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Danish Immigrant
Arrived on the Port
City of Saint John,
N.B.
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Early Years In Canada

As recalled by an emigrant from Denmark.

The winter of 1928 - 1929 was spent at Hasleve Folkenhojskole (Folk High School) at Sjaelland in Denmark. I was enrolled in the Udvandrer (Emigrant) class which was supposed to prepare us for life in Canada. We studied the English Language, Canadian History, Geography and other subjects. Our English Language teacher had spent some time in England. To this day I remember he said, "Svend you will never learn English."



In 1929 immigration to Canada was beginning to close. It had already closed to the United States. Only young men with farm experience were allowed to enter Canada. Eight from our class received permission to emigrate.

Our English Language teacher was our tour guide. Like tour guides today, his trip was provided for, at no cost to him.

We left Denmark in late April. Snow covered the ground and it was cold. Our first stop was in England where the grass was green and cows were out in the fields. It was spring -- what a contrast!

We spent two days in London. From there we travelled to Liverpool where we departed for Canada on an ocean liner. We landed in Saint John, New Brunswick after eight days on a stormy sea with gale conditions. It was a rough crossing.

At Saint John we boarded a train to go part way across Canada, a vast country so unlike Denmark. Our first stop was in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

From there we travelled to our destination, a Danish community at Redvers, Saskatchewan. It took four days and nights to complete the journey from Saint John.

We, eight classmates were separated at Redvers. Two of us, Tom and myself (we had been friends since we were ten years old), worked on neighboring farms about three miles apart.

I came to a farm about ten miles from Carlyle, Saskatchewan. The farmer was Irish and his wife was an ex-school teacher from England. She enjoyed teaching the English language which was most beneficial for me. Tom worked for a Scottish couple.

My first job in the morning was to feed, curry, harness eleven horses and milk six cows. The farmer had other chores.

In the field I was in command of five horses instead of the one or two when I was in Denmark. It was a surprise to learn I could sit on the plow instead of walking behind the horses all day as we did in Denmark. Another surprise -- I had never seen such a big field in one piece -- one round was about one mile.

The wages were twenty-five dollars a month. A full experienced farm hand received thirty dollars a month.

Being an emigrant I had no social life. However, the farmer did provide me with a saddle horse so I could visit my friend, Tom, on Sunday afternoons.

This was my first experience with an inland climate. It was hot, day and night during the summer and inot late fall. One very warm, calm day in late fall I could barely stay awake while plowing in the field. The next morning, much to my surprise, there was two feet of snow on the ground. Summer to winter over-night -- plowing in the field ond day to hauling grain by sleigh to the elevator (a round trip of twenty miles) the next day. It was incredible! It never warmed up until the spring. Temperatures hovered arund minus twelve degrees celsius to about minus forty all winter. The roads were blocked with snow. There were no snow plows to clear the roads.

During my first winter in Canada I worked for an Irish couple in the same district. It was an exceptionally cold winter with lots of snow. My work consisted of hauling geed every day for the horses and cattle that were kept in the barn because of the severe cold weather. In Western Canada it is usually possible for animals to be outside part of the day as we have a dry cold but that winter was just too severe. The snow was so

deep it covered the fences so there were no gates to open when I was hauling feed. It was just a great white landscape.

The farmer seldom came outside. He spent his days sitting in front of the kitchen stove with his feet resting on the oven door, chewing tobacco and spitting it into the coal pail beside him. I did have a nice warm room with good bedding and the food was excellent. I only had one day off from work all winter.

Christmas came. Christmas evening was like any other evening in the week. I thought about the Christmas festivities in Demark while I was doing the chores. This couple celebrated Christmas Day and then it was all over. No more Christmas for another year. I was not impressed with the plum pudding which I had never eaten before.

When spring came I went to Regina where I bought a six-year-old Model T Ford for one hundred and twenty-five dollars. I didn't know much about operating a vehicle. My only experience driving a car was at Haslev Hojskole where I took a short course. I had driven about one-half hour on the school grounds. This brief training hardly qualified me as an experienced driver.

The salesman showed me how to drive by taking me around the block. Then he got out of the car and said, "Now it is your turn, off you go." We didn't need a driver's license in those days.

My next job was north of Regina. The farmer was Swedish, his wife was English. Her cooking skills were limited. She would fry bacon, pour water into the pan, heated it and called this gravy.

In the fall neighbours helped each other with harvesting and threshing. We stayed overnight on the farm where we were working. Another young man and myself were shown where to sleep. It was in the empty stall beside the horses in the barn. I had no idea horses made so much noise at night -- winnowing, grunting, tramping and passing gas. We didn't get much sleep.

I met Tom in Regina when harvest was finished. We drove the Model T Ford to Calgary in minus fifteen degrees Celsius weather. There was no heater in the car and it was bitterly cold. Even though we wore all our winter clothing we could not keep warm. This was a three-day trip. Trans Canada highway was only gravel road in those days.

We spent the winter at Dana Folk Hojskole (Folk High School) in Calgary. Besides enjoying the fellowship of other Danish emigrants we studied the

English language which today is referred to as ESL (English as a second language). We also studied other Canadian subjects.

In the spring, our second year in Canada, Tom and I went back to Saskatchewan. Tom worked for his previous employer. I worked for an American couple. This was a very good place.

Wages had not improved. The Wall Street Crash had taken place in the fall of 1929. The summer was dry and there was little crop in this area.

I left this part of Saskatchewan to harvest north of Saskatoon where there were bumper crops. However, prices were poor -- rye sold for ten cents a bushel net.

At this place the sleeping accommodation was in the straw on the barn loft. It was difficult to get the straw out of my clothes in the morning.

After harvest I returned to Calgary where I attended the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art, now known as SAIT (Southern Alberta Institute of Technology). I enrolled in the motor mechanics course. Horses were rapidly going out of style and no one had grown up with tractors. I wanted to find out what made a motor tick.

Next spring I arrived in Standard, a Danish community. I worked for a Danish couple. The farmer had spent some time in the states before coming to Canada. It was a good place to work and the food was excellent. I owe a great deal to this couple. Some years later their daughter became my wife. We have been married for almost fifty-three years.

In the 1930's there were a series of dry years and an economical collapse. It was the great depression known as "the dirty thirties".

I also worked on a large grain farm owned by an American near Calgary. He overworked his hired help. You had to quit to get a day off and this I did. He farmed about 2000 acres. The largest field was 480 acres.

For a change of scenery I jumped on the freight train to Vancouver. It was the accepted mode for working men to travel long distances during the depression. The train personnel were most accommodating in giving us directions. Sometimes there were as many as one hundred men on the flat cars going either direction -- east or west.

During the depression there was about one million unemployed in Canada with about one-half to today's population. Wheat sold for twenty-five cents a bushel if there was a market for it, a butcher cow sold

for twelve dollars, weiner pig two dollars and eggs, ten cents a dozen. Times were difficult but people seemed to survive somehow. There was relief for the most needy but no social assistance like today and no Medicare. A demonstration by the unemployed took place in Calgary. All the participants were arrested.

Then World War II broke out. England asked for Canada's help. Many, especially the unemployed, joined up before uniforms were available. Recruits wore armbands and received one dollar a day until they were called up.

It took many years before there was any general economic improvement. I read in a Centennial book, "Footprints Along the Stony," a history of Armena and Baldenstein areas that in 1956 road gangs earned the grand sum of fifty cents an hour. There really wasn't much progress until the late 1960's and early 70's.

Of the eight who came to Canada in 1929 I have visited one in Vancouver several times. Another classmate settled in Alberta. I met him and his wife for the first time last winter after sixty-two years. I had no idea he lived in Alberta.

Tom, my boyhood friend, was seriously injured when a freznor pulled by horses ran over him. He was in the Winnipeg hospital for sometime. When he no longer had any financial resources he applied for aid to get back to Denmark. He received this on the condition he would not return to Canada. In Denmark Tom was admitted to Rigshospitalet where he regained his health after extensive surgery. He married, had a family and lived a productive life as a commercial fisherman.

I could go into more detail but the reader may tire of all this rambling. My experiences were no different than thousands of people who came to Canada in the early years. The benefactor of immigration was CPR. (Canadian Pacific Railways). They made money selling passages and land. I remember an advertisement showing the experimental farm east of Calgary. The reader received the impression that one could have a farm like this after a few years of working in Canada.

Now that I am retired I enjoy working with stained glass art, soap stone and wood carving. We also look forward to visiting our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

I can't say I am sorry I came to Canada. It is a beautiful country with good opportunities. It has been an interesting life. I don't know what it would have been like if I had stayed in Denmark.

Greetings to all readers.

Samples of Mr. Jensen's beautiful work



SGN

The Readers' Gallery

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Gallery

"I started doing stained glass at 75 years of age and have now been at it for 15 years. I don't expect you hear from many readers over 91 years old. The Last Supper I completed when I was 90 years old. It took approximately 250 hours to complete. The window is 35"x45"! The Last Supper of course is a famous painting. My window differs in a couple of aspects—the coloring is my own idea, the window is larger than the painting, the floor has 2 rows more tile, and the ceiling is also larger, coming further forward in order to fill the window space.."

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