

DANISH IMMIGRATION AND LIFE IN UTAH

Denmark supplied more immigrants to Utah in the nineteenth century than any other country except Great Britain. Most of these Danes--nearly 17,000--were converts to the LDS Church, heeding an urgent millennialistic call to gather to "Zion."

Generally, Danes were relatively slow to respond to the enticements of America. But the stirrings of the revolutionary year 1848 left Denmark with a liberal constitution (1849) providing for freedom of religion, without the repressive backlash that numbed much of the rest of Europe. This was fertile soil for Mormon proselytizing, initiated in 1850 by Erastus Snow and three fellow believers--a Dane, a Swede, and an American. Benefiting from religious awakenings kindled by Baptists, Methodists, and reformers within the Lutheran state church, the Latter-day Saints also moved forward on their own in less-traveled byways, particularly in northern Jutland. A key to their success was the cadre of enthusiastic young local recruits--many of them journeyman artisans--who soon devoted their full energy to proclaiming the Mormon message. A significant part of that message was the doctrine of the gathering. Thus Danish Latter-day Saints were in the vanguard of emigration from their homeland to the United States.

Danish emigration to Utah began January 31, 1852, when a group of nine Mormons left Copenhagen for Hamburg, continued by steamer to England, and eventually sailed from Liverpool with nineteen additional Danes who joined them there under the leadership of Erastus Snow. Arriving in New Orleans, they traveled by river steamboat up the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers to present-day Council Bluffs, where they joined a larger company of Mormon emigrants for the overland journey to Utah. It took these first Danish emigrants nine months to reach Salt Lake City; thousands who followed took much the same route. New Orleans was the American port of entry until New York and other eastern ports supplanted it in 1855. A few companies sailed directly from Hamburg to America.

Scandinavian converts traveled together, often as part of larger companies including British LDS emigrants, on ships chartered by Mormon agents. After travel by rail or river steamboat, immigrants reached a frontier outfitting post where arrangements were made for their final overland trek to Utah. Beginning in 1869 steam powered the entire journey to Utah, by ship and by rail.

The peak of Danish emigration to Utah came in the years 1862 and 1863, when tensions in Europe were reaching a boiling point over Denmark's attempted annexation of Schleswig, and while the Civil War raged in the United States. In those two years alone nearly 2,000 Mormons emigrated from Denmark, the vast majority destined for Utah. Some, subject to military service, were leaving to avoid becoming cannon fodder in Denmark's armed conflict that would soon break out with Prussia and Austria.

The heaviest Danish Mormon immigration came during the first formative quarter-century of the Latter-day Saint settlement of Utah. No exclusively Danish communities were established, although the village of Mantua in Box Elder County was predominantly Danish in its earliest years. Danes played particularly significant roles in the settlement of Box Elder and Cache counties in the north and of Sanpete and Sevier counties in the south. Sanpete County's Danish-born residents made up twenty-four percent of its population in 1870; with their children born in Utah they were undoubtedly more than one-third of the county's population. One-third of all the Danes in Utah were located in Sanpete County. Droll Danish humor became part of popular Sanpete folklore. Also in 1870, 10.5 percent of Box Elder County's residents were born in Denmark, as were 7.8 percent of Cache County's residents. Although emigration from Denmark to Utah declined after the 1860s, still 10 percent of the state's

population in 1890 either were born in Denmark or had at least one parent born in Denmark. Mormon leaders consistently encouraged assimilation, and many Danish converts began to learn English before emigrating. After reaching Utah, wherever possible, they were asked to participate fully in the activities of local Mormon English-speaking wards (congregations). Still, LDS "Scandinavian Meetings" organizations served as a secondary focal point for religious, social, and cultural activities in the mother tongue. Scandinavians joined forces for outings and reunions, choirs, and dramatic productions. Partly because of the central place the Scandinavian LDS Meetings held among the immigrant community, such organizations as Dansk Broderskab (Danish Brotherhood) enjoyed only limited participation in Utah.

Periodicals in their native language served combined audiences of Danes and Norwegians, and sometimes Swedes as well. The most successful of these was the Danish-Norwegian newspaper *Bikuben* (The Beehive), published in Salt Lake City from 1876 through 1935 (under LDS Church ownership in later years).

Whether disaffected or in search of economic opportunities, some Danish LDS immigrants originally bound for Utah left their traveling companies in the Midwest, or returned there after experiencing Utah. Many of these were among early settlers of Iowa and Nebraska. After a sojourn in Utah and Idaho in the 1860s, Jens (later James) Borglum and his family settled down in Nebraska, where he became a physician. His son Solon, born in Ogden, became a prominent sculptor, as did son Gutzon, born in southern Idaho, who later created the massive monumental sculpture at Mount Rushmore.

After the coming of the railroad to Utah in 1869 Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and Lutherans established churches and schools in Utah aimed specifically at reclaiming Scandinavians from Mormonism. This became a significant factor in the education of many Danish-American youth and won a limited number of proselytes.

The majority of early Danish immigrants to Utah came from agricultural backgrounds. Among the remainder, artisans outnumbered unskilled laborers. While some had been prosperous and the majority were able to at least pay for the ocean voyage to America, most were relatively poor by the time they reached Utah. Several devoted much of their means to help with the expenses of fellow immigrants.

The number of Danish natives living in Utah peaked in 1900 at 9,132 and then declined gradually as more died than immigrated. Yet as late as 1960, Danes and their children made up one-tenth of the state's "foreign stock"--residents who either were born outside the United States or had at least one parent born outside the US. While the 1980 census estimated that only 998 Utah residents were born in Denmark, 137,941 Utahans had at least one Danish ancestor. Continuing interchange with Denmark was facilitated by a Danish consulate for Utah and Nevada in Salt Lake City.

The influence of Danes on the development of Utah is mirrored only slightly in official place-names. Elsinore, Sevier County, was named after the Danish town housing the legendary castle of Hamlet. Jensen, Uintah County, took its name from Lars Jensen, who built a ferry on the Green River. Danish nicknames were more common in the nineteenth century; Mantua was nicknamed "Little Copenhagen," and several communities were often called "Little Denmark."

Anthony H. Lund (1844-1921), who settled in Sanpete County, was Utah's most prominent Danish-American. An 1862 immigrant, Lund served as a member of Utah's territorial legislature. As counselor in the First Presidency of the LDS Church for twenty years, as Church Historian, and as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Lund exerted a significant influence on the development of Utah and of his church.

In his art, poetry, and social criticism C. C. A. Christensen (1831-1912) was a representative spokesperson for Utah's Mormons and Scandinavians. His "Mormon Panorama", a series of historical paintings accompanied by a lecture, memorialized early Mormon history.

Andrew Jenson (1850-1941), a self-taught historian, made major contributions to the preservation of Utah and Mormon history.

Language barriers hindered full participation by many bright and capable Danish immigrants in Utah society. Frederik Ferdinand Samuelsen (1865-1929) emigrated to Utah after serving as a member of the Danish parliament. From 1925 to 1927 he presided over weekly Scandinavian meetings in the Assembly Hall on Temple Square in Salt Lake City. A close friend indicated that Samuelsen was deeply disappointed that his lack of fluency in English precluded his further involvement in public life.

Other Danes were influential in their communities and made significant contributions in their professions or vocations. As long-time bishop in Gunnison (1876-1900), strong-willed Christian A. Madsen (1822-1907) helped shape that town. Sophie Valentine (1861-1940), a poet and author of short stories, served as associate editor of *Bikuben*. Christian Daniel Fjeldsted (1829-1905) was one of the First Seven Presidents of Seventies in the LDS Church. Peter W. Madsen (1852-1922) founder of Madsen Furniture Company, was prominent in business affairs in Salt Lake City.

See: William Mulder, *Homeward to Zion* (1957) and Mulder, "Scandinavian Saga," in Helen Z. Papanikolas, ed., *The Peoples of Utah* (1976).

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