

Scandinavian Saints: A Legacy of Significant Sacrifice

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Sister Virginia U. Jensen, then first counselor in the general Relief Society presidency, spoke to the Faculty Women's Association at BYU in January of this year. She recalled the first time she had to give a talk in the Tabernacle on Temple Square. She noted that she had never had a desire to speak in the Tabernacle. I guess that is how I feel about my experience today. I have never really wanted to give a devotional speech at BYU. I take heart in the promise given in 1 Corinthians 2:3: "And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling."

I want to begin by telling you a pioneer story. Clara Matilda Erickson was born on November 21, 1868, in Julita, Södermanland, Sweden. Her father, Karl Erickson, was a farm laborer at that time, but later he became a builder and carpenter. The family consisted of five children. Amanda Charlotta, the oldest child, died at the age of three years, and Emil, the youngest, died during his first year of life.

Herman H. Sundström was born in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1860 and baptized a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Copenhagen by Elder Andrew Jensen in 1880. Herman was called as a missionary to the Stockholm conference two months later. He was arrested in April

1882 and sent in chains to prison, where he was incarcerated for 19 days, tried on various charges, and then set free. In 1883 Elder Sundström was sent to Eskilstuna, where he baptized Clara Matilda Erickson and her family. It is further noted that he was responsible for baptizing 55 people, selling books to the value of 642 kronor, and traveling on foot about 10,000 miles.¹ He was released from his mission in 1884 and emigrated to Salt Lake City.

Clara left Sweden in 1889 at the age of 19, the only one of her family to come to the United States. She traveled to Copenhagen, Denmark, boarded a Church-sponsored steamship, and crossed the North Sea, arriving at Hull, England. She took a train from Hull to Liverpool and boarded the ship *Wyoming*, joining other Saints from the British Isles. She traveled second-class and landed in New York. The entire voyage took about six weeks. She was sick the whole trip. She took the train from New York to Salt Lake City. She never returned to Sweden and never saw her family again.

Clara met Carl Erik Hoaglund in 1891, and they were married. They had three children,

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two boys and a girl. Carl became sick with consumption (now known as tuberculosis). He wasn't able to work, so Clara did washing and ironing to support the family. Carl died in 1898.

In 1903 friends introduced Clara to Carl John Anderson. They were married that same year. They had four children, one daughter and three sons. Carl had been married previously. His wife had died and left him with five children. A son and a daughter from that marriage lived with Carl and Clara and were quite resentful that their father had remarried so soon after their mother's death. In 1916 Carl and Clara were divorced.

In 1934, at the age of 66, Clara received a patriarchal blessing. In that blessing it stated:

You were willing to sacrifice, to leave home and loved ones and cross the great waters to be here in Zion that you might do the things that the Lord would have you do. As a consequence, you have suffered and have had sorrow come into your life, but the Lord has been with you to support you and help you across the difficult places and peace and happiness have come to your soul and the satisfaction of knowing that you have done that which was right and honorable before the Lord.

The blessing continued:

I bless you to live yet many years to accomplish good, bless you that as you engage in the Temple work a great thrill may come to your soul as you release your ancestors and open the way for them to continue in their progression, for progression, as you know, is endless, and those whose relatives care for them in the House of the Lord are fortunate indeed.²

Clara had sacrificed by leaving her homeland and loving parents and siblings and coming to a foreign land. She struggled with the language and had to raise seven children, basically on her own. However, she never complained. She saved enough money to hire a genealogist in Sweden to do research so she could submit names to the Salt

Lake Temple and have ordinances performed for her family, ancestors, and her first husband.

Clara died at the age of 81. Clara was my paternal grandmother.

Economic and political turmoil in the 19th century led Scandinavians to search for new opportunities beyond the villages and byways of their ancestors. Ship captains hoping to increase business urged those seeking a better life to leave Scandinavia and journey to America, where it was rumored that land was free and economic opportunity unlimited. The poor and destitute of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway were lured by tales of American abundance.

Many left ancestral villages and crowded into the port city of Copenhagen, there waiting on docks and piers for an opportunity to board a ship for the western land. An extreme image held by more than one was that American "pigs come ready cooked, with knives and forks in them, and are running round squealing to be eaten."³ The less gullible scoffed at the story of the pigs but hoped that new land in a fledgling country would prove the solution to the dilemmas that plagued them. So eager were many emigrants to leave Scandinavia that to wait for the next ship was to experience angry frustration. Men forced to wait fought for a chance to purchase another's passage. Some became stowaways, and still others promised ship captains that they would stay in cargo hulls through the entire passage just to get away from Scandinavia.

During the early days of the Church some Norwegian immigrants living on the Fox Islands near the coast of Maine heard the preaching of Wilford Woodruff. A few accepted his preaching and soon ventured inland and traveled to Nauvoo to be with others of their faith. In Nauvoo they attempted farming and tried to meld into the Midwest Mormon society. Although this proved difficult for some, struggles seemed a small sacrifice compared to the privilege of associating daily with the Prophet Joseph Smith. One day, after speaking with a Norwegian convert, the Prophet told

George A. Smith, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “that the Scandinavians would in time come to play a significant role in the church.”⁴

Joseph Smith did not live to witness the fulfillment of his prophecy. He did not see Scandinavian John E. Forsgren march with the Mormon Battalion to California in 1847 or Scandinavian Peter O. Hansen trek with the first company of Mormon pioneers across the plains to the Salt Lake Valley.

At the October conference held in Salt Lake City in 1849, it was decided to send missionaries to the nations of the earth. The Scandinavian mission calls generated much excitement among Mormons living in the Rockies. Many believed that the harvest of converts in the Nordic climes would be great, but none imagined that it would match or even surpass the number of English converts migrating to America.

On October 19, 35 men answered President Young’s call to serve. Among them were Elder Erastus Snow of the Council of the Twelve and Elders Peter O. Hansen and John E. Forsgren. Before Elders Snow, Hansen, and Forsgren left the Rockies, a farewell social was held in their honor. Friends not only extended well-wishes but generously gave of their means to help defray the expense of crossing the plains. Through their generosity the newly called missionaries had the necessary monies to journey in a wagon train to the Mississippi River. The missionaries preached beyond the river to gain additional funds for passage to Great Britain. The Saints in England and Scotland collected the remaining funds needed for them to continue their voyage to Denmark.

Elder Hansen arrived in Copenhagen, Denmark, on May 11, 1850. He immediately published a pamphlet entitled *A Warning to the People*. Elder Hansen’s father, who had remained in Denmark, would not see him, and most of his old friends didn’t want to listen to his message. Even after hearing this discouraging news from Elder Hansen, Elder

Erastus Snow, who had spent some weeks among the Saints in England and Scotland, left London and arrived in Copenhagen on June 14, 1850. He was accompanied by Elder John E. Forsgren and George P. Dykes, who had introduced the gospel to a Norwegian settlement in La Salle County, Illinois, in 1842.

In Copenhagen the elders met the poor and destitute waiting on the docks for ship passage to America. When the poor learned that the Mormon elders were from America, they questioned them about American abundance, just as they had questioned the ship captains. Multitudes gathered to hear the elders tell stories of America and of an American church.

The missionaries bore their testimonies wherever they found an opportunity. Knowing that preaching Mormonism on the docks was disconcerting to government authorities, Elder Snow started “fireside preaching”⁵ to small gatherings inside family dwellings. This quiet, modest approach proved effective. Elder Snow wrote to Brigham Young, “We thank God that the seed has sprung up, and has deep root.”⁶ A year later he wrote, “‘The shell is broken’ in old Scandinavia, and the work of the Lord will advance.”⁷ On August 12, 1850, Elder Erastus Snow baptized 15 converts. At the close of the year there were 130 members in Denmark and a Book of Mormon had been presented to the king of Denmark along with a copy of Elder Snow’s pamphlet *A Voice of Truth*.

In the meantime, Elder John E. Forsgren had been set apart to preach the gospel in Sweden. He proceeded to the city of Gefle on June 19, 1850. His younger sister had been told in a dream that a visitor was about to come with three books and that those who believed in them should be saved. She accepted the gospel when her brother came with the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants. Her brother Peter had a lung disease that the doctors said had no cure. Elder Forsgren laid hands on his brother’s head, and Peter was healed by the power of the Lord.

Peter was the first to receive baptism in Sweden. He was baptized on July 26, 1850. His sister and two others were baptized on August 3.

Elder Forsgren was soon arrested and banished but found many opportunities to preach the gospel before the highest police officers and judges and in the courtrooms. With the help of the American consul and the captain of a ship bound for New York, he was able to escape to Denmark. He arrived back in Copenhagen on September 18, 1850. It was not until 1852 that attempts to establish the Church in Sweden were resumed. Peter Forsgren related the following concerning the preaching of the gospel in Sweden:

John Forsgren was one day summoned to the office of the public prosecutor, and the latter asked him if he had a picture of the Prophet Joseph. He procured a picture, and the officer set fire to it. While it was burning, Elder Forsgren had a vision in which he saw the city of Gefle destroyed by fire. He told his friends of this vision, and also that they would be in America, when the visitation would take place. Nineteen years from the date of the burning of Joseph's picture, the city of Gefle was almost totally destroyed by fire, and the conflagration started in the very house, where the picture of the Prophet had been sacrificed to the flames.⁸

Why were the poor of Scandinavia so willing to unite with Mormonism? Although influences may include internal and external issues in northern Europe, the heartfelt answer is found in journal and diary entries. "As soon as I saw those men's faces I knew the testimony they bore was of God," wrote Jens Nielsen.⁹

"It seemed as though every word the Elder spoke went right through me," added Carl Madsen.¹⁰

"I heard them speak, and the first time I heard them I felt that Mormonism was true, and that it would comfort and satisfy me," said Hannah Sorenson.¹¹

New convert Hans Jensen Hals wrote, "I received a testimony that God had begun

this work, therefore all the evil in the world was against it. . . . I felt more happiness than I had ever had before."¹²

The new converts did not forsake Mormonism. "From that time on [meaning from the time of his baptism] all my former friends turned against me and spoke all kinds of evil against me, and that falsely," wrote Jens Nielson.¹³ For him and for other converts, there was no turning back. To these faithful the only serious obstacle was obtaining a Danish copy of the Book of Mormon. "God's word is free, but paper, printing, binding, and our sustenance all the same cost money."¹⁴

"Let the poor band together, three or four, to buy a Book of Mormon," said Mormon leaders.¹⁵ Believers went without food to save means to acquire the book and then shared truths from the Book of Mormon with neighbors, friends, and strangers. Perhaps unknowingly they fulfilled the prayer of Elder Snow when he said: "O Lord, raise up labourers and send them into this harvest—men of their own tongue, who have been raised among them and are familiar with the spirits of the people."¹⁶

It was on Monday, December 20, 1852, when the first large company of 294 Saints left Copenhagen, Denmark. They boarded the ship *Obotrit* and sailed from the customhouse under the direction of Elder John E. Forsgren. A great many Danish people gathered at the dock as the ship left. The atmosphere was filled with hate because fellow countrymen were disgracing themselves by following a "Swedish Mormon priest" and departing for America.

The journey to Kiel, Holstein (now part of Germany), was stormy and unpleasant, but the ship arrived safely on December 22, 1852. The journey continued by rail to Hamburg. On December 24 the Saints boarded the steamship *Lion*, which proceeded down the River Elbe. Because of fog, the ship's captain cast anchor and they celebrated Christmas Eve aboard ship.

On Christmas morning the ship sailed to the mouth of the river. Because of heavy headwinds

the ship didn't reach the open sea until midnight. A terrible storm ensued as the ship sailed the North Sea. The ship's bridge was damaged, but the emigrants were not injured. On the evening of December 28 the ship steamed into the harbor of Hull, England. It was learned that about 150 vessels had been lost on the North Sea during the storm.

The Saints continued their journey by rail to Liverpool on December 29. On December 31 they boarded the packet ship *Forest Monarch*. Storms prevented the ship leaving port for about two weeks. One night the ship became entangled with another vessel and sustained some damage. A few days later, because of a storm, the anchors were pulled and the ship was set adrift. Two tugboats came to the rescue just before it ran aground.

Finally, on January 16, 1853, the *Forest Monarch* began its voyage to America. There were 297 souls onboard ship. Although very pleasant weather accompanied the voyage across the Atlantic Ocean, a perfect calm hindered the journey for several days. Also, provisions were poor and the supply of fresh water ran out.

After arriving in America at the mouth of the Mississippi River, the Saints took a steamboat from New Orleans to Saint Louis. After about a month in Saint Louis, where commodities were purchased, they traveled to Keokuk, Iowa, by steamboat. There they spent several weeks receiving their wagons and teams of oxen. They left Keokuk on May 21 and finally arrived in the Salt Lake Valley on September 30, 1853. As many as 20 emigrants had died during the journey, some children were born, and a few had lost their faith amid all the hardships.

Once the faithful were in Zion, they sent letters to friends and relatives in Scandinavia urging them to follow. More than one letter announced, "The Lord is gathering out the best and the most pure material for his own use."¹⁷ Such inspiring news led Mormon converts to migrate to Zion at an unprecedented rate. In time, the number of Scandinavian emigrants

to Utah did surpass that of Mormon emigrants from the British Isles.

Many stories have been related concerning the missionary experiences of those called to serve in Scandinavia. August Carlson served three missions, first as a local missionary in Sweden. It was difficult. Fined on more than one occasion for preaching the gospel, he sometimes had to go without a companion. He became discouraged and was ready to quit, but his mother, who had been deceased for 10 months, appeared to him and encouraged him to continue. As recounted in a biography written by his wife, Caroline:

He was considering asking for a release from his mission, as everything seemed dark and useless; so he decided to write to the mission president the next day. In the early morning of that day, which was the 6th of February 1880, he heard a knock on the door to his room. Thinking it was one of the people he was staying with, he said, "Come in!" To his surprise his own mother walked in. . . . He stretched out his arms as to embrace her, but she said, "Touch me not, for I am only a spirit. I have asked permission to come to see you because I know of your hardships." Then she . . . told him to be faithful and finish the mission . . . and promised him that a way would be opened for him to get money so he could emigrate to Zion.¹⁸

His mother's spirit also told him to gather genealogical information for temple work even though, at that time, vicarious work for the dead was being practiced only in St. George.

The promise his mother's spirit made was fulfilled when August Carlson emigrated to Utah in August 1881 and located in Ogden. He returned to Sweden to serve two more missions, during the last gaining an audience with King Oscar and having the honor of introducing Heber J. Grant to him.

At the age of 12 years Anders Peter Anderson was orphaned. He had begun working in a woolen factory at age 10 because his family was poor. When he was 14 he heard the message of

the missionaries, and in January 1878 he was baptized. As soon as it became known that he was a Mormon, the family that had taken him in when he was orphaned and treated him like a son drove him out. Called as a local missionary, Anders was frequently summoned before the Lutheran Church councils. In one city he was sentenced to 14 days in prison on bread and water, but he secretly moved to another area and escaped the punishment. During his mission he baptized 85 people. In the company of 270 other emigrants he came to America in August 1881. In 1889 he left America for another mission to Scandinavia, eventually serving as president of the Stockholm conference and baptizing 66 people.¹⁹

Charles John Christensen was the first male child born in Fairview, Utah. He served four missions, two of them to Scandinavia. He was called in 1883 to serve in the Christiania, Norway, conference. Leaving behind his wife and two children, he wrote poignant letters and poems to them such as this one:

*Oh! Happy Day when we shall meet,
Our joy and bliss will be complete.
Then never more from you I'll part
The fond affection of my heart.*

*Oh! Dearest Wife and Children two,
I want to live and die with you.
Now in my verse, I wish to say
God bless my darlings far away.²⁰*

Thoughts of the Lord and family sustained many missionaries until they could return home.

The native-born Scandinavians preached that Mormonism was gathering the elect to America—not the fanciful America described by seafaring captains or the America depicted in the childish game *Going to America*. It was an American Zion. The combination of the ideas of America and Zion was well received by new converts, especially those crowding the docks in Copenhagen.

Letters from family and friends who had already boarded seafaring vessels bound for Zion also encouraged emigration. P. F. Madsen of Brigham City wrote in 1873, “My orchard is heavy with fruit and I have to shore up the branches of my apple trees for fear they will break. I have never seen here a richer harvest of both grain and fruit.”²¹

The mere fact that letters were sent from Scandinavians living in American communities with such promising names as Springtown, Mount Pleasant, Fountain Green, Ephraim, and Fairview reinforced the image of a better life in Zion. To stay in Scandinavia was to experience war and rumors of war, mobbing, strikes, fires, poverty, unemployment, and financial panic.

To think of Zion as a place in America was to imagine utopia. To think of leaving family and of obtaining the means to board vessels bound for Zion was to cast shadows on the image. Encouraging the reluctant, missionaries reminded potential voyagers of the Book of Mormon migration to the promised land, telling and retelling the story of Father Lehi and his family courageously boarding a ship to reach a new land. The analogy of the ship proved so applicable to the Scandinavians that a typical toast among Danish converts was “May next year find us together in Zion.”²² This strange but irresistible longing for Zion was conveyed in rhyme:

*Oh Zion when I think of thee
I long for pinions like the dove
And mourn to think that I should be
So distant from the land I love.²³*

For the few who could not imagine leaving ancestral homes aboard a Zion ship, a stronger approach was used by Mormon missionaries. Gathering to Zion became a “sign of one’s faithfulness.”²⁴ Not to gather was to not fully embrace Mormonism. Poems about Zion moved from refrains that ended with *love* and *dove* to concepts tainted with fear that God’s judgment could not be restrained:

*Ye Saints who dwell on Europe's shore,
Prepare yourselves with many more
To leave behind your native land,
For sure God's judgments are at hand.*²⁵

Unfortunately, because of their number and their destitute circumstances, not all had the opportunity to emigrate. In 1869, of the 567 emigrants leaving Scandinavia, one-third received money from either relatives, friends, or the Perpetual Emigration Fund. One strong contributor to the Scandinavian emigration was the Relief Society in Ephraim, Utah. Women in that society donated proceeds earned from selling eggs laid on Sunday. "The hens, everyone swore, laid more eggs on Sunday than on any other day."²⁶ At one point, so great were the funds sent to Scandinavia "that the mission could scarcely function" because migration left local branches without priesthood leadership.²⁷ Historical reports reveal that by 1900 at least 30,000 Mormon converts had left Copenhagen bound for America.

We are indebted to the Scandinavians who did leave familiar shores to venture to the American Zion. These Saints were not blind to the risks they faced. They were prepared to sacrifice all to respond to the call from the prophet to gather to Zion. Their response is a tribute to their remarkable courage. J. M. Sjødahl, editor of the *Deseret News*, said in 1912:

*Scandinavian Saints have performed their full share in the work of redemption and the building up of this region. . . . The Scandinavian pioneers and their descendants are found where strong arms are needed to cultivate the soil and fill the storehouses of the people with the good things of the earth. They are found in the literary field, in the seats of learning, in the offices of the Church and the State, from the highest to the lowest. They are found in the missionary field, and among the faithful workers at home. The first pioneers are nearly all gone, but their places have been taken by others whose aim is the triumph of the Church of Christ over the enemies of truth.*²⁸

We all have ancestors who have sacrificed to make our lives better. Now we may be called upon to sacrifice as well. Our sacrifices will probably be quite different from those early Scandinavian Saints. We read in 3 Nephi 9:20, "And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost." In Doctrine and Covenants 97:8 we are told:

Verily I say unto you, all among them who know their hearts are honest, and are broken, and their spirits contrite, and are willing to observe their covenants by sacrifice—yea, every sacrifice which I, the Lord, shall command—they are accepted of me.

Whatever our sacrifice, none has or will match the sacrifice of our elder brother, Jesus Christ, who gave His life that all may be saved. How grateful we should be that we may be asked to sacrifice just a small portion to build the kingdom. May we remain strong and add our strength and testimonies to the brave Saints who have shown us the way by their examples, I so pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. From Andrew Jenson, *History of the Scandinavian Mission* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1927), 339.
2. Original in possession of Shauna C. Anderson.
3. In Jedediah M. Grant, "Instructions to New Comers" (24 September 1854), *JD* 3:65–66.
4. William Mulder, *Homeward to Zion: The Mormon Migration from Scandinavia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957), 8, citing Carl M. Hagberg, *Den Norske Misjons Historie* (Oslo: Universal-trykkeriet, 1928), 56.
5. Erastus Snow, quoted in Mulder, *Homeward to Zion*, 36.

6. Erastus Snow, letter to Brigham Young, 17 August 1850, in Erastus Fairbanks Snow, *One Year in Scandinavia: Results of the Gospel in Denmark and Sweden* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1851; reprint, Dallas: S. K. Taylor Publishing, 1973), 7.
7. Erastus Snow, letter to Brigham Young, 10 July 1851, in Snow, *One Year*, 14–15.
8. J. M. (Janne Mattson) Sjødahl, “The Beginning of the Scandinavian Mission,” *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, July 1912, 108–9.
9. Jens Nielsen, letter to son Uriah Nielsen, in Albert R. Lyman, “Sketch of Bishop Jens Nielsen,” MS, Utah State Historical Society, WPA Writers’ Project Biographies, as cited in Mulder, *Homeward to Zion*, 124.
10. Carl Madsen, “My Conversion to Mormonism,” MS, as cited in Mulder, *Homeward to Zion*, 124.
11. Hannah Sorenson, “Life Sketch of Sister Hannah Sorenson,” *The Young Woman’s Journal* 1, no. 11 (August 1890): 392, as cited in Mulder, *Homeward to Zion*, 124.
12. Hans Jensen Hals, “Autobiography,” MS, as cited in Mulder, *Homeward to Zion*, 124.
13. Jens Nielsen, letter to son in Lyman, “Sketch of Bishop Jens Nielsen,” as cited in Mulder, *Homeward to Zion*, 125.
14. *Skandinaviens Stjerne* 1 (1 January 1852): 58, as cited in Mulder, *Homeward to Zion*, 78.
15. *Stjerne* 1 (1 August 1852): 172, as cited in Mulder, *Homeward to Zion*, 78.
16. Erastus Snow (18 September 1859), *JD* 7:128.
17. George Q. Cannon in Jenson, *History of the Scandinavian Mission*, 170.
18. From page 5 of “The Life Story of August Carlson and Caroline Theblom Carlson,” transcribed from the handwritten account of Caroline by her son, David C. Carlson, February 1977; in family papers.
19. See Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson History Company, 1901–1936), 3:290–92.
20. “To My Wife—Elizabeth Christensen,” 29 December 1894, in S. Kent Christensen, “Charles John Christensen and Family”; in family papers.
21. P. F. Madsen to C. G. Larsen, 1 September 1873, in *Stjerne* 23 (1 November 1873): 41, as cited in Mulder, *Homeward to Zion*, 63.
22. Peter Nielsen, diary, MS, 31 December 1857, as cited in Mulder, *Homeward to Zion*, 18.
23. Reproduced in “Biography of Maria Wilhelmina C. K. Madsen,” MS, page 2, Utah State Historical Society, WPA Writers’ Project Biographies, as cited in Mulder, *Homeward to Zion*, 19.
24. Mulder, *Homeward to Zion*, 19.
25. From “The Handcart Song,” in *Arts Division Source Book* (Salt Lake City: Utah Centennial Commission, 1947), C-15, as cited in Mulder, *Homeward to Zion*, 29.
26. Mulder, *Homeward to Zion*, 153; see also Anton H. Lund, “Sarah Ann Nelson Peterson,” in *Daughters of the Utah Pioneers and Their Mothers* (Salt Lake City: Western Album Publishing Company, 1915), 205, and Edith P. Christiansen, “As unto the Bow,” *Improvement Era*, 56, no. 2 (February 1953): 92.
27. Mulder, *Homeward to Zion*, 153.
28. Sjødahl, “The Beginning,” 111.