

Andrew Nelson Sr.

By Stanley C. Nelson *

Andrew Nelson Sr. was sixteen years old when the Danish Mission was opened in 1850 under the direction of Erastus Snow. Until 1849 the Danish people were required by law to belong to the state church, the Lutheran. At that time they received their religious freedom. Since the Danes now had the opportunity to choose their religion for themselves, the leaders of the Latter-day Saints Church decided that this was the opportune time to start missionary work in Denmark. While many converts were made, the opposition to the Latter-day Saints was strong. Persecution was severe and several of the Elders were brutally treated. In spite of this, Andrew was baptized October 19, 1951 by Elder C. Larsen.

Andrew was born in the eastern part of the mainland (Jylland) in Kalhave, Hornborg, Skanderborg on March 8, 1834. He was the son of Niels Andersen and Marie Kirstine Jensen. His home region is quite hilly and very green, as is all of Denmark. In the springtime there are a great many flowers. Both evergreen and broad-leaved trees grow in profusion. The region has many beautiful lakes with green banks. A very high percentage of the land is cultivated.

At the time Andrew was a boy much of the land was owned by wealthy landowners and bonded out to the farmers. The tenants were bonded and usually could not leave the land. They were bondsmen and their children were also bonded by the landowner so they too had to stay on the land. It was a real accomplishment to become a freeman. The shop-owners and tradesmen were usually freemen, or freeholders, as is usually written by the Danish. One way to become a freeman was to marry someone who was a freeman. Andrew's father, Niels Andersen, first married a woman nine years older than himself. We wonder if he did this because she was a freeholder or had some money or land. When she died thirty years later Niels married a younger woman of about thirty-eight. Andrew was born six years later when she was about forty-four, his father was sixty-nine. Needless to say, Andrew was the only child. His father died just before his tenth birthday. Andrew grew into a large, handsome young man. He had a strong build and weighed well over two hundred pounds. He had dark, good-looking hair and blue eyes. He seems to have

had a spirit of independence; a trait, which has no doubt, filtered down to his family. Although there was much opposition to the Mormon Church, Andrew joined a year after it was brought to Denmark. Thus his routine way of life was interrupted and a course began which would lead him to become a pioneer in the wilderness of Western America.

Andrew soon had a strong desire to come to Utah. He joined the Forsgren Company, which was the first large company of Latter-day Saints to come from Scandinavia. The company left Copenhagen December 20, 1852. They went to Liverpool and after some delay set sail for America. They arrived in New Orleans March 31, 1853. They went to St. Louis by steamboat, stopped a month, then went up the Missouri River to Keokuk, Iowa. They started across the plains with ox team on the 21st of May. They arrived in Salt Lake City on September 30, after nine months of hard travel. Most of the Forsgren party were assigned to Sanpete County by Brigham Young.

On October 15, the company reached "Little Denmark" which was later renamed Spring City. The Walker Indian War was then being fought and there was considerable fear among the settlers. Food was in short supply and life was difficult. "Upon learning of the hostilities of the Indians, and near starvation of the people at Little Denmark, President Brigham Young sent a letter advising the Saints to continue on to Manti."ⁱ They arrived in Manti the evening of December 16, 1853. "A foot of snow had fallen, and it was bitterly cold. They camped inside the fort. For the next few months frozen potatoes served with bran and smutty ground wheat was the fare three times daily. Insufficient clothing, however, caused greater suffering than the pangs of hunger."ⁱⁱ

Andrew's best accomplishment while at Spring City was marrying Metta Nelson, who also came with the Forsgren Company. How long they had known each other is hard to determine. It must have taken considerable courage to get married under the conditions which they faced. The fare was hardly one that would be ordered for a honeymoon.

Plural marriage was the order of the day for the Latter-day Saints who had a desire to live

it. However, additional wives could be married only if the first gave her permission. One of the family said that as Andrew considered another wife, the young people of Manti were invited into the home of Andrew and Metta for some social evenings and Metta had the final say who was to be the second wife. Her choice was Christina Jensen, who Andrew married in July 1858. Christina had come in a handcart company in 1857. Christina has left us an excellent account in her own words of this handcart crossing. Many of the family have a copy of it.

Andrew was called on a mission to his native land, Denmark, in 1865. He had been ordained in the priesthood to the office of a Seventy May 17, 1857 by John Crawford. When he arrived in Denmark he assumed the Danish version of his name, Anders Nielsen. In the United States however he always went by the Anglicized version, Andrew Nelson. It is not known whether Andrew changed it or someone else when he first came to this country. Andrew was evidently a good missionary because he was appointed to preside over the Aarhus Conference in January 1866. He was the first Elder from the United States to preside over this Conference.ⁱⁱⁱ

Andrew Jensen, who was the assistant church historian, wrote a history of the Scandinavian Mission. In this history, he said: "For a long time the Gospel gained splendid ground in the Aarhus Conference, and for a number of years more persons were added to the Church in that conference than any other conference in Scandinavia."^{iv} Andrew was one of them that carried on that fine work.

Andrew left Copenhagen in a company of the Saints on June 13, 1867 bound for Liverpool. In the company were two young women, Camilla and Sophia Moller, who later married him. At Liverpool on June 21st they boarded the beautiful steamship "Manhattan", a vessel of 2,000 tons, big for those days. It was equipped to carry a thousand passengers.

After a twelve-day voyage they arrived at New York City. They went up the Hudson by steamer to Albany. They traveled on the railroad from there to St. Joseph, Missouri via Niagara Falls, Detroit, and Chicago. They took a steamer up the Missouri River to Omaha. From there they traveled on the Union Pacific Railroad 291 miles westward to North Platte. After a stay of four weeks, they journeyed across the plains by

ox-train. They arrived in Salt Lake City on October 5th. Andrew and the two girls went on to Manti. The two sisters stayed through the winter with Andrew's first wife, Metta.

In March Andrew married both sisters. Did he love one sister more than another? His actions speak very plainly for themselves, for he married both girls on the same day, March 28, 1868.

In Manti Andrew and his wives settled down and established themselves in the community. It was not entirely without fear because the Black Hawk Indian War in which seventy-five settlers were killed was in progress. Andrew took part in the local militia and is mentioned several times as an Indian fighter and a veteran of the Black Hawk Indian War.

Andrew Nelson held several positions in public life. He served as a city councilor for two terms, justice of the peace one term, sheriff for two years, and as constable and pound keeper for Manti. He owned several small farms and was a stockholder in the Union Roller Mill in Manti. Peter Munk, an old-time resident of Manti, said of Andrew Nelson, "A man of great wisdom and foresight. He was active in the Indian Wars and served the city in several capacities. He was regarded as one of its (Manti) most substantial citizens."^v

This is only a small part of the history of Andrew Nelson and his wives. How much more of the history and stories of the Nelson family that is written depends largely on the family and how much time the individual members take to write it. May I encourage you to write down the stories you know about the family and send them in?

A few sentences from his obituary were of special interest:

“He became a member of the Church of Jesus Christ in 1851 in his native land and for a number of years was actively engaged as a church worker, filling a most successful mission to his native land for a period of two years in the sixties.” “He followed farming and stock raising as a profession and was successful in his endeavors, and bore an excellent reputation among all the people of this community.” “Mr. Nelson was always kind and generous, helpful to the poor and needy and most friendly with all.”

--Deseret News, September 21, 1909

Andrew Nelson, Sr. used to pound the table and say “I am the trunk and all the Nelsons are the branches.”

He was strong-willed and could get very angry, but he was generally just. One day he took a load of wheat in sacks to the miller and asked him to grind it. For some reason the miller did not want to do it. So Andrew left his sacks of wheat, walked into the mill and took a fair amount of flour, and then distributed the flour to families who needed it.

--Kate Hall

Andrew Nelson served a term as the Justice of the Peace in Manti. He performed this duty in a very dignified and judicial manner.

At one time a family man was brought before Andrew on trial. He was found guilty and

Andrew assigned him to do a number of days' work on a town ditch project to pay his fine. Certain people criticized this penalty as too lenient for the offense.

Andrew answered them, “If I fine him a certain amount of money his family will suffer the loss. It is he who is guilty, not they; hence, his labor should pay the penalty.” The critics agreed with him.

--Eunice Nelson

When the Council House was being built in Manti North Ward, using stone from the Temple Hill quarry, Andrew Nelson came along and watched six men trying to carry a long window sill stone up a ramp to the second story. One of the sidewalk engineers goaded another into a bet, then goaded grandfather into saying, “Let a man show you how to do it.” He had them lift it to his shoulders and carried it up the ramp. This was in his prime of life before he had asthma. He was at the time the most physically powerful man in Manti.

--Eunice and Max M. Nelson

One time as they were hauling hay, the reach of the wagon came uncoupled. Andrew laid on his back and with his legs lifted and held up the load of hay while the reach was replaced.

--Max M. Nelson

* Assisted in research by Monte Nelson and Conrad Nelson.

ⁱ Song of a Century, p. 30 (A history of Manti, Utah. This was compiled and edited by the editorial staff of the Manti Centennial Committee.)

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jenson, Andrew, History of the Scandinavian Mission, p. 498. (see also pages 187-190)

^{iv} Ibid.

^v Daughters of Utah Pioneers, Historical Pamphlet, March 1944, “A Pioneer Journal, Forsgren Company, Containing Story of the First Danish Company to Emigrate to Utah.”