

THE LIFE HISTORY OF OTTO EDWARD WILLIAM THORWALD CHRISTENSEN

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1st Wife
Marianne Christensen
Born 17 May 1840
Married 18 Sep 1861
Died 19 Apr 1905



OTTO EDWARD WILLIAM THORWALD CHRISTENSEN



2nd Wife
Maren Annette Andersen
Born 30 Oct 1846
Married 23 Sep 1865
Died 24 June 1921



3rd Wife
Wilhelmine Peterson
Born 6 Dec 1856
Married 9 Oct 1879
Died 10 Dec 1942

Otto Edward William Thorwald Christensen was born 13 Feb. 1841, in Copenhagen, Denmark, son of Mads Christensen and Dorthea Christiane Christensen, who were married 31 Mar 1831 in Garrison's Church in Copenhagen. His father was born in Durup, Viborg, Denmark, son of Christen Kjeldsen and Karen Madsen, and had come to Copenhagen when in military service. His mother was born 16 Nov. 1806 in Copenhagen, daughter of Christen Christensen Trandum and Anne Kirstine Pederson.

He had three older brothers--Carl Christian Anthon, born 28 Nov. 1831, Niels August, born 10 June 1834 and Mads Theobald Frederick, born 10 Mar. 1837. When William was born the family were in poor circumstances as the father had failed as an owner of an inn. The night he was born there was not so much as a shilling

in the house. The boy was strong and healthy and thrived well on the simple fare given him. The poverty increased and his mother was forced to do washing and housecleaning for others which sometimes exceeded her strength breaking down her health. Carl, the eldest in the family who was ten years old, carried the baby on his back to where his mother was working so that she could feed him. He wasn't strong and had to rest several times on the way. He also did the household chores and watched after his three younger brothers so that everything should be alright when their mother came home in the evening. She was a loving mother teaching her sons everything which was good and worthwhile. She planted in each young heart a noble seed for good which was never fully destroyed by temptation of the things of the world.

In Dec. 1842, Carl was admitted to a boarding school, "Opforstringshuset," and given the No. 59, where he was given religious instruction in the Lutheran faith and also was taught reading, writing, arithmetic, history, and geography until he was confirmed a Lutheran 19 Apr. 1846 after which he was apprenticed to learn the carpenter trade. His brother Niels August got his place and number in the school and when he was confirmed and apprenticed to be a shoemaker, his brother Frederick came into the institution and was given the No. 3. When he came out of the school and was apprenticed by a harness-maker in the spring of 1851, William got his place in the school and also his number 3.

His mother was seeking the truth and joined a congregation of Baptists in 1843. In June 1850 L.D.S. missionaries led by Apostle Erastus Snow (John Erik Forsgreen, Peter O. Hanson and George Parker Dykes) came and opened up the Scandinavian Mission of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Baptist Church, where his mother was, listened to them and several were baptized. Among them was his mother who was baptized 18 Aug. 1850.

On 26 Sept. 1850 Carl was baptized by Elder George Pyper Dykes. Three weeks later Niels August and William were baptized 14 Oct. 1850.

On 20 Dec. 1852 William joined Elder John Erik Forsgreen's company to emigrate to America. His mother and brother Carl accompanied the eleven year old boy to the pier in Copenhagen where he boarded the steamship "Obotrit" for Kiel. They went on board with him. The parting didn't seem to make him feel bad and they did not grieve either. Their hearts were happy, hoping that they would meet again in the beloved Zion, "the gathering city." As the Saints came out from the Copenhagen Customhouse, they sang happily, "Oh Babylon, Oh Babylon, we bid thee farewell." Everyone waved their hats and handkerchiefs--"Goodbye, till we meet again!"

Two hundred ninety-four saints joined Pres. Forsgreen as he left Copenhagen to come to Utah after filling his mission. A great croud of curious joined the Saints to see them off. Although they were blasphemous in their jeers no violence occurred.

It was stormy on the voyage to Kiel, Germany. The train carried them safely to Hamburg where they boarded the steamship "Lion" on Christmas Day and sailed to Hull, England. A severe storm raged on the North Sea sinking about one hundred fifty ships. Nevertheless, the "Lion" safely docked at Hull at the great amazement of the people there.

The next lap of their journey was by train to Liverpool where the Saints boarded the packet ship "Forest Monarch" which docked in the River Morsey Dec. 31, 1852 where she lay at anchor for two weeks awaiting favorable winds. During that brief time three of the emigrants died and two babies were born while three fellow-passengers accepted the Gospel. One night the ship became entangled with another ship sustaining some damage. Once during a heavy storm the ship got adrift pulling up both anchors and was saved from running aground by two tugboats. One emigrant was bitten by a dog and had to go ashore to await the next company. At last the sails were really hoisted Jan. 16, 1853 and now there were two hundred ninety-seven in Pres. Forsgreen's company.

Crossing the North Atlantic at that time of year is perilous and was tedious to bear. Did anyone remember on that storm tossed sea on Feb. 13th a lonely little boy's twelvth birthday? The fifty-nine day voyage to New Orleans greatly strained the supply of poor provisions and fresh water which latter was inadequate to reach their destination March 16th, 1853. Four deaths and three births had occurred enroute.

By riverboat they proceeded to St. Louis, Mo. where they remained about a month where six more emigrants died and two couples were married. Finally they continued by boat up-river to Keokuk, Iowa where they were given oxen and wagons. Some of them disagreed with the American method of yoking oxen and hitched their teams in regular Danish fashion. The oxen who were American were frightened half to death and began to run away. In a council meeting it was decided that the emigrants could learn American ways easier than the oxen could learn to work with Danish harnesses.

Many of the oxen had never been hitched up before and many wagons were upset in gulleys and ditches while oxen and drivers were learning to cooperate properly. On May 21st all was ready and the company with thirty-four wagons and one hundred thirty oxen rolled out from the camping grounds near Keokuk. Four months and eleven days later their overland journey on which a number of emigrants died, many children were born and a few had lost the faith and dropped by the way-side, was finally ended and they arrived safely in Great Salt Lake City Sept. 30, 1853. The whole long tedious journey had taken nine months and eleven days.

William's new life in Zion began in Springville in the home of Richard Bird. The next year his mother, Dorteia Christiane

Christensen and his seventeen year old brother Mads Frederick Theobald, known as Fred, arrived in Great Salt Lake City Oct. 5, 1854 with the Hans Peter Olsen Company. That winter Fred came to Springville and boarded with and worked for Horace Thornton, a chair maker. The next summer (1855) William worked with cattle in Rush Valley as did Fred. Then he returned to his former home with the Richard Bird family. His mother died in Salt Lake City 5 Sept. 1855.

His oldest brother Carl Christian Anthon Christensen and his new bride arrived in the fall of 1857 with a handcart company. By this time William was sixteen years old. One can imagine the reunion of these three brothers.

In 1859 Carl moved to Mount Pleasant, Sanpete County and in the spring of 1860 Fred moved to North Bend, Sanpete Co. (later known as Fairview) where both his brothers Carl and William were then living. Each one had acquired a yoke of oxen and started farming having five acres all plowed and tilled. They raised enough grain that year for bread and seed both.

In the spring of 1861 William went to the Missouri River with the Church teams to help immigrants across the plains. In the company he became acquainted with twenty-one year old Mariane Christensen from Tolne, Hjorring, Denmark, daughter of Christen Christensen and Ane Cathrine Anderson. On the trek westward their friendship flourished into romance as he brought her back to Fairview with him where they were married Sept. 18, 1861 in North Bend, now Fairview.

Two children were born to them there: William Edward born 3 Oct. 1862 and Mary Emeline born 21 Oct. 1864 living only six months as she died 12 Apr. 1865.

On 23rd Sept. 1865 in the Endowment House in Salt Lake City William's and Mariane's marriage was solemnized for time and eternity and he took a second wife, nineteen year old Maren Annette Andersen of Dramen, Norway, daughter of Christopher Anderson and Annette Gurine Christopherson.

During the following years William was busy with his farming and church activities. He lead the choir, played the fiddle at dances and acted in theatrical productions. Through perseverance he acquired a good education and became a very proficient school teacher. Meanwhile he was blessed with three more children by Mariane--Charles Otto born 8 Mar. 1866,

Luanna Maria (my grandmother) born 12 June 1869, and Antonia Belinda born 26 Feb. 1871. Maren Annette, affectionately known as Nettie, had three daughters, Dorthy Gurene born 22 Dec. 1867, Amelia Janette born 5 May 1870 and Mary Eliza born 28 July 1872.

In Feb. 1874 a diptheria epidemic broke out in the community. Mariane's eldest son, William Edward, age eleven, and youngest child, Antonia Belinda, age three, died of the dread disease just ten days apart. William and Mariane were grief stricken at the loss but somehow grew apart. Later that year Mariane felt it wiser to leave than stay and he fitted her out with a wagon and team and she left with their only remaining daughter, four year old Luanna Maria, while he kept seven year old Charles Otto. Nettie, his second wife, was always a kind mother to little Charlie.

William Christopher was born 18 July 1875 to William and Nettie Christensen and on 7 Nov. 1877 Frederick Thorvald was born after his father left on a mission.

In 1877 eighteen elders from Zion arrived in Copenhagen, Denmark. Among them was Otto Edward William Thorvald Christensen. He was appointed to labor in the Aarhus Conference and later became president of Copenhagen Conference, 1878-1879. On 23 June 1879 he was among eleven elders returning home to America with a company of three hundred thirty-one emigrating Saints from Copenhagen on the steamship "Cato." They reached Hull, England successfully on June 26th and were conveyed by rail to Liverpool, where they joined one hundred forty-five British, thirty-eight German and Swiss Saints and two more returning elders on board the steamer "Wyoming." They sailed from Liverpool June 28th and arrived in New York July 8th. The journey westward was continued by rail and the company reached Salt Lake City July 16th. Note the contrast in the two journeys from Copenhagen: in 1853 the slower methods of transportation including packet ship and covered wagon took nine months eleven days while in 1879, twenty-six years later, the improved transportation of steamship and railroad all across America took only thirty-five days, just five weeks.

While William was in Denmark on his mission he met twenty-two year old Wilhelmina Severine Pauline Petersen, who was born 6 Dec 1856 in Copenhagen, Denmark, daughter of Poul Pedersen and Severina Magdalena Margretha Robsham. She came to America in August 1879 and they were married 9 Oct. 1879 in the Endowment House in Salt Lake City. They lived in Fairview about a year where their first child Emma Wilhelmina was born 26 Aug. 1880. William was called as a missionary colonist to San Luis Valley, Colorado.

They traveled by team and wagon while their baby was but two weeks old. Six weeks later they arrived in Manassa in San Luis Valley (Conejos County) in Oct. 1880.

There were only two or three log houses in Manassa and they lived in one of those that winter. It was full of cracks and many a morning they awakened to their bed covered with snow.

In 1881 William had to go away to work. He worked in Gunnison under foreman S. S. Smith building a railroad. He was a bookkeeper. He was appointed the first Postmaster in Manassa and his wife Wilhelmina took care of it though she had not learned the English language. She learned the names of the people and gradually the language. She kept the Post Office for eight years. Later William opened the first hardware store in Manassa which he operated until August 1894.

During the years they were very actively engaged in church activity as well as raising a family. Nine more children were born to William and Wilhelmina in Manassa: William Conrad August who was born 11 Nov. 1881 and died eighteen months and twenty-three days later on 3 June 1883; Charlotte Sophia born 24 Nov 1882; Cordelia Theresa born 24 June 1884; Agnes Magdalena born 19 Feb. 1886; Edward Thorwald born 14 Aug 1887; Marcella Adelaide born 20 Apr. 1889; Lenora Conradine born 30 Mar. 1891; Marion Richard born 2 Mar. 1893; and Wilford Manassah born 7 Nov. 1894.

They decided to move to Vernal, Utah to make a new home and business. On 2 Aug. 1894 William left Manassa, Colorado with two covered wagons loaded with hardware. His eleven year old second daughter Charlotte drove one of the teams. The Cheney family went also. They had a buggy and covered wagons. The first night was spent in Alamosa. They were on the road for a month. At times they had to stop and fix roads on the dugway to get the wagons safely over the mountains. One place the water was brown and they couldn't drink it. All the next day they went without water. When they reached Fruita they stayed three days to wash, repair their wagons, etc.

They arrived in Vernal Sept. 22, 1894. They camped a week then rented a house from Mr. Davis. William taught school at Ashley about three miles through the sagebrush from Vernal. Charlotte kept house for her father and was twelve years old Nov. 24th. He made the best light bread. A neighbor Nelson Sowards lived a quarter of a mile away through the six feet tall sagebrush. On weekends William and his daughter would stay

in Vernal with dear friends, the Bartletts.

In February, 1895 while visiting the Bartletts William took sick. He was sick seven weeks. Wilhelmina with her three month old son Wilford and nine year old daughter Agnes came by stage coach through Utah and were with him the last three weeks. He died 25th March 1895, age 54, and was buried in Vernal.

His wife settled his affairs and went back home by stage. She worked hard and kept the hardware store going. Once it burned to the ground. William's diary was burned then. With the help of friends she rebuilt the store. She took in boarders and worked very hard rearing her nine children and educating them alone. She died Dec. 10, 1942, age 86, in Manassa.

Mariane, William's first wife remarried in 1875, Melitone Gonzalez Trejo and had one daughter Maria Louise. Later he took a second wife and Mariane took back her Christensen name. She died 19 April 1905, age 64 years eleven months, in St. David, Arizona.

Maren Annette, his second wife, moved to Colorado with her children and lived in Sanford, Conejos County, a few miles from Manassa. The pressure upon polygamist families by government officials brought hardship upon them as he chose to live only with his younger wife. Nevertheless, he helped them when he could. She died 24 June 1921, age 74, in Sanford, Colorado.

William's brother Niels August was in the army when his brother Carl went back to Denmark on a mission. He had left the church and his wife was very much opposed to the Mormons. However, he emigrated to America in 1873. He married Elizabeth Catrine Christensen Blackham and had one son Niels August, born 11 July 1874 in Ephraim, Sanpete, Utah. He died 25 Aug 1876 in Ephraim, Sanpete Co., Utah, age 42. Thus William was the first of the family to emigrate to America and Niels was the last--all of them came to America except their father, Mads Christensen, who died 16 May 1860 in Copenhagen, Denmark, in his sixty-second year.

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Sources of Information:

Diary of Carl C. A. Christensen

"Under the Midnight Sun, History of the Scandinavian Mission" by Albert L. Zobell, Jr., published 1950, pp. 48-50.