys notes his light was out and he went in room and found what had happened and it taken 3 men to lift the rock with iron bars so the others could pull him out under the rock.⁴⁸

Margaret went on to report how the day before the cave-in occurred, Laura Alice had had a premonition that something bad was going to happen in the mine and warned her husband. He had assured her, "don't wary Alice it as safe as the house and he was killed the next day about 11 oclock in the fore nun."

George W. was survived at death by his wife and all his children. Most of them attended his funeral, except for Floyd, who was in Missouri; Olia, who was in Oklahoma; and Anna, who was recovering from an accident that nearly took her life a few months before. As we will see, there was incredible longevity in this family. Even Laura Alice, with all the ailments she had suffered amidst the difficulties of frontier life, lived to be seventy-five. She remained at the family's home in Lakeview after George's death and was buried in Cortez following her death on November 8, 1941.

Margaret (19 October 1886–16 December 1980) was the oldest of George and Laura Alice's eleven children. When the rest of the family moved to Tucumcari, New Mexico, in 1910, she went along. She never married, but she filed for her own homestead in the Tucumcari area. Seven years later, when the family again moved, this time to Colorado, she sold her place and moved with them. For many years she worked as a cook at Trimble Springs Resort, near Durango. She had her own home, where she lived by herself. In later life she worked at a variety of jobs in and around Cortez, surviving to the age of ninety-four.

Floyd, Sr., (2 September 1888–16 July 1989) was, to date, the only centenarian in the extended family of Nelson descendents. He was born in Colorado Springs, Colorado, during the difficult period when his parents first tried to make a go of a farm on the frontier. Like his father, George W., he started out being a bit of a wanderer, living in Van, Missouri, in his early twenties, then in Kansas, then in New Mexico, followed by a stint on a ranch in California. The love of a young woman drew him back to Missouri, where he married Ethel Molinda Stokes in Springfield on September 20, 1916. Together they had four children: Elmer Fairrell, Jack Harold, Joe Terrel (Jack's twin) and Floyd Eugene. Ethel died at the birth of their fourth child. A year later Floyd, Sr., married Virgy Wallace and acquired five stepchildren: Wallis, John, Robert, Daniel and Mary. He did construction work and sold wood when jobs were scarce, then for forty years he worked in the blacksmith shop of the Frisco Railroad Company, while living near Noble Hill, Missouri. He continued, until he was 100, splitting the wood needed to fuel the stove he used to heat his home with and cook his meals. At that age he said he didn't have much use for television, since he never wore glasses and wanted to keep it that way. But he retained a keen sense of humor right up to the end, two weeks short of his 101st birthday. When he died it was reported he had fourteen grandchildren, twenty-eight great-grandchildren, and twelve great-great-grandchildren.⁴⁹

The third child of George and Laura Alice was Cornelia Jane (21 October 1890–4 August 1986). She was featured in an article in the Cortez Sentinel that portrayed a woman who lived a full life. She met her first husband when the Nelson family was living in Taloga, Oklahoma, but James Palmer had to follow her to Colorado to marry her, on May 18, 1910. After that they settled back in Putnam, just south of Taloga. Her first two children, Guy and Alice (married name Hayden) were born there.⁵⁰

Later they moved to Alba, Missouri, not too far from Springfield. When the global influenza epidemic of 1918–1919 swept through, it decimated that

part of the country. Cornelia recalled how her husband “went to bed one night [in January 1919] fit as a fiddle, and was dead in the morning.” The rest of the family suffered but managed to recover. In the aftermath of her husband’s death, her brother Floyd helped her move to Springfield. But about six months later, she gathered her kids and belongings and took a train to join her folks in southwest Colorado. Shortly after arriving, she married her second husband, Frank Dunning, in September of 1919. They resided in Lakeview and made a living raising and selling a variety of fruits and vegetables.

With Frank, Cornelia had four more children: Martha Jane, who died at five months old, Maude June Tate, Emma Frank Ferrell and Samuel William. Cornelia gained a reputation for being a skilled midwife and did other nursing jobs in and around Cortez. She joined the LDS church in 1926, along with her daughter Alice. Frank died in 1946, and Cornelia continued on for another forty years. She was well known in the Lakeview area as the woman who got around by bicycle, raised goats and sold goat’s milk. In her eightieth year she moved into Cortez to live with her daughter Alice. Her body gave out, though her mind was still sharp as can be, at age ninety-five.

Bertha Mary (24 February 1893–18 August 1962) followed Cornelia in the family. While the Nelson family was living in New Mexico, she met James Shenold and married him on October 16, 1912. Afterward she and James worked a farm near Cushion (perhaps Cushing), Oklahoma, for awhile. Their first child, Rose Alice, was born there. Later they moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico, where James worked in mines and sawmills, and to Colorado, where they farmed. Together they had two more children: Lois Bertha and Faye Aline Yates. They retired to Cortez, Colorado, where Bertha could be near other members of her family. She lived to be sixty-nine and was laid to rest in the Cortez cemetery.

Martha Ellen (30 October 1894–6 August 1960) was the next sibling in the family. She married Charles Simpson Ownbey a month-and-a-half after her sister Bertha was married and two days before Christmas 1912. Charles

and Martha homesteaded on a parcel of land near Tucumcari but were not too successful. They traded their parcel for a team of horses in 1917 and joined the rest of the Nelson family on their migration to Montezuma County, Colorado. In 1941 they moved to Twin Falls, Idaho, and ran a farm until their retirement. Together they raised eight children: George Joe, Mary A. Odom, Ina Pearl, Robert, Charles, Betty Hazel Geissler, Stanley and Marlene. Martha lived to be sixty-five years old.

Olia May (24 October 1896–3 December 1988) married John Dooley, seventeen years her senior, on January 10, 1915, in Hanley, New Mexico. Their first three children were born, respectively, in Sallisaw, Yale and Marble City, Oklahoma, suggesting that Olia and John moved around early in their marriage seeking satisfactory employment. Sometime in the mid-1920s, they moved to Minco, a small community twenty-five miles southwest of Oklahoma City. John worked as a farmer while Olia kept busy raising kids. They had eleven altogether: Lucy Alice, Alvis Lyndell, Lela Bell, Stella Louise Preston, George Washington, Martha Maxine Way, Johnnie Rexine, William Howard, Robert Ray, Tommie and Lillie Mae. Two of these children, Lucy and George, died young. Olia was another nonagenarian, living to be ninety-two years old.

George Washington, Jr., (26 December 1898–12 May 1964) was known to his brothers and sisters as “Wash.” Early in life, like his father, he took to the mines as a means of employment. He worked alongside his father around Cortez, and, as was noted above, he had just left the mineshaft his father was working in when George, Sr., was killed. George, Jr., never married, living with his mother until the end of her life. He gave up mining and worked on nearby farms. He died at the age of sixty-five.

Olive Grace (28 August 1901–3 March 1989) married Ernest Willett on August 28, 1926. They had three daughters together—Florence Marie Kelly, Betty Ruth Wilhite and Grace Jane—before divorcing. Olive supported herself after that by working in the laundry department in the hospital in Cortez. Her second

marriage was to John Cannon, on December 29, 1939. John was a farmer and a carpenter in the Cortez area. Olive had five children with John: John Luther, Jean Ray, Jeanett Dixie, Frank Alford and Louida May. Two of the children, Jean and Jeanett, were twins.

Anna Amelia (28 March 1904–23 August 1984) may well have been named after her aunt Anna Amelia Nelson, who was married to Cornelius Nelson. Most of her life was spent in and around Cortez, Colorado. She married Ed Boughan the day after Christmas in 1923. In September of the following year, just before the birth of her first child in November, Anna was involved in a serious accident, which nearly took her life at a young age. Her sister described the accident as a “run way,” which presumably means a horse that had been spooked. It is amazing she survived, given that blood clots were removed from her brain and she developed pneumonia while she was recovering. Her child, Ila Mae (married name, Hartley), was born without any problems. Anna and Ed had three more children: Oscar Edward, Elden David and Shirley Ann Wadley. They lived on farms around the Cortez area for most of the rest of their lives. Ed was killed in an auto accident in 1950. After that, Anna moved to nearby Mancos, Colorado, and worked a variety of jobs. She lost much of her sight in her later years and moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico, to live with her oldest daughter. She died there and was laid to rest in Cortez.

Easter Hazel was born on April Fool’s day 1907. Another nonagenarian, she continues to enjoy life at age ninety-eight and is the only surviving grandchild of George and Margaret Nelson. She married Hiram Ensley Baker, a World War I veteran, on October 4, 1925. Following their marriage, they bought a farm in Summit Ridge, near Cortez. Hiram lived until 1981, and afterward Easter continued to live on that same farm until she was ninety-two. Together, Easter and Hiram had three children: George Worth, Charlotte Mae Baxstrom and William Eugene.

The youngest of George and Laura Alice's children was Richard Harlow Davis (26 July 1910–16 January 1981). He married Pauline Rush on June 15, 1936. Following his marriage, Richard joined the Navy during World War II and served overseas. During the post-war years he and Pauline mostly lived in Los Angeles, where Richard worked as a guard. They had no children.

One notable feature of this family is the ages of many of George and Laura Alice's children. Seven lived to be over eighty years old, five lived to be ninety or more (with one still going) and one was a centenarian. The average age was eighty-three. We should be able to expect quite a few more centenarians in this branch of the family in the future.

Abraham Lincoln Nelson (16 December 1865–2 May 1950)

PRESIDENT ABRAHAM LINCOLN was assassinated eight months before the birth of George and Margaret's youngest son, and there can be no doubt about how they felt about the commander in chief of the Union Forces during the Civil War. But young Abe Nelson began life with a disabled father, who died when Abe was just five years old. His role models while growing up were his older brothers.

The earliest references we have of Abe are in letters Christian and George sent to Cornelius. George tells Cornelius in May of 1880 that he wouldn't recognize Abe on account of how much he'd grown, "he is a man now." Abe mostly worked with Christian, maintaining the family farm in Missouri during the early 1880s, but, according to George, the two of them did not get along very well. George worried that Abe would leave home and come to grief among strangers. When he did leave home it was to follow his brother George, who went off to seek his fortune in Colorado.

George finally decided Colorado was where he wanted to settle, and he must have interested Abe in following suit. He moved out to claim a homestead near Colorado Springs early in 1887, then Abe followed around June, bringing George's wife and child with him. Apparently Abe stayed to help George make improvements on his new spread and by the end of the year had claimed a nearby homestead for himself. We get better acquainted with Abe at this point, because during 1888 and 1889, he sent seventeen letters to his brother Cornelius. Many of these letters were posted from Falcon, which he says in a letter was two miles from his place (and about twelve miles northeast of Colorado Springs).

Initially, twenty-two-year-old Abe was optimistic. "times is good in this Country now And Wark is plenty," he reported at the end of January. He said he had been keeping busy working in a carpentry shop as well as squaring up his new land claim. His homestead was about two miles from George's and about two-and-a-half miles from the railroad. He hadn't yet moved onto his piece of property but was getting set to do so, expecting the value of the place to soar to around twenty dollars an acre within two years. Once it hit that price, he was going to sell and find something even better in California or Oregon. Colorado did have some limitations, in his mind. There weren't any deer or antelope within two days travel. He wanted a place where there was a lot of game to hunt. There wasn't even a stick of timber on his homestead, just prairie grass. Plus it was just too cold and windy.

His ambivalence about Colorado had grown by the time of his next letter, April 15, 1888. "Wel times is good in this contry now i Am Working every Day it is For \$2 A Day." At the same time he was lamenting the fact that he had not yet "proved up" on his homestead so he could leave without losing it. "i Don't Like this contry A tall the Longer i s[t]ay the wors I hait it." Still, he was determined to hold on until he had proved up, which meant residing on a homestead and making improvements to it for five years or paying \$1.25 per acre for it after six months of residence.

Cornelius must have been encouraging Abe to move to Oregon and homestead near where he was getting ready to settle, northwest of Portland. By June, Abe was tempted, wanting to leave but also wanting to make something off his claim. "i Expect to come As soon As i can git off i Want too make Anuff money out this plase so i can have A good start on Another clame in that contry Har it is tuff going on A New plase With out Eny money." He wasn't interested in "sackrafisin mi Land." A month later, he informed his brother:

Well times is Dull in this contry Now ther is so meney people coming in From the East work is scarce in this contry Wages is run Down too nothing onley \$1.50 per Day....We have had An Ofley Dry seson mi patatos Will Not bee worth Digin And thay Was mi mane C[r]op....Land is going Down in value i Cant git As mutch For mi clame As i cold Last Winter i have A Noshen to sell out For What i Can git And Lev this contry the Longer i Stay the woss i hat[e] the contry

In September of the same year, Abe thought he had found someone interested in trading something for his place, but the trade fell through. George, along with his family, was still just a few miles down the road, but Abe was finding life to be pretty lonely on his spread. "Well times is Dull in this contry....i Ame Afly Lonsom to Day...the kiouts is All the music i her And i Ame tyerd off hering them."

It must have been hard for him to watch George and Alice leave at the beginning of 1889 to go back to Missouri. That was his family, the only people he really enjoyed being with in Colorado. Alice would later write about how her young daughter “maggie thot thar was no body like hir unkle Abe she talks a grate Deal about him.” Abe thought for awhile about a trip back to Missouri himself, to take care of some business, which he later insisted to Cornelius did not mean he had a girlfriend back there. Anyway, he wasn’t going to settle in Missouri. “I Don’t think that old Mo Will Ever hold me Long A gin For i have A spite At that country.”

With George gone, life became increasingly lonely for Abe. There were hundreds of more like him in Colorado at the time, hoping to “prove up” on the free land, cash in, and move on to someplace better. It sounded like an easy enough plan to make a quick buck. For George it had worked, though he had occupied a more attractive piece of ground than Abe was able to acquire. Abe was stuck on a dismal landscape, not a tree on his place, all alone in his quickly assembled little shack on the prairie east of the looming mountains. When there was a job to go to, something to do to stay occupied, he managed all right. But when the cold season set in and the icy wind blew for days at a time, he sat huddled near the stove in his place, thinking of better things he could be doing with his life. It wasn’t just coyote music he had had enough of; the kind of people he kept encountering were rather unsavory types. He spilled out his feelings once again to his older brother:

it is so Lonsom Living in this Country i thought it Was Lonsoum beforur
Gorge leff but it is A gradul Was Now i miss him Afley it is An Afley onplesant
Life For me to Live Alone And keep batchlars hall in A Country Like this
ther is No Socity her A tall All that pepal thinks About is to Fite And Quarl
With Eteh other thay Ar the Loest grade off peple i Ever Saw in mi Life And
it Apers Like the more the Country setles up the Wors it gits

His hopes rose again in April when he thought he had found a buyer for his property, but he soon learned his solitary ordeal wasn't over yet. He managed to find work in a blacksmith shop in Falcon. Illness then laid him low for part of the summer. An early frost in September ruined most of the crops he had planted on his land, and he wrote to Cornelius, without any details, of some other bad luck that had beset him. "it semes as iff Ever thing goes Wrong with me." Later he elaborates by saying, "the Bad Luck that i had was not very seris it onley was A Leson that All chaps Like me has to Liern that is iff thay try to. Speclate to Far A hed Well i Wold Rather take mi Lesons While i Ame young then to Wate till i get old."

Abe seems to have finally given up on finding a buyer, perhaps leasing the pasture on his place, then leaving it all behind. Just before Christmas 1889, he wrote to Cornelius to inquire about directions to his place in Oregon. He expressed hope that the forested parcel of property in the valley just north of Cornelius's place was still available. Then, for the price of a fifteen dollar ticket, Abe was able to take a train to Portland. From there he caught a steamboat on the river up to the Willamette Slough, near confluence of the Willamette River and the Columbia River. He probably hiked up the hill from there to Cornelius's place. He hadn't seen his brother in fifteen years, not since Abe was about nine years old.

Not long after arriving in Oregon, Abe applied to homestead the 160 acres north of Cornelius's spread. Much of that parcel was on a steep hillside, covered with old growth timber. It was not a suitable site for farming and Abe seems to have sold it soon after proving up on it, not realizing that a few decades later the timber on the place would be worth a small fortune. He also, early on, became acquainted with, among others, the Ryckman family, one of the first families to move onto Dixie Mountain, back in 1881. The mother in the family, Catherine, had died in 1889. Fifteen-year-old Fidelia, the oldest daughter, known as "Deal," must have caught Abe's attention. Two-and-a-half years later, on July 26, 1892,

Abe and Fidelia were married. Six years after their marriage, Abe paid \$600 to his father-in-law for his eighty-acre place, less than a half mile up the road from Cornelius's home.⁵¹ This new place was a more attractive site for farming than the hillside that his homestead occupied.

During these early years of Abe's life on Dixie Mountain a shoot-out occurred that, when it was all over, cemented Abe's reputation for being an excellent marksman. The story is one of the favorite pieces of lore in the Dixie Mountain community. Many years later, George A. Nelson and his brother Charlie, sons of Cornelius, wrote about what happened. What follows is mostly George's account, with some added comments given by Charlie.⁵²

The ordinary events of homestead days did not always run quietly, as when at one time the settlers found it necessary to take up their trusty rifles and go out in defense of law and order. A real gun battle followed and brought to a close a series of disturbing events.

A number of the homesteaders' houses had been robbed when the owners were absent, and valuable things had been stolen. No hint of who was doing this was found until one evening a homesteader by the name of Keath reported that after he had cooked his supper and had then gone down to the spring to get a bucket of water, he found, on his return, a man sitting at the table eating the supper he had cooked.

Mr. Keath was incensed at this and was going to give him a calling down for eating the supper he had just cooked, but on sizing up the man and also noting that he was well armed, he decided not to.

The man said he saw that the supper was ready and had sat down to eat. Keath said that was all right and made no protest. After eating, the man disappeared into the woods.

This apparently was the same man who, in the opinion of the settlers, had been implicated in the house robberies on Dixie Mountain.

Among the houses robbed was one belonging to my father [Cornelius]. It had been rented to his brother Abe during the time we were living at Scholls

Ferry. The robbery occurred just previous to our return to the homestead in the late spring of 1894. After the robbery, Abe Nelson, my uncle, found tracks of two men leading from the house down into the woods north of the house. He got some help and started following the trail, which led northwest down the mountain, across ridges and canyons, through thick woods, fallen trees and tangled underbrush. At times it was a difficult trail to follow, but the men persisted. According to reports, it was evident that one of the men was large from the kind of tracks made going down hill in the soft dirt. The other man seemed to be a lighter man. After following the men through this wilderness over the rough country, they came at last to the Dutch Canyon road. Here the trail was lost. One conclusion that the people were able to make was that the robbers consisted of two men and that they probably lived in the vicinity of Scappoose. For the present, however, the trail had come to a dead end. Those interested continued to look for additional clues [hoping] to run down the real robbers and bring them to justice.

One thing that was discovered late in the summer and after other matters had developed was that the robbers had taken a large amount of things and had hid them in the woods outside of the clearing on my father's place. These were discovered after a fire in the woods. Evidently the robbers had intended to come back later for these articles. Things may have gotten too hot for them and they did not do so.

Along about the latter part of July, an accomplice named Potter, had a falling out with the chief culprit. This man had gone to St. Helens and reported everything to the authorities of Columbia County, identifying the robber as John Bain and telling where he hid out; he said he would be willing to confess to some of the crimes he had taken part in provided he could be locked up in jail to be protected from threats of violence from his partner.

This was done and the man then reported the robberies in which he had taken part; also that his partner, Bain, was a dangerous man and a serious threat to anyone who might attempt to arrest him. He also warned that any officers sent to arrest him should be well prepared and take due precautions

to protect themselves.

The feeling of the settlers on Dixie Mountain had begun to run high because of the crimes that had been committed. There was also the fear there might be other crimes that would be more serious.

Later, during the summer of 1894, Constable Ed Fowler from Goble, Columbia County, and his deputy, John Eisenblatter, of Scappoose, came into the Dixie Mountain community and reported that they had a warrant for the arrest of John Bain. They reported that they had met Bain on the Rocky Point road at the junction of the road going down to the Sophie Mozee place. They said Bain was on foot, armed with a rifle. The constable and deputy were mounted on horseback and rode by without saying anything to him. They approached several of the settlers for help as a posse to go with them to arrest Bain. Most of the men declined to go along to try to arrest a man who was reported to have said that he would resist any attempt to put him into custody. Noticeable among these men were those who were usually the outspoken members of the community on ordinary affairs. But here was some dangerous business to be undertaken and they were not going to accept this kind of job.

As the officers didn't have much success in getting help here, they left their horses on the mountain and walked through the woods to the Dutch Canyon settlement to see if they could get help there where deputy Eisenblatter lived and knew the people. They did not have much better success there. Most of those approached declined to go along to help with the arrest. One settler, a Mr. Saline, agreed to do so.

The officers returned through the woods to Dixie Mountain to try and get more help in this community. Abe Nelson, my uncle, was approached and he agreed to go along as a member of the posse. The constable asked my father, Cornelius Nelson, if he would go along. He said he would but that he didn't have a suitable gun for an undertaking of this kind. The constable furnished him with a rifle. The constable next engaged Jim Ryckman, who had a reputation among settlers as an expert deer hunter and a crack shot. Together with

Saline, there was now six in the posse. It had all been organized as secretly as the circumstances would permit. Then plans were made to locate and capture John Bain. It was reported that he was living in a cabin just north of the Rocky Point road, at the foot of what is known as the Portland hill, so named because Portland could be seen from the top of this hill.

The members of the posse quietly left their homes about midnight with plans to reach the cabin about three o'clock in the morning. When they arrived at the cabin they surrounded it at the edge of the small clearing and waited, hoping to surprise Bain when he came out in the morning and headed for the spring for water without his weapons.

The constable and Abe Nelson watched from behind the woodshed. The others stationed themselves at the edge of the woods around the small clearing. All was in readiness for daylight and the moment of surprise for the outlaw.

Daylight finally came after the long wait in the darkness and the chill air of the morning. The sun began to shine up over the horizon, but still no evidence of the outlaw. Finally, one of the men back of the woodshed thought he had seen a man move at the window in the cabin. All was quiet. There was no other evidence of life in the house. The suspense for the men continued, and all were on the alert for the expected moment when Bain would come out. The sun rose higher in the summer morning. The men sat silently in their respective vantage points around the small clearing and behind the woodshed. All was quiet.

Then suddenly Abe Nelson glanced back towards the woods and there was Bain coming across the clearing from out of the woods. He apparently had just noticed Constable Fowler and Nelson at the same time. Bain stood in the clearing about seventy feet from them. He stopped suddenly and demanded to know what they were doing there. The constable replied that they were watching the house. Bain was reported to have said, "You are here for some purpose and you had better get out damn quick!"

The men in the woods heard the loud talking and came out and then around

the woodshed at the left and on a line with the constable and Abe Nelson. Abe Nelson was on the right, Constable Fowler and Jim Ryckman next, then Saline, Cornelius Nelson, and Deputy Constable John Eisenblatter lined up to the left. As the clearing around the cabin was small this took place very quickly.

Constable Fowler, noting out of the corner of his eye the quick response of the other men, drew his revolver and jumped from his crouching position with the order to Bain to “throw up your hands.”

“No! Go to hell!” snarled Bain. He is reported to have stood looking at the posse for a moment.

Suddenly he leaned over and threw a sack from his shoulder. In doing so he pulled a revolver from its holster and shot at the men. At the same time he started jumping around, apparently to make it harder for the men to hit him.

The men in the posse replied immediately after Bain’s first shot. Four of the men were armed with rifles, the constable and his deputy with revolvers. Bain emptied his revolver, shooting rapidly and jumping around at the same time. After his revolver was emptied, he turned and ran back across the clearing and down the trail he had come in on a few minutes before.

The posse continued to shoot at him as he ran. Abe Nelson, who was on the extreme right of the line of men, by running a few steps to the right was able to get in line with the trail which turned slightly to the left and got in the last shot at Bain. This shot was believed to have hit him.

While Bain emptied his six-shooter point blank at the posse, none, fortunately, had been hit. He was reported to be a crack shot. Members of the posse had heard the bullets whiz past them. Afterwards, the men reported that they believed Bain had made the first shot too quickly to take good aim and that a bullet from the posse had hit him during the first round of shots from the posse. They said he had seemed to wince. Bain’s next shots went wild and probably over the heads of the men.

In all the excitement of shooting by the posse, John Eisenblatter, who

followed my father into line on the extreme left of the other men, fired from behind him. Cornelius ended up with powder burns on his neck from Eisenblatter's gun.

The posse started to follow Bain across the clearing into the woods, but Constable Fowler called off the chase, saying it was too dangerous and Bain had all the advantages of cover. He said that he had seen a man pass the window in the cabin that morning and that they should go back after him before he got away.

The constable and the other men battered the door of the cabin down. This was accomplished by Deputy Constable Eisenblatter with a heavy wooden maul. The other men stuck the muzzles of their guns in the door as it fell in. There were no signs of life inside. The deputies searched the cabin, and many stolen articles were found. Among these was a revolver belonging to Abe Nelson that had been stolen from his homestead cabin on Dixie Mountain. The constable took charge of the stolen articles from the cabin, and the posse then left the scene to return to their homes.

After this gun battle with John Bain and the uncertainties of whether or not he had been wounded; as well as because of his proven desperate character, the people were concerned as to whether he might return to the settlement and ambush some of the settlers in revenge for their trying to arrest him. The members of the posse carried revolvers and rifles with them while at their work or while traveling on the road.

My father drove a young spirited team while hauling shingles to the boat landing at Rocky Point, and he wondered what he could do if it was necessary to shoot and control the team of horses at the same time. But that was the chance that had to be taken. After a day or two, some of Bain's friends started looking for him. They came up the trail from Scappoose to his cabin. Just outside the clearing they found Bain lying dead with four bullet wounds in his chest. He had been fatally wounded during the gun battle with the posse but had had strength enough to keep running until he had gotten into

the woods and out of sight of the posse. Then, reportedly, he had retrieved a shotgun out of a hollow stump and was lying on this when he was found. Two rifles were also found in the old stump.

A coroner's inquest was held on August 3, 1894, by the coroner from Portland (Multnomah County). According to the coroner's report, John Bain, thirty years old, had been killed July 28th while resisting arrest. With the known death of Bain, the settlers felt more secure. The robberies of homesteaders ceased from that time on.

Many years later, another mystery was apparently cleared up that had puzzled members of the posse. That was the fact that a man had been seen at the window of the cabin; yet no one had been found when they entered the cabin, nor was any evidence found of anyone having left the cabin that morning. A man not known in the community years later made a statement that he had been in the cabin the morning the posse came to arrest Bain and had been there when the shooting took place. To get away, he had gone up the chimney and hid. In this hiding place, he had not been detected and had been able to escape arrest by the posse. So ended one of the most stirring events of the homestead days—a subject that was to be discussed around fireside gatherings for many years afterwards.

In Charlie Nelson's version of this episode there are some further details given:

The mystery of who was in the cabin before and during the gun battle was not solved until a number of years later, when one of the neighborhood children, Robert Service, Jr., was old enough to work in a logging camp on Rocky Point Road.

One evening while the loggers were swapping yarns in the bunkhouse, one of them by the name of William Gentry told of an experience he had a number of years before not far from there. He told of meeting a young fellow

on a riverboat down from Portland who invited him to his cabin in the hills for the night and promised to go deer hunting with him the next day. He said he accepted the invitation and after a venison supper they went to bed in a double bunk, but when he awoke at daybreak in the morning his host was gone. Being hungry he had just started to fix himself some breakfast when suddenly he heard loud voices outside, followed by many gun shots. He knew he could not escape through the door so he locked it from the inside and then pulled a board loose from the boarded-up fireplace, crawled inside and climbed up onto the chimney bench. He quietly stood there until all the excitement was over and everybody had gone, then he got out of there and down the hill fast. He admitted to his bunkhouse audience that he had never been so scared in his life as he was during that ordeal.

John Bain, as a teenager, had been convicted and sentenced to prison for murdering a Chinese-American with a meat ax while employed in a butcher shop. He served out his sentenced but was later convicted again and sent to prison for murdering his own two children. He escaped after serving but a short time and had been leading a life of crime for several years before being mortally wounded on Dixie Mountain.

Abraham, when he wasn't using his marksmanship skills to hunt deer and other wildlife on Dixie Mountain, mostly made a living by farming and cutting shingles. For years he operated a small shop near his home, where he turned out cedar shingles for a market in Portland. Dixie Mountain was known as Cedar Mountain in the early days, on account of the fine quality of cedar trees growing on the mountain which produced excellent shingles. Abe devised a means of steaming the shingles during the manufacturing process, so they could be tapered more easily using a drawknife.

Abe engaged in an added occupation during Prohibition, 1916 to 1933. Along with his oldest son, Oscar, Abe ran a moonshine operation, transporting

his product under loads of shingles or firewood to Portland to sell. He wasn't the only one on Dixie Mountain engaged in this illicit liquor trade. The deep ravines in the region offered good places to hide a distillery. Abe's brother Cornelius may even have done a bit of moonshining, at least enough to satisfy his own needs. But Abe and Oscar had a serious operation going, until they were arrested for it and their still was destroyed.

A rift developed between the Cornelius branch of the family and that of Abraham after the breakup of Abe and Oscar's clandestine operation. Abe and Oscar suspected afterward that Cornelius's son Clarence had notified authorities, leading to the crackdown on their business. For years these two brothers, Abe and Cornelius, and the cousins from both families, kind of avoided each other. But the truth about how the authorities learned about Abe and Oscar's dealings may have been less intentional. Clarence's older brother Walter at one point went into the bank in nearby Linton. The banker, knowing Walter was related to Abe Nelson, expressed concern for the financial well-being of Abe's family. Walter responded that he thought they were doing quite well, with their moonshining and all. The banker, who attended the same church as Fidelia, said something like, "Surely Deal doesn't know about this." Walter replied that she could not help but know about it. It was not long afterward that Abe and Oscar were arrested, and Walter always assumed the banker had notified the authorities.⁵³

Abe and Fidelia had twelve children; two did not survive childhood. Interestingly, three of their offspring remained childless, and five only had one child each (though in two of these cases the child was not a biological Nelson descendent). There was a total of eleven grandchildren. Abraham lived out his life in Oregon, dying at the age of eighty-four in 1950. He was the last survivor among the offspring of George and Margaret Nelson.

Oscar (11 September 1894–17 March 1952) was the oldest of Abe and Fidelia's children. He grew to be a large, husky fellow, six-foot-one inch tall. Most of his life he worked as a logger and a railroad trestle builder. After a short

first marriage, he married Ruth Farris and they raised four children on Dixie Mountain. These were James, Winston, Virginia “Ruth” Johnston and Delores Teipel. In 1938, Oscar fell while setting up logging rigging on a “spar pole.” His back was broken and he suffered severe internal injuries. For the remainder of his life he was disabled.

Lincoln (4 January 1895–18 January 1905), the second of Abe and Fidelia’s children, died just after his tenth birthday.

He was followed in the family by John Roy (2 July 1896–29 July 1978). John married a woman named Margaret. They had no children. He mostly did carpentry work and operated a vineyard in Vellejo, California. Late in their lives, John and Margaret moved to McMinnville, Oregon.

Arthur Nelson (10 August 1898–18 May 1903) was the other son of Abe and Fidelia to die young. He died of appendicitis at the age of four.

Elmer Nelson (6 November 1899–27 October 1979) was the fifth son in the family. He never got more than five years of education and he couldn’t write, but he worked as a timber faller most of his life, mainly for International Paper Company, while living in Reedsport, Oregon. His biggest claim to fame was his exceptional skill at sharpening chain saws, something he did for the entire falling crew he worked with. But his real love was hunting, which he passionately pursued, though cleaning the animals he killed would make him sick. His wife’s name was Nan, and together they adopted a daughter, Kay. Kay earned a doctorate degree and teaches at a private school in Arizona.

Lucy (13 July–30 September 1991) was the first of two daughters in the family. As an adult, she lived in Portland, then moved to Montana and finally settled in Grover, California, late in life. She is remembered as having been a great cook, lifelong grange member, and a person full of humor. This was despite having been widowed twice. With her first husband, Harry Spencer, she had one daughter, Wanda Schroeder. She married a third time, to Earl Haley.

George Wilson (18 March 1903–June 1984) was the seventh child. After

growing up on Dixie Mountain, he ran a dairy farm in Gravelford, Oregon, for many years. Later he moved up to Forest Grove, Oregon, and worked in the woods as a logger. A heavy drinker and a lifelong Mason, George was a tough character. He married Evelyn and had one step-daughter, Helen Lang.

Myrtle Virginia (15 April 1904–5 May 1986) married Charles Young and lived in Los Angeles for many years. Late in life they moved to San Luis Obispo, California, where, when out for a walk one morning, Myrtle was hit by an auto and killed. The couple had no children.

Albert Wendell (17 April 1906–13 February 1993) lived in Bend, Oregon. Right after High School, he taught elementary school for awhile, then took a two year course at a Normal School (i.e., educational college) and went on to become a school principal. He completed his career as the school superintendent in Bend. His wife's name was Vangie, also an educator. They had one daughter, Valerie, who also taught school. All three members of this family died during a short period in the early-1990s.

Lewis (16 August 1908–19 February 1995) was, at six-foot-four-and-a-half inches, the tallest of Abe and Fidelia's offspring. He married Doris in 1935, and during World War II, he served overseas. Afterward, Lewis and Doris lived in Portland in a float home on the Columbia River. For a living he drove a fuel truck for Shell Oil and then for many years was the company's truck dispatcher. He was an excellent horseshoe player who loved to go fishing. Lewis and Doris had no children.

Thomas Edward (26 July 1911–13 June 1998) learned to be a logger early in life living on Dixie Mountain. He did logging off and on throughout much of his life. But after marrying Doris Johnson, whose father was part Coquille Indian, he moved to Coquille, Oregon, and helped manage his in-laws' dairy farm when he wasn't working in the woods. Tom and Doris had one son, Bob, who has made a name for himself as an aviculturist, breeding and raising exotic birds.

The youngest in the family was Raymond Harold (8 February 1917–27 Au-

gust 1991). Ray was another husky Nelson, with exceptional athletic talent early in life. He attended Southern Oregon Normal School on a football scholarship. Later he served in the Marine Corps. Ray married a daughter of a Dixie Mountain family, Juanita Smith. They lived in Salem, Oregon, and later in Portland. For forty years he worked for a telephone company as a PDX installer. Together they had two children: Ray, Jr., who has had a career as a communications instructor in colleges and universities in the Portland area, and Linda Henley.

Chapter Five

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Much of the story of the first three generations of Nelsons in the United States is typical of thousands of other immigrant families of the same era. That the Nelsons came with a party of Mormons is, perhaps, a more unusual feature, but, even there, the history of immigration to America is replete with stories of people seeking to escape religious persecution. No doubt, there was a basic economic motive as well that prompted George and Margaret to leave the dismal prospects they faced in Denmark to seek a better future. The Mormon church supplied the beliefs and helped work out the logistics of travel to make it possible. Around a quarter-million other Danes came without the assistance of a church in the nineteenth century, and after the Nielsens/Nelsons defected from their religious affiliation, they had much more in common with these other Danes.

Places where they lived in Iowa became a part of the United States where Danish immigrants left a lasting mark. Shelby County is a lot like Denmark, with similar terrain. Joanna and I attended an annual Danish Days Festival in Elk Horn, Iowa, in June of 2000. The Danish Immigrants Museum there is worth a visit for anyone interested in the Danish heritage.

Immigrants settled in the urban areas and scrambled to find work in the factories and shops of the cities. Others sought a place in the countryside or

in rural settlements, wanting a piece of ground they could farm. People often gravitate toward that which they have grown accustomed. The Nelsons were definitely country folks before they arrived in America. George came with skills in a trade that was in high demand in small towns. With wagon trains moving west toward new frontiers, his blacksmith skills must have served him well in making a start for his family in America. But if business was so good, why did he move several times in those early years? It would be interesting to know more of what occurred during the period the Nelsons were in Iowa. Were there conflicts resulting from George's hot-tempered personality, which we get a glimpse of in his angry outburst with the Mormons? Could such feuding have resulted in the need to escape to someplace else, while he blamed the Mormons for sending an avenging angel? Or was the move to Missouri a result of more mundane economic factors. Possibly it was the railroad being constructed across the continent, which arrived in Iowa City, Iowa, in 1856, and became the jumping off point for wagon trains leaving for the West Coast. This would have diminished the demand for wagon builders in the western part of the state.

The family arrived in Gentry County, Missouri, about the time some people in the county were pulling up stakes and heading toward better prospects out west. The Nelsons may well have been able to buy a farm from one of those families that was eager to move on. As it was, the choice to move to Gentry County was not a good one, and we've seen evidence that they wanted to leave not long after arriving. Even today, Gentry County is not a profitable agricultural region. Abandoned, ramshackle farm-houses are scattered across the landscape. The family got bogged down, trying to eke out an existence off poor soil while enduring unforgiving weather.

George's injury during military training made a bad situation much worse. Some relatives have suggested that, given the casualty rate during the war, his life may have been spared on account of his injury. The Missouri Thirty-fifth Infantry, which he had been a part of, mostly did garrison duty at Helena, Ar-

kansas, during the war. The unit was only involved in one battle, repulsing Lt. Gen. Holmes's attack on Helena on July 4, 1863. Eight enlisted men from this unit died in combat, but 234 died of disease during the war. George escaped all of that, but he suffered enough as it was, and his family bore the misery with him. There were probably times when they wondered whether life in the old country might not have been better.

As we have seen, soon after George's death, the family started dispersing. Marie was a brave young woman—or maybe just eager to escape a depressing situation at home—when she ventured out to California. She probably dreamed of better prospects in fertile valleys, or even in a town or city. My guess is she met Julius in someplace like Sacramento and fell in love before she realized that all he had to offer was a hardscrabble life in a little frontier mining community. She didn't live long enough to see life improve much and could have died of any number of diseases that swept through the mining camps.

Cornelius seems to have gone to Sonora because it is where his sister lived. The best thing he got out of the place was a good wife. The rest was just tedious day jobs and small-time farming. He did better once he moved his family up to Oregon and homesteaded on Dixie Mountain. There wasn't a lot of money to be made, but it was a healthy environment. The view he enjoyed of the Columbia River valley and Cascade peaks was priceless. (I suspect that it won't be long before someone builds a million dollar home with large bay windows on the site of his old homestead.) He found contentment, even though he was a widower for many years, living a long life.

George W. was the next member of the family to venture out on his own. He clearly was a hard worker, trying to succeed with the brute force of his large body. Coal mining was generally the most reliable, steady source of income for him, but he dreamed of something better and was restless in trying to find it. One gets the feeling that his first experience in Colorado, when he homesteaded near Colorado Springs, was incredibly disillusioning. He clearly loved the place

he found. His dream of settling on a productive farm where his labor would pay off was being fulfilled. However, less than two years later, he and Alice were pulling up stakes to move back to Missouri. Interminable illness, compounded by obnoxious neighbors, had killed the dream. Nursing his wife back to health and caring for a growing family seems to have become his preoccupation for awhile. Moves to Oklahoma then New Mexico represented repeated resurgences of his dream of finding a place where his hard work would yield enough to provide for his family and give him some contentment. A treasure, he finally learned, was hidden back in Colorado, but this time down in the southwest corner of the state. The tragedy in the Colorado coal mine was not just his death, but that he had been forced back into the kind of work from which he had so delightfully tried to escape. I am left with the impression that George was well loved by his large family, even though they may never have fully understood all that his restless soul had struggled to overcome.

Abe's story reinforces this less-than-romantic picture of homesteading pioneers. One thing was clear in his mind, he didn't want to spend any more of his life in "old Mo" if he could help it—a sentiment that was expressed by many others. He went on to learn in Colorado how lonely it can get out in the wide open West without a family. What he had not fully anticipated was the sheer boredom that was so much part of the lives of many early homesteaders. Once in Oregon, life settled down for him, with a growing family to keep him company. During the long years of the Great Depression, however, they lived on the brink of poverty. Alcoholism took a heavy toll on some members of this family.

Christian's life, even more than that of his siblings, gives us a portrait of the kind of economic constraints early settlers struggled against. The old farm in Missouri robbed him of the best years of his life, years spent lamenting the dullness of it all. Montana gave him a new lease on life. He was a brave man to venture forth with his large family and endure what they did to get a new start. The dry climate cured him of the illness that had plagued him for many years.

A demand in the region for the blacksmithing skills he had learned from his father gave him the chance to engage in the kind of work he enjoyed most. The family life that meant so much to him was able to proceed on a firmer economic footing.

Meanwhile, Chrisanna was the only one of George and Margaret's children to remain in Gentry County, Missouri. Her devotion to caring for her mother defined her life, then left her empty when Margaret died. But once she married a widower and took over responsibility for raising his six children, she must have had more than enough to do to keep occupied. Her husband, Anthony Walker, seems to have been better established in Gentry County, and the new farm they acquired along the Grand River was preferable to what the Nelsons had formerly owned. They scraped by, finding meaning in their church involvements, as the family continued to grow. Nowadays, we would think of a family like that as being dirt-poor. In those days, people thought of it as normal, like most of their neighbors.

The generation following these six Nelson siblings presents us with a picture of further development in American life, with the roots in the old country a fading notion. It is interesting to see how places settled by the six children of George and Margeret who spread out across the United States have continued to be home for many descendents in subsequent generations. There are descendents of Mary still living near Sonora, California. Two of Cornelius Nelson's kids lived out most of their lives on Dixie Mountain, Oregon, and several others lived nearby. One descendent still lives on Dixie Mountain. There are quite a few Nelson relatives in or around Cortez, Colorado, where George W. last settled; others continue to live in Oklahoma. Only one of Abe's offspring stayed on Dixie Mountain, but most of the others remained in Oregon, some in nearby Portland. The area around Billings, Montana, is still populated with descendents of Christian Nelson; and there are a half-dozen families in or near Gentry County, Missouri, that can trace their roots back to Chrisanna.

Many of those in this third generation of Nelsons continued to earn a living by working with their hands. Farming continued to be a mainstay for some, others found steady wage earning jobs or started small businesses. At least eight years of education was available to them, and many received twelve. The quality of the letters they wrote greatly improved over that of their parents. Only a few attended college, but a handful received enough training to go into the teaching profession. As with the American population in general, once they made it through the Depression, life began looking up for most of them.

The fourth generation is a much more diverse group of people. Most seem to have been in a better position to fulfill their dreams and aspirations, rather than being prodded along by circumstances beyond their control. Many of them completed college; at least two earned doctorate degrees. I've met some great relatives in this generation: more than a few farmers, a cat skinner, a college instructor, an aviculturist, a librarian, a rancher, a timber scaler, etc. I even met another Jack Nelson. However, the story of the fourth and subsequent generations is a subject that is beyond the scope of this book.

In concluding this story of the Nelson family, there are a number of things I would like to briefly mention. During the course of my research on the Nelson family in the United States, a few people have suggested there seems to have been an above-average rate of twin births among the descendents of George and Margaret, and people have occasionally commented on the long life span of many in our family. I want to make a tentative effort to examine these issues. I also want to say some things about extended family relations and things that can be done to stay in touch with each other.

Multiple births is a subject that attracts a fair amount of attention. Frequency of multiple births in the United States has in recent decades increased appreciably on account of fertility treatments available. But before the advent of the use of these treatments in the 1960s, the rate of twin births was around 1.2 percent, or

one set of twins for every ninety live births. In the three generations of Nelsons following George and Margaret, there were six sets of twins (not counting three sets stillborn) out of 196 live births. That makes for a twin rate of just over 3 percent, or one set of twins for every 32.66 live births. However, in spite of this impressive statistic, this probably is not a genetic trait that comes from George or Margaret. Identical twins are considered to be purely a random phenomenon, occurring once in every 285 livebirths. Fraternal twinning is believed to be influenced by heredity, carried down through the maternal line. In the second generation, Christian and Mary had a set of twins, and both Cornelius and Anna, and Abraham and Fidelia had stillborn twins. For each of these cases, the father was the one from the Nelson family of origin and, therefore, not the source of the genetic predisposition. The frequency of twinning has become above average in the family due to women who have married into the family and passed this trait on to their daughters. Our sample may be too small to get a fully reliable reckoning. Still, there were in the family in these three generations about three times more than the usual number of twins.

Viewing the data on the family that has been gathered on the first three generations after the immigration (George and Margaret, plus their children and grandchildren, including those in Denmark), it might be possible to test hypotheses about family longevity and to get more specific results. I offer only a provisional answer here. Though there has only been one centenarian in the family to date, there were an additional twelve nonagenarians—with one still surviving—in these generations. For the sixty-three people in these first three generations, the average life was sixty-four years. (For those who survived childhood, it was 75.5 years.) The average for those in the third generation was 67.4 years.⁵⁴ Given the increase in life expectancy in the United States in the latter half of the twentieth century, these figures may not seem so dramatic. But compared to figures from the first half of the twentieth century—life expectancy in 1900 was 47.3; in 1930 it was 59.7—the ages of Nelson family members seems to

be well above average. For a sample of people who mostly lived in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, Nelson family life spans were longer on average than those of most people. Most impressive is the fact that one in five Nelsons in these early generations reached the age of ninety or more. This included three out of six of Cornelius's children and five out of eleven of George W's offspring. For those of us in the fifth and sixth generations, perhaps we need to take seriously the person who said, "If I knew I was going to live so long, I would have taken better care of myself." At the same time, we have to take into account the hereditary influences from other branches in our family trees and our own habits.

Living long is less important than living well. Even our one centenarian, Floyd Nelson (1888–1989), couldn't quite understand all the hoopla surrounding his 100th birthday. If that's what it takes to be famous, well, he figured he could do it. But that was after the fact. The TV appearances, the article in the newspaper, the birthday card from President Reagan, not to mention the big birthday party, all took him a bit by surprise. He was used to making the most of each and every day he had left.

A big part of living well involves enjoying good family relations. Venturing forth has its drawbacks, as it pulls apart extended family units. Now that communication and transportation have dramatically improved over those that our forebears dealt with, there is opportunity to reunite and enjoy getting to know others in the growing family tree. Mary Weishaar (a grandchild of Christian and Mary Nelson) made a big contribution toward keeping the family together by organizing a couple of extended-family reunions in Montana in the 1980s. In June of 2000, Jacquelyn Nelson Foster (a great-granddaughter of George W. and Laura Alice Nelson), put together a large, extended-family reunion in Branson, Missouri, that attracted 170 members of the family. Jacquelyn is willing to do it again, and plans have been made for another gathering in Branson in 2005.

There are a number of other ways in which extended-family relations can be

maintained. Jacquelyn has a Web site at <myfamily.com> devoted to news and photos of the family. There is also now an annual family newsletter, something many families use to keep relations intact.

Hopefully, this book will also contribute to an increase in understanding of the extended Nelson family unit—what it is that we all have in common—and give us greater appreciation for our heritage and a sense of family loyalty. In the process of writing it, I have derived a great deal of pleasure from getting to know relatives I didn't know I had, and I look forward to learning more about the Nelson family as it ventures forth into the future.

ENDNOTES

¹William Mulder, *Homeward to Zion*, University of Minnesota Press, 1957, p.139. Mulder has written a general history of the LDS immigration from Scandinavia, providing details of early missionary efforts, opposition to the Mormons, and voyages to America. This book was reprinted in 2000.

² Conway B. Sonne, *Ships, Saints and Mariners*, Utah: SLC University Press, 1987, p. 76. Descriptions of LDS immigration parties and their experiences at sea can be found on a Web site put together by Bert Nelson (no relation) <<http://www.xmission.com/~nelsonb/pioneer.htm>>

³ Mulder, *Homeward to Zion*, p. 157.

⁴ The journals recording the experiences of the Forsgren company include the following: “The Forsgren Journal,” published in *Heart Throbs of the West*, Vol. 6, 1945, pp. 1-31, compiled by Kate B. Carter. This journal can also be found on the Scandinavian Mormon Immigration Web site: <<http://www.xmission.com/~nelsonb/forsgren.htm>>. “The Diary of Christian Nielsen” is in manuscript form, translated by Niels F. Green, in the LDS Historical Department archives, Salt Lake City: manuscript numbers 5710, 1619, as well as 6133. A lengthy letter Christian Nielsen wrote to his family in Denmark has appeared in *Our Pioneer Heritage*, Vol. 11 (1968), pp. 231-242, and, more recently, has been edited and published by Carol Cornwall Madsen in *Voices from the Mormon Trail*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Books, 1997, pp. 521-29. (The date of Christian’s journey is mistakenly given as 1855 in these printed sources.) “The Christian Munk Journal,” translated by Andrew Jensen, is in the LDS Historical Department archives, manuscript 1535, 18 pp. A summary by William Mulder of the Forsgren Party’s voyage and subsequent trip across the continent can be found in *Homeward to Zion*, pp. 157-165. This passage can also be found online at: <http://www.xmission.com/~nelsonb/full_index.htm>. See as well, Davies Bitton, *Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies*, FHL microfilm 1059488; microfiche 6053254. A fourth journal, by Herman Julius Christensen, noted in Mulder, 1957, p. 336, n4, remains in private hands.

⁵ This record of the family’s arrival in America can be found at the National Archives in

Washington, D.C., by searching the Index to Passenger Lists under the misspelling that appears on the New Orleans log, i.e., “Neilsen,” (T527, # 22). It is also available from the Family History Library on microfilm # 200173.

⁶ Kate Carter, “They Came in 1853,” *Daughters of Utah Pioneers*, 1954.

⁷ A good, readable overview on early Mormon treks to Salt Lake Valley is Wallace Stegner’s, *The Gathering of Zion: The Story of the Mormon Trail*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964.

⁸ It is possible to retrace the Mormon Trail across Iowa. Maps are available from state tourist offices. The Western Trail Museum in Council Bluffs and the Mormon Trail Museum in Florence, just north of Omaha, offer lively displays that depict life on the trail.

⁹ Letter from Elder James Bond to President Willard Richards, August 12, 1853, FHL # 125 9740, *Journal History of Church* # 14..

¹⁰ Letter from Elder James Horace S. Eldredge to his superiors, July 10, 1853, writing from St. Joseph, FHL # 125 9740, *Journal History of Church* # 14.

¹¹ Ane (Nielsdatter) Hansen (LDS AFN: 1QZP-GT) immigrated to Utah in 1862, in the same party (Liljenquist) in which her future husband, Soren Hansen (d. 1900), came. Soren’s first wife, Ane Jensen, who bore him eleven children, died during their trip across the plains to Utah. He later also married Ann Christiansen (b. about 1814). Ane (Jørgen’s sister) had two children: Lucy Annie Hansen (b. 1863 in UT) and Soren Hyrum Hansen (b. 1866 in UT). Ane died May 30, 1899, in Mantua, Utah. Many of her descendents reside in Utah. Research on Ane’s descendents in the LDS databank was done by Afton Julia Horsley. Marie Christensen (b. 1798), Ane and Jørgen’s mother, came with Ane, but died while crossing the plains.

¹² The LDS maintain genealogy databanks which contain information entered into them by people researching primary source materials. The International Genealogical Index (IGI) is the more comprehensive databank, but it is not as well integrated as the Family Source, the other databank, which provides pedigrees and descendancy charts, as well as easy cross-referencing. Both these databanks are available at local Family History Centers maintained by the LDS Church. The IGI can be viewed online at: <<http://www.familysource.org>>. The ancestral file number (AFN) for Jørgen is C8ZT-NS; that of Margaret is 3KN3-RP. It should be noted that a typological error in early editions of the Family Source placed Jørgen and Margaret’s family in Kirke “Laaby.” This mistake shows up in places in the IGI as well.

The research on Margaret’s and Sophie’s ancestry, tracing roots back to around 1600 for some branches of the family, was done by Ruth Hansen and Harold Ted Hougaard.

¹³ For an overview on Danish history, I relied on a number of sources: Stewart Oakley, *A*

Short History of Denmark, New York: Praeger, 1972; Palle Lauring, *A History of Denmark*, Copenhagen: Høst & Søn, 1960 [1999]; Thorkild Kjrgaard, et al, *The Danish Revolution: An Ecohistorical Interpretation*, Cambridge University Press, 1994. Most of the local history on the Kirke Såby area I gleaned from visits to the Local Archive in Hvalsø and from local historian Bent Godfredsen.

¹⁴ Photographs and information on Kirke Såby can be seen online at: <<http://www.astoft.co.uk/churchessaelland.htm#Kirke%20Såby>>

¹⁵ A copy of this letter from George A. Nelson, dated April 11, 1958, was sent to me by Ava Kenny. Ava's sister, Velma Nelson Burch, repeated this same information in a letter to Irene Groom dated September 28, 1981.

¹⁶ Details regarding Åstrup come from Anden Ud gave, *Danske Slotte og Herregaarde*, København: Hassings Furlog, 1963; further information came from Bent Godfredsen, a local historian residing in Vester Såby.

¹⁷ Dannemand remained childless and lies buried in the churchyard at Solderup. But before his death, in 1888, he created a foundation for the care of widows and unmarried members of the nobility and left his estate at Åstrup as a place for them to reside. Additional vacancies were given to retired members of the Royal Guard after 1928.

¹⁸ The description of Jørgen is taken from his Union Army discharge certificate, found in his pension file at the National Archives, Washington, D.C., file number 47.428.

¹⁹ The circumstances of Margaret's birth could lead to speculation about whether there might have been some indiscretion involving Count Holstein, and thus some *nobility* in the family's blood. Given Marie Rasmusdatter's age at the time and the fact that there is no clear evidence she worked at Ledreborg before Margrethe's birth, this hypothesis may be a bit far-fetched.

²⁰ Sources on the history of Ledreborg are: Første Bind, *Danske Slotte og Herregaarde*, København: Alfred G. Hassings Follog, 1944; Flemming Jerk, *Herregårde: Danmark*, København: Gyldendal, 1980. See <<http://uk.ledreborgslot.dk/dk/>> for some great photos of Ledreborg.

²¹ For information on early Mormon missionary efforts in Denmark, I relied on William Mulder's book, cited above, plus Jørgen W. Schmidt, *Oh, du Zion i Vest: Den Danske Mormon-Emigration 1850-1900*, København: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1965; and Andrew Jensen, *History of the Scandinavian Mission*, Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1927.

²² Dale Nelson, a grandson of Cornelius, had the clearest recollection of this incident involving the sound of a gun being cocked. C. Donald Nelson, a first cousin of Dale's, also remembered

the story being told during his youth.

²³ Kirby Chestnut wrote a brief article titled “History of the Hugginsville Church” in April of 1954, when the second church building on this site was razed. I am indebted to Irene Groom for finding this article and other sources on Gentry County for me.

²⁴ Charlotte Baxtrom, a granddaughter of George W. Nelson, provided me with a copy of this old deed of sale.

²⁵ The Nelson properties in Gentry County lay in sections two and three of township 63 north and range 32 west. Mostly this acreage was, more specifically, the eighty acres in the east half of the northeast quarter of section three, the northeast forty acres of the southeast quarter of section three, and the southwest forty acres of the northwest quarter of section two.

²⁶ I am indebted to Irene Groom for helping me identify the Nelson property holdings in Gentry County. Irene found relevant back tax receipts in a vault at the UMB Bank in Albany (Box # 24, Estate 443) and helped me locate old maps in the country library. These properties were later known as the Amon Gregory place. At the turn of the millennium, the place is vacant. I was informed that it was owned by someone named Albright and managed by Darrel Woods. The part near the creek is wooded; hay gets cut on the northern part.

²⁷ The name “Margaret Wilson” appears on the properties in question on the Edward Brothers Atlas of Gentry County, 1877. “M. Wilson” also appears on the NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of section 2, which may have been where the additional Nelson properties were at that time.

²⁸ The 1896 map was done by W.P. Bullock and, along with the Edward Brothers Atlas of 1877, is on file in the Gentry County Library in Albany. The Nelsons appear as owners of the parcels in question on the 1896 map, though, in fact, most of these properties were sold the year before.

²⁹ The story of George Nelson seeing slaves being sold in the marketplace and children being separated from their parents in New Orleans, and his vowing to fight for their freedom if he ever got the chance is found in an article featuring a granddaughter of George’s, Cornelia Palmer Dunning, that appeared in the *Cortez [Colorado] Sentinel*, May 17, 1982.

³⁰ The account of Col. Cranor’s “nonbattle” of Gentry County is addressed in Carmeta Pierce Robertson, *They Paved the Way, Research Material Relative to Gentry County, Missouri Pioneers, 1800–1875*, Albany: Gentry County Genealogical Society, 1988.

³¹ Record of George Nelson’s participation in the Home Guard is found at the National Archive, M405, Roll #716. The questions written by Bertha Nelson and responded to by her father, Christian L. Nelson, is in an old document that Maggie Applegate (granddaughter of Bertha) showed

me. He also wrote that his father served under General Prentice and died of “brain problems,” statements that appear to be inaccurate.

³² Information on the Gentry County Home Guards comes from Frederick Dyer, *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion*, 1908 ed., pp. 798, 1342. This reference can be viewed at: <<http://www.usmo.com/~momollus/MOREG/HG.htm>>. The record of a George Nelson joining this unit in Gentry County is found at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., on microfilm: M405, Roll #716.

³³ George A. Nelson’s recollection of his grandfather’s participation in the Union Army is taken from “The Last Covered Wagons,” unpublished manuscript, about 1948.

³⁴ The letters contained in George Nelson’s pension file (47.428) can be viewed in the reading room of the National Archives, though one must allow several hours for the file to be retrieved after submitting a request. About a dozen affidavits are contained in the file, including those cited here, attesting to George’s disability and how his injury was sustained.

³⁵ These Certificates of Disability are found among George’s military records in the National Archives, available on microfilm, M405, Roll #643. A copy of the second certificate, that of January 13, 1863, is also found in George’s pension file (47.428). Another copy of this second certificate, which seems to have been passed down through the family, is in the possession of Charlotte Baxtrom.

³⁶ The reference to the old oak tree and plans for a trip to California comes from George A. Nelson’s unpublished manuscript titled “The Last Covered Wagons.”

³⁷ This April 13, 1887, affidavit written out by the county clerk, J.S. Williams, was filed on behalf of Abraham L. Nelson when Abraham was seeking benefits he was entitled to as a child who was still a minor when his father died from injuries sustained during military duty. Burroughs testimony was needed to prove that George died of the hernia suffered in his military training.

³⁸ These papers and affidavits were not filed until the late 1880s, about fifteen years after George Nelson’s death. The affidavits have been preserved in George’s pension file (47.428) and copies of some have been handed down through the George W. Nelson family (Charlotte Baxtrom provided me with copies).

³⁹ These letters, fifty-some in all, were preserved first by Cornelius, then by his son George A. Nelson, and then George’s daughter Ava Kenny. I am indebted to Ava for entrusting me with the originals of most of them. Copies of additional Christian letters were given to me by Irene Groom. To these I have been able to add a few more which other members of the family managed to save.

⁴⁰ Easter's daughter, Charlotte Baxtrom, passed this old letter on to me, and I am grateful to Bente Trane, director of the Local Archive in Hvalsø, Denmark, for translating it from Danish.

⁴¹ Leonard Verkuyl, a great-grandson of Mary and Julius Halck, found the record of their marriage license and certificate for me in the Stanislaus County courthouse. Leonard and his brother Eugene related to me the tradition of Julius's arrival in the United States and other details on the history of this branch of the family. The reference in the "Miners and Business Men's Directory" of Tuolumne (and parts of Calaveras, Stanislaus and San Joaquin) County, Columbia, 1856 (reprinted in 1976 by the Donald I. Segerstrom Memorial Fund) is on p. 87. He is listed as a miner from New York in the Poverty Hill Directory subsection.

⁴² From George A. Nelson, "The Last Covered Wagons," unpublished manuscript.

⁴³ Cornelius and Anna's homestead was on the SE ¼ of section 28, Twsp 3N, Range 2W. A history of the Dixie Mountain area written by Jack E Nelson and Jo Ann Tannock was published with the sponsorship of the local grange in 1998. The book is titled *Dixie Mountain Legacies: Rural Life in an Oregon Community*.

⁴⁴ A tribute to George Allen Nelson appeared in the Saint Helen's *Sentinel Mist* on August 16, 1935.

⁴⁵ A letter dated February 15, 1889, has been preserved (Charlotte Baxtrom sent me the original) in which Ambrose Collins, brother of Laura Alice, offers to George and Laura Alice Nelson the Collins farm in exchange for their caring for Martha Collins. A deed of sale dated March 14, 1889, completing this transaction is in the possession of Charlotte Baxtrom. The property in question was in Nodaway County: NE ¼ of the NE ¼ of section 15 of Township 64 and Range 37 (40 acres); plus, SE ¼ of the SE ¼ of section 16 of Township 64 Range 37 (40 acres).

⁴⁶ The quote and information given by Cornelia Nelson Dunning comes from a newspaper clipping of an article written by Susan Shields, "Cornelia Dunning—goat herder on bicycle," *Cortez Sentinel*, May 17, 1982.

⁴⁷ Charlotte Baxtrom, a granddaughter of George and daughter of Easter Hazel, first related this account to me of the hidden treasure in southwestern Colorado and the family's move there to search for it. Stanley Ownbey provided further details.

⁴⁸ The letter conveying the news of George's death was written by his daughter Margaret to Sam and Fanny Baker on January 18, 1925. Fanny was a stepdaughter of Chrisanna Nelson Walker. Sam and Fanny lived in Alanthus, Missouri.

⁴⁹ On the occasion of Floyd Nelson's "100-year celebration," he was featured in a *Bolivar Herald Free Press* article written by Clarice Beaman (September 7, 1988, p. 6-B).

⁵⁰ The article in the *Cortez Sentinel* written by Susan Shields says Cornelia and James moved back to the Nelson family farm in Gentry County. Alice Hayden, more recently, informed me that she did not think this was correct, and that they settled not too far from Springfield at "Alva," [which is probably Alba]. She also noted they did not go to New Mexico by wagon before taking a train to Colorado, as was reported in the article.

Alice Palmer Hayden deserves credit for gathering in a scrapbook much of the information I have used regarding the George W. Nelson branch of the family. Alice credits her aunt Margaret for giving her much of the data. Additional information came from Charlotte Baxtrom and Jackie Foster.

⁵¹ Abe Nelson's homestead on Dixie Mountain was the NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of section 28, Twsp 3N and Range 2W. The old Ryckman place was the east half of the NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of section 33 and was later known as the Hennessey place.

⁵² This edition of the story of the battle with the outlaw is taken from *Dixie Mountain Legacies: Rural Life in and Oregon Community*, by Jack E. Nelson and Jo Ann Tannock, pp. 45-48. The original versions appeared in "Battle with an Outlaw," unpublished manuscript by George A. Nelson, no date; and "Dixie Mountain: 1889-1972," unpublished manuscript by Charles L. Nelson, 1972.

⁵³ Dale Nelson, the son of Walter Nelson, informed me of this account of how authorities learned of Abe and Oscar's moonshining activities.

⁵⁴ There are a couple of caveats in these statistics on life spans. Niels P. Hansen and his son (and perhaps other children) were left out of the calculations because I do not know the dates of their deaths. Those who died accidental deaths are included. Those not surviving childhood included children up to thirteen years old.

About the Author: Jack E. Nelson, a fifth generation descendent of George and Margaret Nelson from the Cornelius branch of the family, spent his childhood in the Congo, where his parents supervised a mission hospital from 1953-62. During his youth, he lived in northern California. He earned a Ph.D. in religious studies and taught at Temple University in Philadelphia and at Temple's branch campus in Tokyo, Japan. Currently, he resides, together with his wife, Joanna, in Charlotte, North Carolina.

