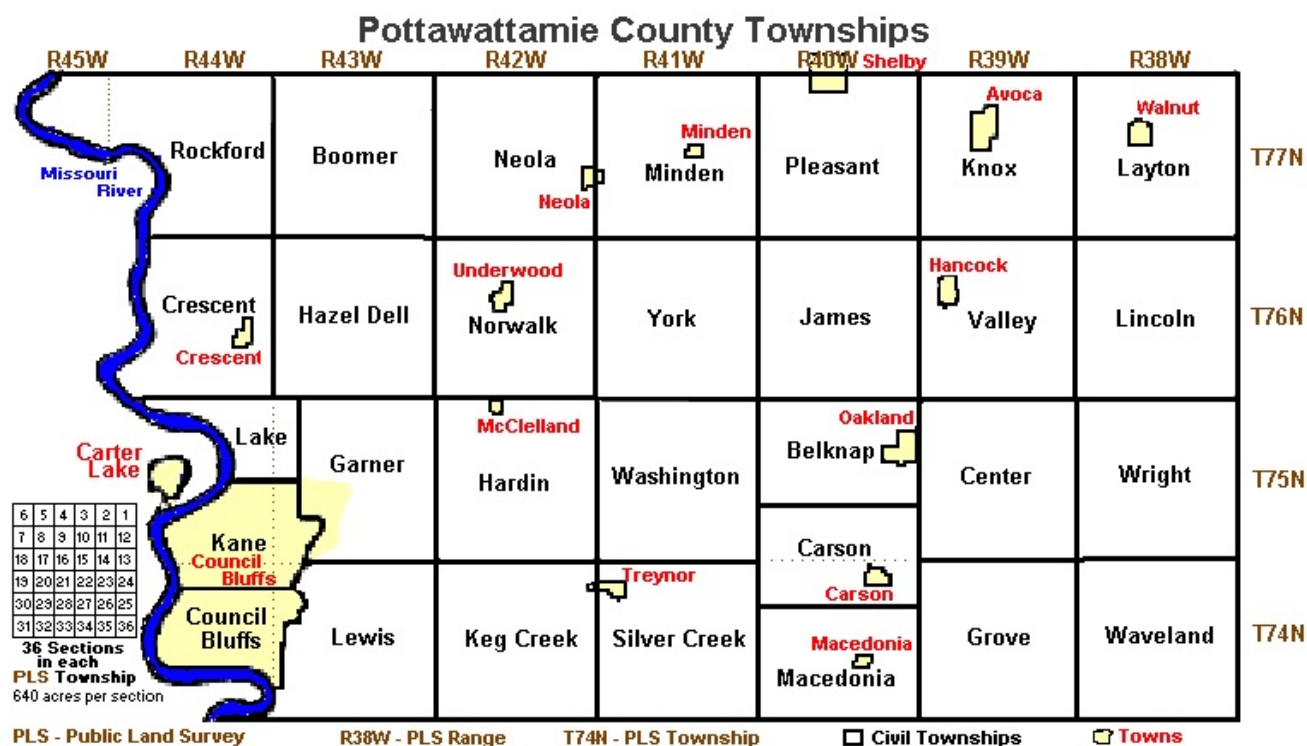


Big Pigeon Area Danes

Version 1 © 2017 by Robert A. Christiansen, updated by RAC 22 Aug '17.

Big Pigeon Creek, now renamed Pigeon Creek, flowed through Boomer and a corner of Hazel Dell Townships in rural northwestern Pottawattamie County, Iowa. Beginning in the late 1860s, Danish immigrants moved into the Big Pigeon area. In this area, St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Boomer-Neola, founded by Danish immigrants, is a major object of my research.

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Pottawattamie County, its Townships and Incorporated Towns
 courtesy of Dennis Walsh, iowagenweb.org/pottawattamie

About My *Big Pigeon Area Danes Report*

Much of the material I have written about early northwestern Pottawattamie County, Iowa, and especially the Danish settlers in the Boomer and Hazel Dell Township area, is now on-line at my website, bigpigeon.us.

To view this report and related material on-line as of August '17:

- Access the website *bigpigeon.us*.
- Under the *Local History* item in the main menu, select *Big Pigeon Area*.
- Click on the *Danes in the Big Pigeon Area* hotspot.

The **Resources** area of *Big Pigeon* contains links to many of the on-line sources I used in preparing this report.

Since 1998 I have been studying the early history of rural northwestern Pottawattamie County with a focus on the Danish residents. Older Danish Americans who lived in this area left behind several interesting personal histories. I have also compiled a private database named *St. Paul's* of over 36,000 individuals with family connections to this area.

My old family church, St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Boomer Township west of Neola, was founded by Danish immigrants in 1881. The **St. Paul's History** area of *Big Pigeon* provides historical information about this church and its congregants.

Contacting Me

I would appreciate hearing from others who could provide more information on the Danish community in northwestern Pottawattamie County.



Finding Your Big Pigeon Danish Ancestors

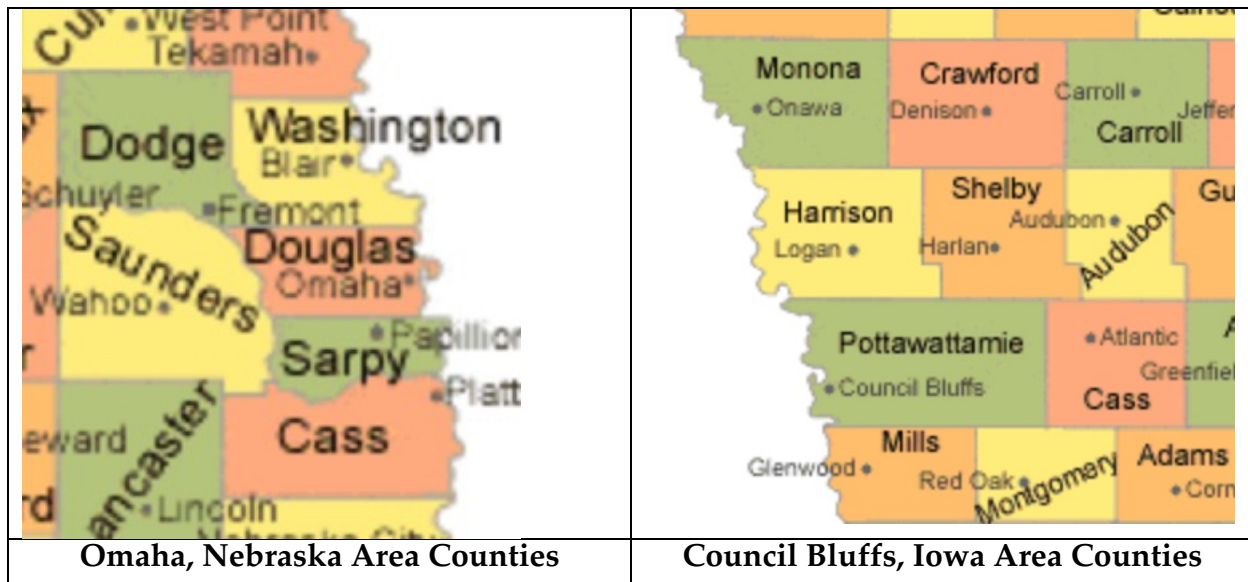
Several hundred Danish immigrant families once lived in the Big Pigeon area in rural northwestern Pottawattamie County, although not all at the same time. Some immigrants came initially to Council Bluffs and after a few years working in the city moved to farms in the Big Pigeon area. Others landed in the Big Pigeon area, and later moved to Council Bluffs or Omaha or points beyond.

If you are searching for Danish ancestors who once lived in the Big Pigeon area, my *bigpigeon.us* website currently notes about 1/2 of such families. Here are some relevant *bigpigeon.us* website pages:

- From the **Local History > Big Pigeon Area** webpage: Many Danish immigrants were buried in the Grange and Hazel Dell Cemeteries. *Grange Cemetery Burials* and *Hazel Dell Cemetery Burials* may give you limited information about such individuals.
- From the **St. Paul's History > St. Paul's Family Reports** webpage: You can access brief biographical sketches of 42 early Danish immigrant extended families affiliated with St. Paul's.
- In the *More Danish Families* section near the end of this report, you'll find a table containing about 25 early Big Pigeon area families for whom I am seeking more information.

Danes Along the Middle Missouri

A half dozen contiguous counties in southwestern Iowa and across the Missouri River in Nebraska attracted a disproportionate number of Danish immigrants in the latter third of the 19th century. These counties are shown on the following maps, which are courtesy of geology.com.



To illustrate the relatively large number of Danish immigrants in these counties, I created the following table showing the percentage of Danish born in various jurisdictions as enumerated in the 1900 census.

County	1900 Denmark Born	1900 Total	% Denmark Born
Dodge County, Nebraska	562	22,298	2.5%
Washington Co., Nebraska	798	13,096	6.1%
Douglas Co., Nebraska (includes Omaha)	3,170	140,590	2.3%
Pottawattamie County, Iowa (includes Council Bluffs)	1,892	54,336	3.5%
Shelby County, Iowa	1,417	17,932	7.9%
Audubon County, Iowa	1,274	13,626	9.3%
all of Iowa	17,316	2,231,853	0.8%
all the United States	154,230	76,212,168	0.2%

Notes About the Above Table:

- The number of Denmark born is taken from ancestry.com.
- Entries in the 1900 total field come from <https://www.census.gov/population/cencounts/ia190090.txt> and <https://www.census.gov/population/cencounts/ia190090.txt>.
- Although the percentage of Danish *born* may seem low to the casual reader, the percentage of Danish *ancestry* is much higher. In fact, Audubon and Shelby counties

vie with counties in Utah for having the highest percentage of population of Danish ancestry.

- as shown above, numerically Pottawattamie County Danes outnumbered those in Shelby or Audubon counties. This is not surprising when one considers that because of the size of Council Bluffs the Pottawattamie County Danes were distributed among a much larger population than Shelby and Audubon Counties. Unlike Shelby and Audubon Counties, I believe no Pottawattamie County neighborhood, except perhaps for Danetown on the south side of Council Bluffs, ever had a majority of Danish-ancestry residents.
- The preservation of our Danish heritage is well-represented within the six counties in the above table. The Danish American Archives and Library is in Blair in Washington, County, Nebraska. The Museum of Danish America is in Elk Horn in the southeastern corner of Shelby County, Iowa.
- However, the Danish presence in the Council Bluffs - Omaha area has received little attention from historians, who instead have focused on Shelby and Audubon counties about fifty miles to the northeast.

In the early 19th century, the term *Council Bluffs* referred to the portion of the Missouri River area starting at the mouth of the Platte River and extending upstream for about 40 miles. As you may know, the name derived from the first meeting of the Lewis and Clark expedition with Native Americans in 1804 near today's Fort Calhoun, Nebraska.

The Council Bluffs area was one of the major jumping off places for immigration across the Great Plains and the western mountains in the period from 1847 to 1869 and especially for the Latter-Day Saints (Mormon) migration to Utah. Around 1869, the Council Bluffs area evolved into a major railroad center.

The overland migration of Mormons to Utah began with the arrival in the Council Bluffs area of exiles from Nauvoo, Illinois in 1846. Until rail travel to Utah became possible in 1869, many Utah-bound migrants passed through the Council Bluffs area in horse, oxen, or human-drawn vehicles. Some dropped out before making the arduous crossing. Others became disillusioned with aspects of Mormon life in Utah and became backtrailers, returning to the Council Bluffs area. Some of these dropouts and backtrailers were Danish immigrants.

Danes in Pottawattamie County

Danish Mormon Migration Through Council Bluffs.

Starting in the early 1850s, a sizable number of Danish citizens converted to the Mormon religion and migrated from Denmark. Those who ended up in Council Bluffs helped form the nucleus of a small Danish population that burgeoned after the Civil War ended in 1865 and the first railroad entered Council Bluffs in 1867.

I know of two companies of Danish Mormon immigrants who passed through Council Bluffs in the 1850s:

- In 1853, John Erik Forsgren led the first company of Scandinavian Mormons, largely Danish, to Utah. Their route took them up the Mississippi River from New Orleans to Keokuk, then across Iowa, the Great Plains, and the mountains to Utah. I don't know what happened to the three families who dropped out in the Council Bluffs area. Incidentally, John Erik Forsgren later became the stepfather of Carrie Bondo of Hazel Dell Township.
- In 1857, the 100th LDS immigration company consisted entirely of Scandinavians, a majority being Danish. Their route took them by rail from Philadelphia to Iowa City. In the Iowa City area, where they were split into groups, with one group traveling by wagon to Utah and the other comprising the 7th handcart company. In a following section, I sketch the story of two Mormon families who dropped out in the Council Bluffs area.

The Railroads Come to Council Bluffs.

After our Civil War ended in 1865, Council Bluffs was transformed by a massive railroad building boom. The Union Pacific Railroad was being constructed from Omaha west. Meanwhile, three railroads were crossing Iowa heading towards Council Bluffs, the first arriving in 1867 and the remaining two in 1869.

Danes, some with connections to the few Danish families already living in the area, began arriving in sizable numbers to join the expanding work force. Much potential farmland near Council Bluffs remained unbroken, being held by speculators or railroads or used for grazing. Thus, into the 1880s it was possible for an energetic and enterprising Dane to work in Council Bluffs or a nearby railroad town and then move out onto a farm.

The 1850 Pottawattamie County census contains one person of Danish birth. Presumably he was a Mormon who had immigrating before converting and then went on to Utah.

The following table shows Pottawattamie County's Danish-born population from 1860 through 1920, courtesy of ancestry.com. 1890 census records were lost in a fire.

Census Year	Denmark Born	Total	% Denmark Born
1860	34	4,968	0.7%
1870	328	16,893	1.9%
1880	812	39,850	2.0%
1900	1892	54,336	3.5%
1910	1930	55,832	3.5%
1920	1672	61,650	2.7%

Three Early Pottawattamie County Danish Families.

My search of the 1860 census for Pottawattamie County via ancestry.com returned thirty-six individuals born in Denmark. Among the thirty-six are fourteen currently in my *St. Paul's* database. These fourteen were members of the following three families:

The Mynster Family: Christopher and Marie Mynster and their young son, William, immigrated in 1846, spent three years in Washington, DC and then a year in Louisville, Kentucky. In 1851 Christopher bought a supply of trade goods in St. Louis and came to Council Bluffs, then named Kanessville. Christopher bought numerous claims from local Mormons who were moving to Utah. However, Christopher died in August 1852 and his widow, Maria, lost many of these claims. Maria and her son, William, remained in Council Bluffs, where Maria remained a large landowner, especially in the loess hills just north of Council Bluffs.

The Hans and Maria Hansen Family: the parents and six older children emigrated from Denmark in 1857. They moved from Crescent to Council Bluffs in 1857, and then to rural Council Bluffs, finally settling in Hardin Township by 1880.

The Hans Wissing and Karen Sophie Michelson Family: the parents and three older children emigrated from Denmark in 1857. Hans Michelson was a tailor. The Michelson family also moved from Crescent to Council Bluffs in 1858, and then later, around 1880, to a farm in northern Boomer Township.

Both the Hansen and Michelson families were from the Copenhagen area, converted to the LDS faith in Denmark, and in 1857 took similar paths to Pottawattamie County.

Here is a timeline describing the Hansen and Michelson families' immigration experience in 1857.

18 Apr – steamship *L. N. Hvidt* leaves Copenhagen.

21 Apr – *Hvidt* arrives Grimsby, England.

Travel by rail to Liverpool.

25 Apr – Sailing ship *Westmoreland* leaves Liverpool with 540 Scandinavian LDS converts and four returning missionaries.

31 May – *Westmoreland* arrives Philadelphia.

2 Jun – 100th company leaves Philadelphia by rail.

9 Jun – 100th company arrives in Iowa City by rail.

The immigrants staged along Clear Creek about three miles west of downtown Iowa City. here the 540 immigrants from the Westmoreland divided into two groups:

- Those who would travel by wagon.
- Those who would travel in the 7th handcart company with three supporting wagons.

The Hansen family crossed Iowa with the handcart company. I don't know about the Michelson family.

12 Jun – 7th handcart company leaves Iowa City.

13 Sep – 7th handcart company arrives in Salt Lake City.

After reaching the Council Bluffs area, both the Hansen and Michelson families did not cross to Utah.

The first railroad into Council Bluffs was the Chicago and Northwestern, which entered from the north in 1867.

[Some of the Danes in western Boomer Township and northeastern Rockford Township came to the Big Pigeon area via Missouri Valley, north of Rockford Township in Harrison County. Missouri Valley, a division point for the Chicago and Northwestern, offered employment to many railroad workers.

The Chicago and Rock Island Railroad, which passed though Avoca and entered Council Bluffs from the east in 1869, facilitated the growth of the major Danish area of settlement in Iowa in Shelby, namely Shelby and Audubon Counties. The Avoca area, and especially Fairview and Monroe Townships in Shelby County just north of Avoca, attracted a fair number of Danish immigrants. Altamont, an early Danish Baptist Church at Cuppy's Grove in Monroe Township still survives.

Danes in the Big Pigeon Area

The first permanent Danish resident in the Big Pigeon north of Council Bluffs likely was Peter Peterson, a former California gold miner from the Stevns Peninsula south of Copenhagen. Peterson settled along North Pigeon Creek in southwestern Boomer Township in 1863 and soon thereafter married his housekeeper, a Civil War widow, Rachel (Cady) Shadden.

In the late 1860s, a substantial number of Danish farmers began settling in the Big Pigeon area. The concentration was heaviest in Hazel Dell Township, where in 1880 and 1900 about 15% of the residents were Danish born.

Approximate Number of Danish-Born Residents in the Big Pigeon Core Area

Year	Boomer Denmark-Born	Boomer Total	Hazel Dell Denmark-Born	Hazel Dell Total
1870	32 *	611 *	56 *	1117 *
1880	91	870	133	972
1900	118	1023	162	1101

Above is aggregate data from ancestry.com in May 2016. 1870 Hazel Dell figures include Crescent Township. 1870 Boomer figures include Neola Township.

There were no towns in the core area I am studying. However, Danish immigrants in the Big Pigeon area early organized three rural religious congregations in the early 1880s to minister to the spiritual needs of the Danish immigrants:

- † Danish immigrants organized St. Paul's Lutheran Church, in Boomer Township eight miles west of Neola, was organized in 1881. St. Paul's Lutheran Church is still active in 2017, with Rev. Norm Jelken being the current pastor. See the St. Paul's area of my website, bigpigeon.us, for more information.
- † Hans N. Hansen established a Reorganized Latter Day Saints (R.L.D.S) chapel for Danish speakers in Hazel Dell Township around 1882. The original chapel was located on the Hansen farm four miles north of Weston. Around 1930 the former Boomer Township RLDS chapel was moved from west of St. Paul's Lutheran Church to Hazel Dell Township to serve both rural RLDS congregations. In 1941 this congregation merged with the R.L.D.S. church in the town of Underwood, which also is still active in 2017, with the R.L.D.S. now known as the Community of Christ.
- † For some years starting in the 1880s the Weston Adventist Church building was located on the Lars Rasmussen farm in Boomer Township just west of St. Paul's. It appears that congregants were immigrants, with most being Danish.

In addition, the Boomer Danish Brotherhood lodge (lodge #137) met at the Boomer Township Hall, which was built in the early 1870s and is still standing in central Boomer Township.

My main St. Paul's database includes over a hundred early Danish American families who lived in the Big Pigeon area, about half of whom were affiliated with St. Paul's Lutheran Church. As of August 2017, this database includes 413 individuals who were born in Denmark and died in Pottawattamie County.

(this page is reserved for expansion of the *Danes in the Big Pigeon Area* section.

More Danish Families

Below I list Danish immigrant families who once lived in or near the Big Pigeon area but are not in my *St. Paul's* database.

- I am collecting information for these families in auxiliary databases, one database for each family.
- As noted below, many of these additional families had brief St. Paul's connections.
- Neither my *St. Paul's* database nor my peripheral databases are publicly available. However, I can share information upon request.

Known religious affiliation for these additional families:

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Boomer-Neola:

- Bladel, Johannes Andreas Dons & Dona, Nana (1917 baptism)
- Jensen, James Peter & Nielsen, Anna Christine (1902 and 1910 baptisms)
- Jensen, Jens Peter & Johnson, Vilhelmine (1908 baptism)
- Nelson, Anders Peter "Andrew" & Hansen, Maren Cecilie (1894, 1896 & 1897 baptisms)
- Nelson, Anton & Swana, Mary (1905 baptism)
- Nelsen, Soren & Gertrude Marie (1902 baptism)
- Olsen, Carl & Christine (1907 & 1914 baptisms)
- Olsen, Ole P. & Pauline Simonsen (1914 baptisms)
- Petersen, Carl & Maria (1892 baptism)
- Simonsen, Anton Pedersen & Larsen, Anna (1904 baptism)
- Thomsen, Jens & Hansen, Inger Marie (1891 baptism)
- Vammen, Jens Hoppe & Boesen, Elizabeth (1918, 1921 & 1922 baptisms)
- Williamsen, Carl Christian & Knudsen, Martine Gudrun (1907 & 1910 baptisms)

RLDS (Reorganized Church of Latter Day Saints, now Community of Christ):

- Andersen, Peter Christian & Jensen, Mette Margrethe

Adventist Church:

- Christensen, Martin & Inger

Individual Family Notes:

- James and Mary Bush were the parents of the criminal Ernest Bush, also known as Chain Man Fred Brown.
- Hannah Marie "Mary" Peterson Casterson is a relative of Johan Frederick Sandstrom whose widow and children are in my St. Paul's database.
- Jens Peter "J. P." Jensen headed Dana Academy and Trinity Seminary in Blair, Nebraska before his early death.
- Rev. Jens Hoppe Vammen was St. Paul's pastor from 1916-1923.

About the following table. Families are listed alphabetically. Columns are:

- Names of husband and wife.
- Birth year & place and death year & place for husband and wife.

- Marriage year & place and immigration year (“ddd” means found in Danish Emigration Archive).
- Location – where family lived and where parents buried.

Major sources for the Location column are:

- United States census - 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940.
- Iowa census - 1885, 1895, 1905, 1915, 1925.
- draft registration – 1917/18 WW I; 1942 WW II civilian old man’s registration.
- findagrave.com.
- Unless indicated otherwise, townships and towns are in Pottawattamie County.
- St. Paul’s Cemetery and the Grange Cemetery are in Boomer Township.

The More Danish Families table begins on the following page.

Husband name Wife name	Birth year & place Death year & place Birth year & place Death year & place	immigration yr. and Marriage yr. & place	Location in USA
Andersen, Christian unknown, Laurine "Lorena"	b. ~1839 Denmark d. b. ~1834 Denmark d.	m. Denmark immi. 1874 (ddd)	1880 Boomer T.; 1885 Norwalk T.
Andersen, Christen Petersen, Mary	b. ~1851 Denmark d. b. ~1849 Denmark d.	m. 1877 Pott. Co.	1880, 1885 Hazel Dell T.
Andersen, Peter Christian Jensen, Mette Margrethe	b 1845 Dronninglund Sogn, d. 1931 Johnson Co., MO b 1838 Dronninglund Sogn d. 1920, Johnson Co., MO?	m. 1872 Dronninglund Sogn, Hjørring; immi. 1878	1880, 1885, 1895, 1900 Hazel Dell T.; 1910 Johnson Co., MO; bur. Fairview Cem. Holden, MO
Bladel, Johannes Andreas Dons Dons, Nana	b. 1886 Haarby, Denmark d. b. d.		1915 Sioux City, IA; 1917 Union T., Harrison Co.
Bush (n. Buus), James Jespersen, Marie "Mary" See Notes.	b. 1856 Svenstrup Sogn, Aalborg d. 1930-40 Los Angeles, CA b. ~1853 Hjørring d. aft 1940 California	m. Denmark; immi. 1892	1905, 1910 Boomer T.; 1930 Los Angeles, CA
Peterson, James (husband #1) Casterson, Christian (#2)	b. ~1819 Denmark d. 1874 Pott. Co. b. ~1821 Denmark d. 1900 Pott. Co. b. 1823 Sweden d. 1903 Council Bluffs		1860 Kane T.; 1870, 1880, 1885, 1895, 1900 Boomer T.; bur. Grange Cem.; See Notes.
Christensen, Martin Nielsen, Inger	b. 1862 Denmark d. 1934 Colorado? b. 1863 Denmark d. 1946 Colorado?	immi. 1882 immi. 1881 m. 1884 Pott. Co.	1895 1900 1910 Hazel Dell T.; 1920, 1930 CO; bur. Palisade, CO
Jensen, James Peter Nielsen, Anna Christine	b. 1873 Denmark d. 1949 Bend, OR? b. ~1882 Denmark d.	m. 1900 Pott. Co.	1910 Norwalk T.; 1920 Idaho; 1930 Bend, OR; bur. Bend, OR
Jensen, Jens Peter "J. P." Johnson, Vilhelmine "Minnie" See Notes."	b. 1871 Denmark d. 1908 Nebraska b. 1878 Norway d. 1965 Minneapolis, MN		
Johnson John (b. Hans Jensen)	b. ~1839 Denmark d.	immi. ~1868	1880, 1885 Boomer T.; 1891, 1900, 1910 Mason Co., WA;

Thompson, Ane Kirstine	b. ~1849 Denmark d. 1940 Olympia, WA	immi. 1873 m. ~1877 USA	1920, 1930, 1940 Thurston Co., WA
Larsen, Paul Christensen, Bodil Cathrine	b. 1842 Denmark d. 1915 b. 1833 Denmark d. 1907	m. 1863 Tolstrup Sogn, Hjørring immi. 1874 (ddd)	1895, 1900, 1905, 1910 Boomer T.; 1915 Council Bluffs; bur. Grange Cem.
Nelsen, Soren unknown, Gertrude Marie	b. d. b. d.		
Nelson, Anders Peter "Andrew" Hansen, Maren Cecilie	b. ~1859 Denmark d. 1948 b. 1862 Vig Sogn, Holbæk d. 1932 Clay Co., SD.	m. ~1890 Denmark; immi. ~1890	1895 Norwalk T.; 1900 Turner Co., SD; 1910, 1920, 1930, 1948 Clay Co., SD; bur. Wakonda, Clay Co.
Nelsen, Anton Svana?, Marie	b. ~ 1871 Denmark d. b. ~ 1872 Denmark d.	immi. ~1890 immi. ~1893 m. 1897 Pott. Co.	1900 Council Bluffs; 1910 Minden T.; 1920, 1925, 1930 Council Bluffs
Olsen, Carl unknown, Christine	b. ~1877 Denmark d. b. ~1872 Nørup Sogn, Vejle d.	m. ~1898 Denmark; immi. unknown immi. ~1904 (ddd)	1905 Council Bluffs; 1915 Shelby T., Shelby Co.; 1920, 1930 Fresno Co., CA
Olsen, Ole P. Simonsen, Pauline	b. 1871 Denmark d. 1936, Jamestown, NY b. 1875 Clinton Co., IA d. 1938, Jamestown, NY	m. ~1895	1910 Brookings Co., SD; 1915 blacksmith Walnut; 1925 Story City, IA; later Jamestown, Chautauqua Co., NY; bur. Lake View Cem., Jamestown
Paulsen, Laurits Alexander "Louis" Pedersen, Marie "Mary"	b. 1854 Vester Brønderslev, Hjørring d. 1938 Polk Co., WI b. 1858 Jerslev, Hjørring d. 1956 Barron Co., WI	m. 1884 Brønderslev, Hjørring immi. ~1887	1900, 1905, 1910 Boomer T.; 1920, 1930 Polk Co., WI; bur. Milltown, Polk Co.
Peters, Charles unknown, Matte	b. d. b. d.		
Petersen, Carl unknown, Maria	b. ~1846 Denmark d. b. ~1847 Denmark d.		1880 Hazel Dell T.; 1885 Norwalk T.; 1895 Hazel Dell T.
Petersen, Frederik Ferdinand	b. ~1863 Denmark d. b. ~1865 Denmark	immi. 1888 (ddd) immi. 1894 (ddd)	1910, 1920 Los Angeles, CA;

Thorkildsen, Karen	d.	m. 1894 Council Bluffs.	1930, 1940 Glendale, CA
Petersen, Thomas unknown, Carrie	b. ~1845 Denmark d. b. ~1853 Denmark d.		1885 Norwalk T.
Simonsen, Anton Pedersen Larsen, Anna	b. 1861 Volsted Sogn, Aalborg d. 1952 Harlan, IA b. ~1870 Denmark d. 1960 IA	immi. 1887 (ddd) m. 1898 Pott. Co.	1895 Council Bluffs; 1900 Union T, Harrison Co.; 1910, 1920 Monroe T., Shelby Co; 1930 Harlan, IA; bur. Harlan, IA
Sorensen, Anton George Madsen, Christel Nielsine Andrea	b. 1886 Denmark d. b. ~1886 Denmark d.	immi. ~1904 immi. ~1910 m. Pott. Co. 1912	1920, 1925, 1930 Boomer T.; 2017 - Database Lost
Thomsen, Jens Hansen, Inger Lena	b. 1853 Denmark d. 1942 b. 1853 Denmark d. 1932	1889 Pott. Co.	1895 Garner T.; 1900 Humboldt Co., IA; bur Union Cem., Humboldt Co.
Rev. Vammen, Jens Hoppe Boesen, Elizabeth	b. 1885 Denmark d. 1968 Los Angeles, CA b. 1883 Demark d. 1963 Los Angeles CA		1910 Blair, NE; 1920 Boomer T.; 1930 Los Angeles, CA; 1934-51 Ansgar Luth. Ch., San Francisco
Williamsen, Carl Christian Knudsen, Gudrun Mathilde	b. ~1877 Denmark d. 1949 b. ~ 1879 Denmark d. 1961	m. ~1902 Denmark; immi. 1906 (ddd)	1910 blacksmith Underwood; 1915, 1920 Defiance, IA; 1930 Carroll Co., IL; bur. Coloma T. Cem., Whiteside Co., IL