

The next few weeks in Denmark were dedicated to rebuilding what damage had been done during the occupation. MATHIAS was almost certainly involved in the new farm building which was constructed on Rodslet Manor later that year - most likely to replace the building destroyed by fire.

Shortly after things settled down in Denmark, MATHIAS resumed his normal work and church duties. On September 8, 1865, MATHIAS baptized his oldest son, JENS, who had just turned eight.

One year later, MATHIAS and BENGTA found they were expecting another child, and on April 12, 1867, HANS SEVERN MATHIASSEN (BENGTA NELSON WHEELER's father) was born, their last natural-born child.

The Danish economy was in a shambles after the defeat of the second Prussian war, causing great hardship for its citizens. The hard-pressed Scandinavians did find one viable option to worsening conditions at home - emigration. Andrew Jenson wrote, "the spirit of gathering is great among the Saints, and those that can are preparing to emigrate next season. Would to God we had means enough to emigrate, the poor, honest and faithful souls who are struggling here in poverty, hardly able to support themselves, work being scarce and wages low" (Jenson, 183).

Many good men, within and without the church, desired to rescue the common people of Scandinavia from their plight. In 1868, matured and successful, yet still down to earth, BENGTA's old neighbor HANS MATTSON anxiously returned to visit Scania "with the affection of a child toward its mother" (Mattson, 104).

His first experience in Scania awoke him to the striking contrasts between the land of his fathers and his new land of promise:

"I landed at Malmo just in time to walk to the railroad station and take the train to Kristianstad. The beautiful station with its surroundings, the uniformed and courteous officials in attendance, the well-dressed and comfortable-looking people in the first and second-class waiting room, all made a pleasant impression upon me, which soon was to be disturbed, however, by the following little incident:

As I stepped up to the ticket window to buy my ticket, I observed a poor working woman at the third-class window with a silver coin in her hand and with tears in her eyes begging the clerk to give her the change and a ticket. I heard her pleading that she had left three little children alone at home, that this was the last train, and if she did not get home with it, she would have to walk in the mud after dark. The clerk insultingly refused her, stating that he had no time to bother with her trifles unless she paid the even change; she asked several gentlemen nearby to change her money for her, but they all turned away as if fearing contamination by coming in contact with one so poor and lowly. [The rules in Sweden at the time gave the ticket clerks the right to demand even change.]

I had only a few large bills, and as the woman was crowded away, the same clerk at the

first-class window took one of my bills, and, with a most polite bow, gave me a handful of large and small change. Of course I got the woman her ticket also. This was possibly an exceptional case, but to me it was a striking example of the difference between Swedish and American ways and courtesy.

I venture to say that in no railway station or other public place in the whole United States, north or south, east or west, would a poor woman in her circumstances be left one minute without a friend and protector. Men of all classes, from the millionaire to the day-laborer, or even street loafer, would have vied with each other in trying to be the first to render her assistance” (Mattson, 104-105).

HANS was quite taken aback at how his accomplished countrymen still despised those less fortunate than themselves. Upon his train’s arrival in Kristianstad, one of the first things HANS noticed was how the earthen bulwarks surrounding the old fortress city had been leveled: he considered it an improvement. Yet he lamented the preservation of one remaining ugly wall - the unnatural barriers between people at varying levels of financial success. Social conditions had stagnated in Scania since his earlier departure, and showed little hope of improvement. During this visit, HANS apparently resolved to level the stubborn social barriers that denied the common man a passageway to opportunity.

Upon his arrival in his hometown, HANS experienced again how the upper classes were intent on preserving the status quo, on maintaining the common people in their role as menial servants. HANS recalled:

“Now followed a season of visits and entertainments in Kristianstad and the neighboring country, which I shall ever hold in grateful remembrance. I was received with cordiality everywhere among the common people and the middle classes, while the aristocratic classes looked on with distant coldness, as they always do when a man of the people has succeeded in getting beyond what they would call his legitimate station, and is what we would call, in other words, a self-made man.

My plain name and humble ancestry were in their eyes a fault that never could be forgiven. This did not trouble me, however, for I sought no favors, or even recognition from the great, but found plenty of delight in the cordial welcome of the middle classes” (Mattson, 109).

The contempt of the upper classes had for the common man likely grown out of the fear that such might lose the lofty status which they prided themselves in. Human nature, such as it is, the ability to look ‘down’ upon others, provides man with the illusion that they are somehow better than another. The notion that the common man could never achieve anything beyond their present state was naively accepted by the lower classes and perpetuated by the ruling classes to maintain their position of status and prestige. HANS MATTSON’s presence was despised by the upper classes simply because it threatened to unmask their facade.

The return of a local folk hero stirred up crowds of curious onlookers, not unlike King Oscar’s visit to the region years earlier. HANS related:

“At the time, only a few Swedish emigrants had returned from America, and to see a man

who had been eighteen years in America, and had been a colonel in the American army must have been a great curiosity, especially to the country people; for wherever it was known that I would pass, people flocked from their houses to the roads and streets in order to catch a glimpse of the returned traveler” (Mattson, 109). What his curious presence offered was hope.

“So great was their curiosity,” continued HANS, “that on New Year’s Eve the servants girls...drew lots as to who should carry in our coffee, and thereby get a chance to look at the American colonel. One of the ladies of the house told me afterwards that when the girl returned to the kitchen, she put the tray down with great emphasis and disappointment, exclaiming indignantly: ‘Oh, pshaw! He looks just like any other man!’” (Mattson, 109).

Such was HANS’ own reaction as a youth years earlier, when among the crowd that flocked to see the Swedish king, he was struck by the truth that there was no significant difference between himself and those in authority, that the King and nobility were perhaps not “the peculiar and elect people of the Almighty” he had once imagined.

HANS’ desire to free the common people from their oppression crystalized into the decision to create a network of contacts to assist him in his goal. He established links with the state of Minnesota and the railroads, which sponsored him to become an immigration agent for his people. He formed a “warm and lasting friendship” with Karl Mollersvard, editor of the leading newspaper in Kristianstad, which provided him a trumpet blast in the homeland to wake the people up to the opportunities which beckoned (Mattson, 105).

It was this appropriate message of hope which HANS chose to carry to his people, that he was “just like any other man,” who simply lived in a land which offered more opportunity, and who had seized that opportunity.

MATHIAS had probably been entertaining the thought of going to America as early as 1853, when his first brother emigrated. Now that all three of his brothers, his mother, and one of his sisters were in America, the pull of the ‘land of promise’ was even stronger.

A more powerful motivation, however, was the fact that his children were now reaching the age when they would begin raising families of their own, and like all good parents, MATHIAS and BENGTA wanted their children to have a better life. They realized, however, that Denmark offered limited hope for the future of their children and grandchildren.

Even their faith encourage MATHIAS and BENGTA to make the journey. Strong hands were needed to help settle the Salt Lake Basin, and especially the fertile Cache Valley, where land had been dedicated to building a temple. The Swedish carpenter and his wife answered the call.

“Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.”

Like many Scandinavian emigrants, MATHIAS sent ahead his nineteen-year-old daughter HANNA as a scout for the family. Hardworking young women could find temporary work on frontier farms and dairies easier than young men. Cooks and milk maids were in high demand in the fertile dairy provinces of northern Utah.

So on August 29, 1873, HANNA left Copenhagen on the steamer "Pacific," her passage paid in part by a PETER CHRISTENSEN. It was certainly a memorable trip. Hundreds of miles before reaching New York, the ship ran aground on a sand bank near Sable Island. After throwing thousands of dollars of heavy cargo overboard, the crew was able to clear the sand bank with the next tide.

HANNA's next challenge was to get through the emigrant processing center at Castle Garden, New York, and to endure the long train ride to the Salt Lake Valley. Apparently, HANNA died shortly after her arrival in Utah, but not before being married to LARS CHRISTENSEN on her deathbed. This LARS is likely the same man who had confirmed HANNA's parents some fifteen years earlier. The sad news of her death probably reached MATHIAS and BENGTA months later with the arrival of new missionaries from Utah.

On November 8, 1873, MATHIAS baptized his two sons, ANTON and NIELS CHRISTIAN into the LDS church. Six years later, eighteen-year-old ANTON also left Denmark for America.

Also in 1879, MATHIAS began a flurry of missionary activity. Within a fifteen-month period, he baptized and/or confirmed at least eight of his neighbors in Vadum parish.

JAKOB HOLM, the Lutheran pastor of Vadum parish, was evidently not pleased with the success of MATHIAS and his companions in sharing the message of the Restoration among his parishioners, for in 1882, he published a pamphlet titled "Hvad er Aarsagerne til at saa mange gaar over til Mormonismen" ("The reasons why so many are converting to Mormonism") (Petersen, 11).

In addition to their missionary-related activities, MATHIAS and BENGTA also cared deeply for children. BENGTA WHEELER recorded that "besides raising their own family, GRANDPA and GRANDMA NELSON [MATHIAS and BENGTA] would take in orphan children. They raised them until they came to America, then she had to give them up" (A. Nelson, 1).

But there was one adopted child they didn't give up. Danish LDS Membership records show that MATHIAS blessed a six-year-old girl named ALBERTINA JOSEPHINE KINDBERG on March 2, 1880. When MATHIAS and BENGTA left for America four months later, that same young girl (called Tina for short) came with them.

After living much of their lives in northern Denmark, leaving their home for good must have been quite difficult for MATHIAS and BENGTA, knowing they would likely never return. As their crowded boat pulled away from Denmark's shores, their feelings were likely similar to those which HANS MATTSON recorded earlier:

“We gazed back at the vanishing shores of the dear fatherland with feelings of affection, but did not regret the steps we had taken, and our bosoms heaved with boundless hope...” (13).

“Then they sailed, set their ship
Out on the waves...
Ready for what came they wound through the currents,
The seas beating at the sand, and were borne
In the lap of their shining ship...
Going safely
In that oak-hard boat to where their hearts took them.

The wind hurried them over the waves,
The ship foamed through the sea like a bird
Until, in the time they had known it would take,
Standing in the round-curved prow they could see
Sparkling hills, high and green,
Jutting up over the shore, and rejoicing
...they quietly ended
Their voyage. Jumping to the ground, [they]
Pushed their boat to the sand and tied it
in place...
As they swiftly moored their ship. And then
They gave thanks to God for their easy crossing.

Beowulf, Lines 210-228

They reached Castle Garden, New York on July 21st and arrived in Utah, appropriately, on July 24th, Pioneer Day. They were likely greeted at the train station in Utah by young ANTON, who had arrived the year prior. According to BENGTA WHEELER’s account, MATHIAS and his family lived in Hyde Park, Utah for that first year.

Centuries earlier, another emigrant shortly after arriving in this land of promise, made a memorable declaration:

“Wherefore, I, Lehi prophesy according to the workings of the Spirit which is in me, that there shall none come into this land save they shall be brought by the hand of the Lord” (2 Nephi 1:6).