

A SHORT LIFE SKETCH OF  
LARS NIELSEN  
Written by his Son  
Joseph G. Nelson  
April 1947  
Logan, Utah

Lars was the third child of Niels Jensen and Ane Marie Madsen. His brothers were Jens, Mads, and Jorgen and his sister was Ane Marie.

Lars was born March 1st or 2nd, 1822, in a country district called Vejlbymark on the island of Fuenen [now Fyn], Denmark. (For the reader's information, I will here state that the father's given name became the child's surname with "son" or "see" added; hence, Lars, my father, instead of being called Jensen, became Nielsen, or the son of Niels. In our early time in Goshen, Utah it became Nelson and has so remained.)

Of my father's brothers and sister we know little, save that which is recorded of baptisms and endowments done for them in the temple. Father is known to have corresponded with the family until they failed to answer his letters. The nature of his correspondence is obvious—"The Plan of Life and Salvation," which to a non-believer would have little appeal. He confided this to mother, that one of his brothers became a physician of note and emigrated to America, which is not difficult to believe, since they, like my father, must have been mentally efficient.

Father inherited the right from our Father Adam to "till the soil and eat bread by the sweat of his brow." Thank God for such a heritage! Life on the farm must have developed for him a healthy body to support such a vigorous mind. At the age of seven, a great sorrow came into his life—the death of his mother! After a year his father married Ane K. Hansen, from which union there came four brothers. One can easily imagine that poor little Lars was thus early in life placed upon his own resources, which in God's providence was not an unmixed blessing.

Of his early training and schooling little is known, but his was a master mind with the eternal question mark always before him: The why and the wherefore of it? He was a student first and always and would naturally seek the best source of learning, which would be at Odense, the capital of the island, not far from his birthplace. This, of course, is only conjecture.

One of my earliest impressions of my father's "seeking for knowledge" was that he carried always with him two dictionaries - one Danish-English, the other English-Danish. He wrote in a small pocket notebook every new word he heard, then from his dictionaries he mastered the meaning thereof. In this way he acquired an extensive vocabulary of English. To illustrate this, he was a subscriber to the earliest issues of the Deseret News, from which he freely translated into the Danish and read to mother, who could not then read English.

One glimpse only of father's school days is before me: He was engaged in athletic sports on the playground with other boys, when on the opposite side of the street they saw a cripple hobbling

along the way. In a spirit of levity, he imitated the poor cripple, which doubtless produced hilarity in the thoughtless but dire consequence to Lars, as the sequence proved. Soon after this event Lars was stricken with a peculiar affliction of the lower limbs, which became so severe that he despaired of ever walking again. To him it was God's punishment for that act of levity toward the poor, suffering cripple.

Suddenly his bright horizon had become clouded. Doomed to earn a living by his own efforts, he sought how this could best be done. The tailors' trade appealed to him—he could still sit cross-legged on a table and sew! Thus he became a tailor and doubtless was an expert. I have seen a fine sample of his handiwork—a “dicky” or shirt front made of small hand-stitched tucks.

This enforced stationary work grew more loathsome day by day. He longed for the freedom to move about as other men. After all known remedies within his reach had failed he sought the one source of all strength—his Father in Heaven, with whom he made a covenant to this effect: “If Thou, Oh Lord, will restore me to health, that I may walk as other men? I will surely devote the remainder of my life to thy work!” He was made well!

Lars was eight years of age when the Church of God was again restored, but it was not until about 1850 that the Gospel of Christ came to his native land. Erastus Snow, then an Apostle of the Lord, with others brought the message of Life and Salvation to the people of Denmark. The Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants were published in the Danish language by Lorenzo Snow and doubtless came into my father's hands. He became a member of the Church in 1851, being baptized on October 5, 1851 by W. Anderson and confirmed by C. J. Larson of October 12, 1851.

True to the covenant he had made with the Father for restoration of health even before he had received the light of the Gospel, he now more than ever entered upon the work with untiring zeal. On October 10, 1852 he was ordained a Priest, which gave him authority to preach and baptize in the name of the Lord. On November 28, 1853 he was ordained Presiding Elder of Store Lilme, from which position he was released and appointed traveling Elder on September 10, 1854.

He continued in this capacity until January 12, 1856, when he was made President over Vejlbj Branch and traveling Elder in Wester Branch District, including Store Lilme and Laborg Branches. In 1856 he filled a mission to Varde and Silkeborg, after which he was released to emigrate to the U.S.A. March 2, 1857.

It is plain to note from that which is recorded in Church history, that Lars Nielsen showed very great zeal for the Cause of the Lord. From the day of his conversion, 1851, to the time of his release, 1857, covering a period of about six years, he had been constantly “in the harness.” In Company with other Saints father sailed on April 25, 1857 from Liverpool, England on board the “Westmoreland”. Mathias Cowley had charge of the company. They must have had a prosperous voyage, since they arrived in Philadelphia on May 31, 1857, slightly more than one month on the ocean. If my memory is not at fault, mother's voyage over the Atlantic covered a period of 6 weeks—incredible even for sail ships! Continuing the journey, the company arrived at Iowa City on June 9, 1857, at which point they recruited for the long trek over the plains to their haven in the Rocky Mountains of the West.

With all his worldly belongings, consisting of clothing, a feather-bed, two guns (a rifle and a shotgun), some most needed tools and some condensed food stowed in his handcart, he began the toilsome journey to the Mecca of the Saints in the “Valleys of the Mountains,” in Christian Christiansen's Hand-Cart Company, and arrived in Salt Lake City on September 13, 1857.

Just how father found his way to Goshen we may not know, but I conjecture that he was one of

the original pioneers of that place. It is situated about 4 miles south of the southern point of Utah Lake and was first settled in 1857, under the leadership of Phineas Cook, Presiding Elder.

Lars Nielsen was now 35 years old and unmarried. He was not averse to the opposite sex, not immune to their charms, but I suspect that he was self-conscious, at the same time discriminating in his choice of companion. None but the best for him! A hint dropped from mother told us there had been a romance. His “Old Flame” went to Sanpete, Utah, with another man.

Lars was very industrious. His first home was in Sand Town, then in Lower Goshen, from which people were driven because of alkali in the soil. I was told by one who knew him that his first home was a dug-out facing the west, with a single window in the east and an entrance by means of steps into the ground; it had a fireplace and chimney. Here he lived alone until 1859. By this time he had acquired three plots of ground—two ten-acre plots of farm land separated about one-half mile, and a five-acre plot of meadow land, in the big hay field north of Goshen. To subdue this virgin land must have been a tremendous task with the meager means at hand. It was accomplished, however, by him, single handed!

Directly east of the Goshen Dam was a sand hill nearly 30 feet high. The early settlers attempted to make a cut through this sand in order to bring irrigation water to the present site of Goshen. This work was done by hand-shoveling. I recall standing by my father, my head coming scarcely above his knees, as he threw shovelful after shovelful onto a platform which was half-way up the hill—the others would then throw it from there over the bank.

I sensed that my father was very ill, because he would stop every few moments and rest his head on the top of the shovel handle. I had a strong desire to help, but of course could not. This was the summer before his death in the Fall. Weak from overwork and with not sufficient nourishing food, his body succumbed to pneumonia easily.

Mother told me that father often went to work carrying a tin cup and a crust of bread—his sole supply for his lunch. One season mother succeeded in raising one large sugar beet and one squash. She reduced the beet to a syrup and cooked and mixed the squash into it. This formed a “delicious spread” for his otherwise dry bread.

I saw his tithing record from the first year in Utah to the time of his death. It was perfect! I marveled that he could have paid so much when struggling to make an existence. He feared to offend God, desiring to love Him above all else. An example of this from mother: Their first cow had a heifer calf. Mother fondled and petted her, fed her choice bits, for it gave promise of becoming a wonderful cow. Mother saw visions of a plentiful supply of milk, butter, and cream for hungry children. Imagine her sorrow and disappointment, her chagrin, when father sold the calf without consulting her! His only excuse was, “You were making a god of it!”

My father stood about six feet in height, but was inclined to stoop. He was without one ounce of surplus flesh. His eyes were dark-brown, as were also his beard and hair. He wore his beard “chin” style and wore also a mustache. We have no photo of him. (One of my own, my children, will give you some idea of his appearance.)

In character I feel he was too just, if such a condition could obtain. I think it was hard for him to condone the frailties in others. Scrupulously honest, he gave heaping measure to God and fellow man. If he was warmhearted, he failed to show it to me. While I honored him as a parent, I do not recall a single word or act of endearment. My brother, Nels tells me he remembers very distinctly of being fondled by father. Mother said she starved for affection. One compliment he gave her: When she was sealed to him—there were other women present—he said, “Mother, you were

more beautiful than any of them!” This made her happy, but one compliment in ten years is “spreading it pretty !” But he has Eternity in which to make amends—he will do it, too. (Father and Mother were sealed for “Time and All Eternity” in the Endowment House, June 17, 1865. Their children born before this date were all sealed to their parents in the Salt Lake Temple on April 1, 1921.)

I was in bed with father when he died. He was suffering terribly with pneumonia. In his great agony he asked mother to go plead with God that I may die.” She did so and in five minutes he had passed away. I have read of heroines who approached the angelic, but none were greater than my dear little mother, God bless her memory! She was left in absolute poverty with six children—the eldest, Emma, ten years, and the youngest (twins) six months old!

Father was buried in the old cemetery west of Sand Town in Goshen by the side of his little son, Ephraim, both in unmarked graves.<sup>1</sup>

Alone with six children to feed and clothe, with no harvest, the picture was not a bright one for mother, but she trusted implicitly in God. Her story is a novel one which you will realize.

---

<sup>1</sup>In the summer of 1988 we visited Goshen, Utah, in an attempt to locate the graves of Lars and Martha. We visited with a Lola Nelson, wife of one of their grandsons. A number of years before, Lola had been responsible for placing a granite marker on Martha’s grave which we located in the Goshen City Cemetery. The marker reads “Martha Nelson,” with no indication of her subsequent marriage to Jens Jensen. Lola said that the “old” cemetery in which Lars and Ephraim are buried had not been maintained for many years and was now part of a dairy farm, with no physical markings remaining. As best as we can recall, she said: “He’s well watered and happy!” (Ron & Pat Madsen)