

Family Roots of the Christiansen Daughters

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I wrote this short family history synopsis for my younger daughters in 2013. Since my own family history appears elsewhere, this report focuses on the family of my former wife who was born and raised in Burlington, Iowa and has lived in Atlanta, Georgia since 1979.

This draft narrative will make more sense if viewed in conjunction with the ancestor charts found at the end. I also wrote this report in an informal style, addressing my daughters.

Much of the source material for this and my other reports is in my *St. Paul's* database. When I'm no longer able to work on my history projects, I've asked my wife to see that my database goes to the Genealogy Center at the Museum of Danish America in Elk Horn, Iowa.

The Elk Horn museum, as well as the Pottawattamie County Genealogy Society in Council Bluffs, has copies of the 2012 version of my extended family history, which was then called *Ancestors and Older Relatives of Robert Christiansen – Christiansen, Rasmussen, Larsen/Larson and Hansen*, as well as some of my other writings. However, their holdings will be increasingly out of date as I'm continually updating my reports. In the future I will endeavor to keep current copies on my website currently under development.

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My Daughters' Paternal Roots – Robert A. "Bob" Christiansen

All of my ancestors emigrated in the late 1800s from rural or small-town Denmark and settled in southwestern Iowa, near Council Bluffs in Pottawattamie County, where they all eventually took up farming in Boomer and Hazel Dell Townships.

All of my great-grandparents and grandparents, along with other relatives, are buried in the St. Paul's Lutheran Church Cemetery in Boomer Township, in the countryside about eight miles west of Neola. My extended family history, *Robert Christiansen's Family History – Christiansen, Rasmussen, Larsen & Hansen* contains more information. If anyone ever visits Denmark, my history includes the places of origin in Denmark for all of my ancestors.

My parents, Alvin Christiansen and Leona Larson, married in 1933 and moved into a new house across the creek from the farmstead of my grandparents Christiansen. The Christiansen farm was about 15 miles north of Council Bluffs, Iowa and had a Honey Creek address. Our four-room house had a kitchen, living room and two bedrooms. We lacked conveniences except for a faucet in the kitchen sink that drained into a bucket in the basement. The kitchen stove and an oil-burning heater in the living room provided heat.

Since I was so small for my age and school was so far away, my parents kept me back for a year. In the late summer of 1942 I finally began attending the one-room Boomer #8 school. Thereafter I walked 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles to school except for two weeks every March when I was sick.

I was a difficult child. Nevertheless eventually my parents gave me a sister, Carolyn, and a brother, Don, who remain very dear to me.

In February 1948 our family of five moved to a smaller farm two miles west and $\frac{3}{4}$ miles north of Avoca and I began attending the Avoca School.

I graduated from Avoca High School in 1954, Chris in 1959 and Don in 1964. We were all encouraged to leave home soon after graduating. I joined the army and my siblings went to college.

Our house near Avoca had all the amenities that our house near Honey Creek lacked.

Having a smaller farm to work, my father had more time to engage in his passion for public service. My mother ran the household, gardened, joined the Social Farmerettes, and occasionally cared for neighborhood children. Both my parents were active in the Democratic Party.

My parents are buried in the Graceland Cemetery on the north edge of Avoca. From their gravestone they can see their farmstead on the western horizon.

My Daughters' Maternal Roots

All of your mom's ancestors immigrated to Iowa in the mid 1800s from continental Europe.

Roger Christensen: The ancestors of your grandfather, Roger Christensen, settled in southeastern Iowa near Burlington, which is on the Mississippi River in Des Moines County. Burlington, a small industrial city, is the oldest city in Iowa and was the first capital back in the 1830s when Iowa was still a territory.

Roger's father, William Christensen, left the farm for Burlington and became a locomotive fireman on the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad, and later an engineer. At one point he became a chiropractor, which didn't work out, and he subsequently returned to the CB&Q RR, but I was told that thereafter he was demoted to run trains on branch lines. William and his wife, Nora, were living at 818 S. 8th St. by 1910 and Nora continued to live at this address for most of the remainder of her life.

Roger Christensen was born in Burlington in 1907 and graduated from Burlington High School in 1926. Roger then attended Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois. Before graduating from Bradley, Roger had to quit school and return home. Roger's father died when Roger was about 20 and the family gave priority to educating Roger's older brother, Earl. Earl never amounted to much, and I believe Roger always regretted what happened.

In 1931 or earlier Roger began teaching manual training in the Burlington school system. It appears that Roger lived at home until he married in 1935.

Gladys Hove: Most of the ancestors of your grandmother, Gladys (Hove) Christensen, settled in prime agricultural land in central Iowa around Stanhope, which is in Hamilton County north of Ames.

Gladys' father, Peter P. Hove, was a prosperous businessman and landowner living in Stanhope. He was in the farm implement business in 1900 and was an automobile dealer in 1915. He suffered financially in the 1920s and 1930s but was still able to leave a farm to each of his four children.

Gladys was born in Stanhope on leap day, February 29, 1908 and graduated from Stanhope High School. Gladys studied home economics at Iowa State College in Ames, graduating in 1929. In 1929 Gladys began teaching home economics and physical education at Humboldt, north of Fort Dodge in north central Iowa. Gladys joined the Burlington school system as a home economics teacher in 1931.

In the summer of 1930 Gladys and her older sister, Marie, journeyed to Europe, returning on the *SS Carmania* in August.

Roger and Gladys: Roger and Gladys met when she was teaching in Burlington, Iowa. They married in Peoria, Illinois on June 27, 1935. After marrying, Roger and Gladys remained in Burlington until Roger's death over 50 years later.

After marrying, Roger and Gladys lived at 311 or 511 Spring Street in Burlington. In 1937 and 1938 Roger and Gladys were living at 1102 12th Street in Burlington and Roger was teaching at Oak Street Junior High School. Between 1943 and 1945 Roger and

Gladys and their two young children moved from 1102 12th Street to 516 South Garfield, where your mother grew up.

Until after World War II, Roger taught industrial arts in a junior high school in Burlington. Back then industrial arts was sometimes called "manual training" and was quite important in a city like Burlington where many of the jobs involved wood and metal fabrication.

Eventually Roger could no longer teach because he lacked a degree. He then became a house painter.

Gladys didn't work outside of the home after their children were born (or maybe after they married). I believe she was very attentive to providing a rich environment for her two talented daughters.

Roger and Gladys were always able to lead a comfortable middle class life, even though Roger had a blue-collar job. They were not frivolous in their spending and during their earlier married years they brought in additional money by fixing up and selling small homes. In addition they had income generated by the farm that Gladys' father had managed to keep for them.

In the early 1970s Roger and Gladys built a retirement home near Crapo Park in south Burlington.

After Roger retired, he pursued with passion his hobby of woodworking and, for diversion, coin collecting. Gladys remained a top-notch table tennis player until late in her life.

Roger died in Burlington of congestive heart failure. After Roger's death, Gladys continued to live in their retirement home for a few months. Eventually there was an auction and Gladys moved to Atlanta to be near her daughters. Gladys died in Atlanta.

Roger and Gladys were cremated and their ashes scattered, I believe in Crapo Park.

About My Daughters' Cousins:

As you know, you have only two first cousins. On my side, your Aunt Chris never married and your Uncle Don and Mercedes have only one child.

On your mom's side, your aunt and her first husband, George Mallett, had only one child.

I believe it unlikely that either of your first cousins will ever have children.

I have numerous first cousins so consequently you have a plentitude, around 80, of paternal second cousins. All are listed in my extended family history.

It appears that your mom had only one first cousin, as explained below.

Your grandfather, Roger Christensen, had two brothers:

- ▶ Clinton died in infancy
- ▶ Earl was an interior decorator. He was living with his mother in 1935 and in Cedar Rapids around 1940. Later he may have lived in Des Moines. Earl never married and never had children.

Your grandmother, Gladys (Hove) Christensen had three siblings:

- ▶ Marie never married. She taught mathematics at Wayne State College in Nebraska, the University of New Mexico, Hofstra University in New York, and Iowa State University.
- ▶ Leslie left the University of Iowa after one year of law school. He married Beulah Harron and worked in the Hamilton County Court House in Webster City, Iowa. Later he married Ada Kolb and raised turkeys south of Stanhope. There were no children from either marriage.
- ▶ Arline, the youngest sibling, married Mark Sylvester and lived in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Arline had one child, Peggy Lee, who married Roger L. Robertson and lived in the Bellevue, Washington area. Roger and Peggy adopted two children. Your mom's cousin, Peggy, and one of her children are deceased but I believe she has one living child.

Gladys apparently didn't have anything to do with her younger sister, Arline, so I wonder if your mom ever met her cousin, Peggy.

So it appears that you have no paternal first cousins and only one living maternal second cousin.

However Roger and Gladys had numerous aunts, uncles and cousins so your mom has many second cousins, some still living in the Burlington and Stanhope areas.

More on Roger Christensen's Ancestors:

Roger's parents, William Christensen and Nora Rundorff, were both born to large families near Burlington in southeastern Iowa in rural Des Moines County. William came from a family of ten children. Nora was one of eleven children, consisting of ten girls followed by one boy.

Roger's paternal grandfather, Niels Christensen, was born in Denmark on the Jutland peninsula, in Bandsby, Ringkobing, and emigrated around 1864 as a young man. Currently I don't know anything about Niels' parents or siblings.

Roger's paternal grandmother, Sophia Distelhorst, was of German ancestry and immigrated to Iowa as a young child. Her two oldest known siblings were born in Lerbeck near Minden in Westphalia in northern Germany in 1838 and 1839. Her family was already living in Burlington in 1850. Oral family history and some census records say that Sophia was born in Russia. However, I now suspect this is in error, that someone confused "Russia" with "Prussia".

Roger's maternal grandfather, August Rundorff, emigrated in 1857 with his parents as a teenager from Peitz, Brandenburg in Prussia.

Roger's maternal grandmother, Rosetta Fosbender, was probably born in Alsace-Lorraine, which is now part of France but always had many German residents and was temporarily part of Germany from 1870 to 1918. Rosetta emigrated around 1848 with her family as a small child.

Roger's great-uncle, William Fosbender, served in the 2nd Iowa Volunteer Cavalry Regiment for over four years during the Civil War. William's regiment served a role in Gierson's famous cavalry raid early in 1863. William was wounded and was also captured, but somehow rejoined his regiment, ending as a Quartermaster Sergeant. William Fosbender moved to Nebraska in the 1870s. I believe that some of William Fosbender's writing from the Civil War have been preserved.

Roger's parents and his grandparents, both Christensen and Rundorff are buried in the Prairie Grove Cemetery in West Burlington.

More on Gladys (Hove) Christensen's Ancestors:

One of your third cousins, Helen (Severe) Mackey, has worked on the Hove family tree. As of 2012 she has a database, "Hove Family Tree", available through ancestry.com. Her database includes a number of photos of Hove family members.

Gladys' father, Peter P. Hove, came from Norway with his parents and other relatives and neighbors as a small child around 1869. The family was from the Sogndal area in magnificent fjord country 100-200 miles northeast of Bergen. Peter Hove's parents were Peder Larson Hove and Ingeborg Petersdotter Nornes-Olmeheim.

The extended Hove family was but a small part of the large Norwegian community in central Iowa north of Ames. When I was a student at Iowa State University in Ames in 1957, there was still an Ames radio program called *The Norwegian Hour*. As of 2012, the mayor of Stanhope, where the Peter Hove family lived, is named Hove so may be a distant relative.

Gladys' mother, Emily (Hanson) Hove, was born in Iowa, probably not far from Stanhope, of Swedish parents, Sven Hanson and Augusta Matilda Anderson. Sven and Augusta had married about 1873 and settled in Hamilton County near the Peder and Ingeborg Hove farm.

Gladys' maternal grandfather, Sven Hanson had emigrated as a young man in 1869.

Gladys' maternal grandmother, Augusta Anderson emigrated as a small child in 1856 with her parents, Lars Peter Anderson and Maria Gustava Sederstrom. Augusta grew up near Peosta in northeastern Iowa in rural Dubuque County.

In the early 1880s, after Augusta had married Sven Hanson, Augusta's parents left Dubuque County and moved to Floyd County in north central Iowa. There they lived several miles northwest of Charles City and a few miles west of the Cedar River. Living near the Cedar River was appropriate since Augusta's mother's maiden name, Sederstrom, means "cedar stream" in Swedish.

Gladys' parents, Peter and Emily Hove, are buried in the Lawn Hill Cemetery near Stanhope. Her Hove grandparents are buried in the Lake Center Cemetery near Stanhope. I don't know where her Hanson grandparents are buried.

The Lost Swedes:

I don't want the story of The Lost Swedes to be forgotten, although it has little to do with your family history.

In 1845 the first party of Swedes in Iowa settled in southeastern Iowa at New Sweden on the Skunk River about 40 miles northwest of Burlington. The New Sweden settlers wrote back to Sweden inviting their friends and relatives to join them.

Thus in 1846 a second group of Swedes crossed the Atlantic and took a complicated route by water all the way from New York to southeastern Iowa. They traveled up the Hudson River to the Erie Canal, across the Erie Canal to Lake Erie, down canals in Ohio to the Ohio River, down the Ohio River and up the Mississippi River to St. Louis. Then they took a steamboat up the Mississippi River to southeastern Iowa.

However, the second group misunderstood the directions mailed to them for the route to take after leaving St. Louis. Instead of following the Skunk River upstream from the Burlington area, the second party left the steamboat too soon and followed the Des Moines River for 150 miles from Keokuk into the interior of Iowa. Their route was the route followed by the first railroad into Des Moines, which didn't arrive until 1866.

Eventually the lost Swedes arrived at Fort Des Moines, on the southern edge of what soon became the city of Des Moines. The soldiers at Fort Des Moines tried to persuade the Swedes to not continue further upstream, telling them they would find only one lone settler, who was a former soldier and definitely not Swedish. However these Swedes, evidently being somewhat stubborn, insisted on continuing their quest up the Des Moines River valley in search of their compatriots. After another 30 miles they indeed found the lone settler, and finally gave up hope of reuniting with their fellow Swedes. The lost Swedes founded the first Swedish settlement in central Iowa.

The lost Swedes called their settlement, which was located near the Des Moines River, Swede Point. Later, for reasons lost to history, it was renamed Madrid.

None of your Swedish ancestors were in the 1846 party of lost Swedes. However, Gladys' mother, Emily (Hanson) Hove, lived in the Swedish old folks home in Madrid before her death in 1966.

The Fictional Swedes:

Wilhelm Moberg from Sweden wrote a best-selling series of books chronicling a fictional party of Swedes who emigrate in 1850, and like the lost Swedes mentioned above, travel to St. Louis and ascend the Mississippi River. The first Iowa Swedes disembarked at Burlington in 1845 and the lost Swedes at Keokuk in 1846. However, Wilhelm Moberg's Swedes traveled all the way up the Mississippi to the St. Croix Valley east of St. Paul.

In the early 1970s Wilhelm Moberg's books were filmed as "The Emigrants" and "The New Land". You may have seen these fine movies when you were children.

Your Swedes:

As mentioned above, your great great great grandparents, Lars Peter Anderson and Maria Gustava Sederstrom, emigrated from Sweden in 1856 and settled in rural Dubuque County. Maybe they were lost also, as there were only 26 Swedes living in all of Dubuque County in 1856 – the county population was around 20,000.

How You Got Your Names:

Although your mom may have different recollections, this is my memory of how the two of you happened to have Russian names.

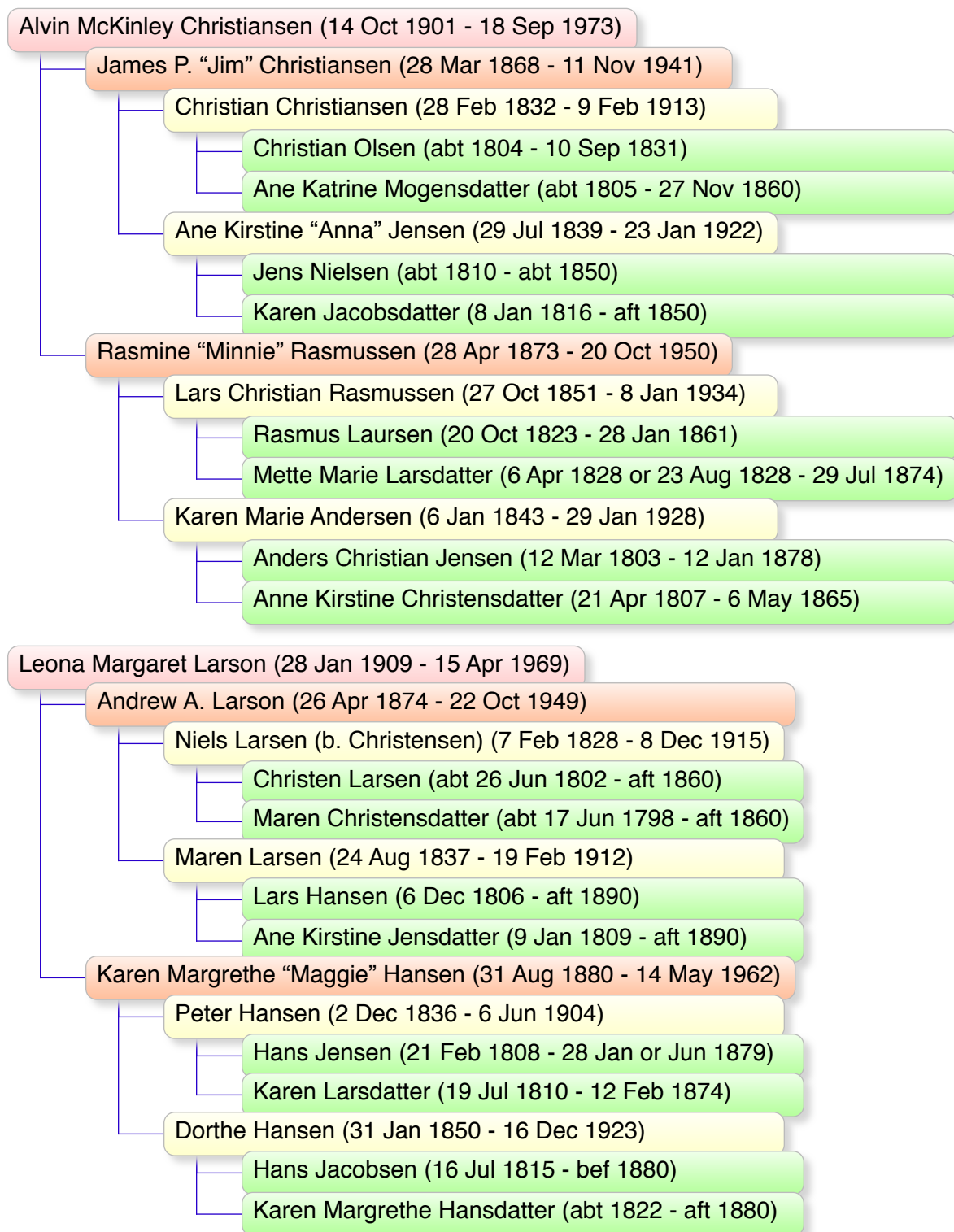
Around the time you were born, many people developed more interest in their ethnic roots. Because I am of entirely Danish ancestry, and your mom is 5/8 Scandinavian (1/8 Danish, 1/4 Norwegian and 1/4 Swedish), we considered giving you Scandinavian names.

My favorite Danish name, Karen, had already been appropriated by my cousin, Phillip, for his daughter. At the time we thought Roger Christensen's paternal grandmother, Sophia, was an ethnic Russian. Moreover the thought of using Russian names intrigued me, as it was the height of the Cold War and to some extent Russians were being demonized. Since I was an Iowa contrarian, this suggested doing the contrary thing by giving you Russian names. Later we learned that that Sophia was of German heritage, and despite Roger's family's oral family history may have never lived in Russia.

I found one of your names in Gogol's short story *Twenty Six Men and a Girl*. However, I misremembered the author and until recently thought the short story was by Chekhov. Consequently we still have a large portrait of Chekhov, which I appropriated from the Russian Department at Grinnell College.

The other name came from a character in Tolstoy's epic novel *War and Peace*.

Your Paternal Grandparents and Their Ancestors



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