

A Life Sketch: Martin Peterson (Pedersen)
by Dan W. Peterson

A small rural village in Denmark by the name of Sonder-Okse, a town that no longer exists because the farms there were so small that they were not profitable, was the birthplace of Martin Peterson (Pedersen). He was born on February 15, 1865, the youngest child of Peder and Marianne Thompsen Pedersen. Other children in the family were Thomas Christian, Maren Kirstine, Anne Cecilia, Johanna Kirstine, Peder Simonsen, Jorgen Christian, Marie and Christen.

Only a little is known of the youthful family life of Martin. He said that on only one occasion did he ever remember seeing his eldest brother, Thomas, who was twenty-six years older than Martin. Thomas was in the Danish army and was home at the time. Martin remembered his leaning against the house filing his fingernails. He was in full uniform. This brother later came to the United States, but stayed only briefly. The last that the family ever heard of him was that he caught a ship heading for South America. It was a standing joke in the family that he struck it rich, and one day all of his relatives would inherit his vast fortune. Martin talked of an elder sister who was in love with a man in a neighboring village who was of noble birth. On the arrival of their second child, his parents permitted their son to marry this humble farm girl. Children before marriage was not unusual in nineteenth century Denmark.

Martin's childhood job was to herd the pigs and the geese at the same time. Usually things went well, but occasionally a strong wind would blow. "Geese, by nature," Martin said, "Will always fly into the wind, but pigs, by nature, go the way you don't want them to!" Later in life he would often feel the complete frustration he had known when the geese took off in one direction and the pigs wouldn't follow.

He told his family of severe bone trouble he had in his legs as a boy. He had had leg aches for some time. One day as he was herding the animals, he fell asleep in a ditch. When he awoke, his legs hurt so bad that he could not get up or walk. Several hours later, the family found him crying in the ditch all alone. He was down for many months with bone decay in his legs. He said that some bone fragments worked out through the skin. All his life he carried deep scars from these fragments.

Martin spoke of one severe illness he had as a boy. He later decided that it must have been appendicitis. He suffered acute pain and other general appendicitis symptoms followed by bloating. He said that he was sure he had had a ruptured appendix which somehow drained inwardly. Surgery for appendicitis was unknown in Denmark when he was a boy.

Peder, Jorgen, Marie, Christen, and Martin all came to the USA as immigrants and stayed here. Peter (Peder) and Jorgen settled in the mid-west; Marie lived near them with the exception of a rather short period of time that

she lived in Pleasant Grove near her brother Martin. Christen moved to Utah where he raised a family; he married Anne Georgena Larsen, who was a sister of Thomas Larsen, who later became Martin's father-in-law.

When he was nineteen years old, Martin came to America. Very shortly after arriving here, the Peterson brothers decided that one of them should go back to Denmark to help their mother as their father was seriously ill. Since all of the other brothers were married and had responsibilities to their own families, it was decided that Martin should return to help his mother in her days of trial and sorrow. After staying with his mother a few months until after his father's death and after helping his mother get her affairs in order, Martin returned to the USA to stay.

Martin must have been an excellent student in the little one-room school of his youth. He read very well, and when he had to learn a new language, he readily adapted from Danish to English in both reading and writing. He generally read at least two books weekly. During his later life, he was one of the best patrons of the Pleasant Grove City Library. In those days there was no television and very few good programs on the radio. Martin did enjoy listening to "Amos and Andy," and each night at 9:00 he would set down his book and listen to this program for fifteen minutes on George's brand new "Brunswick" radio. He was an excellent pen-man. In his day there were very few typewriters, so good penmanship was not only an art but also a necessity.

On several occasions he told the story of his schoolmaster seeing him on the street when he returned to Denmark after being in America. The schoolmaster invited Martin to come and speak to his students to tell them about the "new world." As he introduced Martin to the class, he said, "Martin is the only student that I ever taught that I did not have to beat with my cane." When Martin got up to speak, he told the students that their teacher's memory had slipped a bit, for on one occasion he too had to be beaten with the cane. In those days students had double desks – two students sat in each of the desks. The boy that Martin was sitting with dropped some marbles on the floor; the teacher thought that Martin had dropped the marbles, so he got the cane. The boy that Martin was sitting with was Jim Peterson, who also made his home in Pleasant Grove, and was one of Martin's good friends throughout his entire life.

After Martin returned to the United States, he worked in the mid-west for a short period of time. While there, the Union Pacific Railroad offered a special fare on their new passenger train from Lincoln, Nebraska, to Los Angeles, California, and return. Martin bought a ticket with a stop-over in Utah so that he could visit with his brother, Christen. The first night he was in Salt Lake City, Chris and Anne took him to an LDS dance and social. There he met Lena (Nickolina) Jensen. Love developed between them quickly, so Martin sold his ticket for a profit and stayed in Utah. He and Lena were married on December 29, 1886. Only rarely did he ever leave Utah after his marriage.

To Martin and Lena were born four children – two boys and two girls. They

were Arthur Martin, Cora Mary Ann, Ethel Jennie – who died as an infant, and Harry Chester. In 1903, less than a year after Harry's birth, Lena passed away, leaving Martin with a teenage son, an eleven year old daughter, and a small baby. After Lena's and Martin's first two children were born in Salt Lake City, they moved to Pleasant Grove where they bought a small piece of land with a little house on it at second north and second east. This site became Martin's home for the rest of his life. Several years later, he built a nicer house on the intersection corner. This house became the permanent family home. Following World War O, Martin sold his Liberty War Bonds and added a cellar, a screen porch, and a bathroom to the house.

During Lena's illness, Martin hired Martha Larson, a daughter of one of his Danish friends, to take care of Lena, the children, and the home. After working for Martin for over two years, on December 28, 1904, Martha became the wife of Martin. Over the next eleven years, six sons were born to this couple. They were George Thomas, Leonard Eugene – who drowned in the “big ditch” when he was about twenty months old, Raymond Franklin, Marion Dale, Jesse Gordon, and Dan Willard. Eight of Martin's children lived to adulthood, and all but George married and had fine families. All of his children with the exception of Arthur, who moved to Portland, Oregon, lived in Utah County most of their lives.

As Martin was not trained professionally, it was necessary for him to work with his hands to make a livelihood for his family. He did many different kinds of jobs going where the opportunities seemed best to him at the time. He worked for the Union Pacific Railroad laying track in Idaho, at the sugar factory in Lehi, at the livery stables in Salt Lake City, and as a tender of blooded stallions used for breeding mares in the north part of Utah County. While working in the livery stables and with the stallions, he learned a great deal about horses. Before there were veterinarians, Martin was often called to help anywhere in the area when there was a sick or injured horse.

Martin became associated with L.W. Lund, who was a leader in importing fine stallions into Central Utah. Mr. Lund became one of the wealthiest men in Pleasant Grove, largely through the stallion business. One day Raymond found, in some of his father's old papers, a promissory note made to “Peterson and Lund.” When he questioned his father about the note, Martin told him that he and Lew Lund began as partners – Lund had some money but knew very little about horses, while Martin knew a lot about horses, but had little money. The partnership broke up because Martin would not accept some of Mr. Lund's business practices. Lund would buy stallions in Iowa for \$150 to \$200 and sell them in Utah for at least ten times what he paid for them. Martin would not stand to see his friends ripped-off in this manner. He continued to work with Mr. Lund, but only as a paid employee.

During the twenties, Martin went into the chicken business. He built coops on his property. At one time he had more than a thousand laying hens – not many by modern standards, but a large number in those days. To finance this chicken enterprise, he mortgaged his home. All went well at first, then his

chickens developed a diphtheria-like illness and many of his hens died. About the same time the price of eggs dropped to ten cents a dozen and it cost more than this amount to produce them. Martin could not handle both of these setbacks, and he found it necessary to get out of the egg business. He never recovered from the financial loss caused by his chicken venture, and he worried the rest of his life about the mortgage on his home that he was never able to pay off.

He raised fruit on the small acreage he had around his home and rented other property on which he raised raspberries that he took to the Grower's Market in Salt Lake City. He bought a truck that he used to transport fruit to the "big city," but soon found out that it was not large enough to handle his crops and the crops of his friends. He sold the small truck and bought the first "big" truck ever used in Pleasant Grove. His neighbors and friends in Pleasant Grove and American Fork depended on him to market their fruit crops for them which he did for a small, fair commission. As was the case with most cars in those days, his truck had to be cranked to get it started. On one occasion it kicked while Martin was cranking it, and Martin suffered a broken arm. His son George then had to crank the car; the car kicked while George was cranking it and he too suffered a broken arm.

Dale spent more time with his father on the market and in the trucks than did the other boys. Dale said, "My first remembrance was seeing him come home in our first Model T Ford truck (probably about 1915)... after outgrowing the original Model T in the fruit business, Dad purchased a Model T ton truck with four hard rubber tires and a cruising speed of some twenty-five miles per hour downhill, fifteen to twenty miles per hour on the level. Dad became the raspberry "king" of the old grower's market in Salt Lake city, having a share of stock in the company and an assignment to stall #46 whenever he wanted to use it."

Some times it was not possible to sell all of the fruit the morning it was taken to the market, so it had to be disposed of at a reduced price. Dale tells the following story of one such day, "...we had twenty-six cases of day-old berries at the close of the market 'run.' A Dago peddler offered Dad \$8.00 for the entire lot which Dad finally accepted. On the way home I asked Dad why we hadn't just dumped them over the gorge at the point of the mountain, to which he replied, "It looks like you need a pair of shoes, and I suppose at least one of your brothers probably does, so we'll buy them, and I'll get even with Louis later." He very likely did.

For a time he ran the community threshing machine in Pleasant Grove, and each night he would bring the old fire engine home and park it in the backyard. The next morning, he would get up early, fire the old engine and move to the next place to thresh grain. When running water was first placed in the homes in Pleasant Grove, before the days of septic tanks and sewers, the surplus water and waste was run into cesspools. Martin had learned to lay rocks, and his skill in doing this was put to good use as he dug cesspools and rocked them up for a

small contract price. Most of his sons helped in this work at various times as they were growing into manhood.

When he reached the age that he did not choose to compete with the younger men that were then trucking fruit to Salt Lake, he opened up a small fruit stand in P.G. He ran this fruit stand in three different locations for a period of twenty years. The stand was first located on the east side of Main Street right next to the city park, then on the west side of the street directly across from the first site, and later about half way between Pleasant Grove and American Fork. When the stand was first opened, Dale worked closely with his father in its operation. Later, Dan became very active with his dad in the operation of these small fruit markets.

While running the fruit stand, Martin was appointed sexton of the cemetery in Pleasant Grove – a position he held for ten years. Under his direction the cemetery operation was vastly improved as was the appearance of Pleasant Grove's burial ground. George, Jess and Dan all helped him with the work on the cemetery.

Martin didn't get involved much in sport activities, but he enjoyed getting in the truck and driving down just above the mouth of the Provo River to snag suckers. He used a bamboo pole with as many as twenty large hooks set back to back on a wire line connected to the bamboo pole with a chalk line. He would jerk the line through the water where the suckers were running. While his wife was preparing a lunch for the family, he would catch a couple of gunny sacks full of fresh water suckers. Some of these the family ate fresh, some were smoked by a neighbor for future use, and many were given to the folks in the neighborhood. The sucker which was once indigenous in great numbers to Utah Lake and its feeder streams is now nearly extinct.

His social life included parties with the other Danish families in the town. These Danish friends included the Larsons, Andersens, Christensens, Petersons, Jensens, Nelsons, Thompsons, Sundquists, and others. The group celebrated the birthday of each member with the host being the person whose birthday was being celebrated. The evenings were spent socializing, eating, and playing "High Five."

In Pleasant Grove in the early twentieth century, the pool hall was the community center where the elderly gentlemen congregated to review the local news and gossip, and to engage in a friendly game of billiards. It has been suggested that Martin at one time "shot a fair stick."

The Petersons seldom took vacations. On one occasion the Petersons, with the Uncle George Larsen family spent a couple of nights in the upper Provo River area. They spent one night at Hailstone and one night at Woodland. These two nights spent in this area were probably the only two nights that both Martin and Martha spent away from home at the same time in their entire married life. Later when he was in his seventies, Arthur invited Martin to come to Portland to

spend a week at his home. He accepted the invitation and really enjoyed his trip to the Northwest. Art and his wife Nell saw to it that Martin had a good time.

Aunt Marie Nielsen spent some time living in Utah. Much of this time she spent in Martin's home and with his children. Uncle Chris Peterson lived several months with Martin's family when he reached the age where he could not work and when he was not very ill. Martin was always kind to his brother and sister.

Shortly after he arrived in America the second time, he was working in Racine, Wisconsin. He was employed along with several other young men as milkers in a large dairy. He said that while he was milking cows, he and the other young men all started to chew tobacco. Later he said that giving up this filthy habit was one of the most difficult things he ever did. Another difficult thing he learned to do when he first came here was to learn to like tomatoes; this fruit was new to him, and for many years he hated the taste of a tomato.

Most settlers that came to Utah in the nineteenth century came here for religion. Martin came here only to see his brother and he had no interest in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. While he always lived comfortably among the Saints, he never saw fit to join the dominant religion of the State. He once said that if the Church leaders would live the same kind of lives all week that they did on Sunday, he may become interested in joining the Church. While he did not join the Church, he encouraged his wife and the children to be active, good members. He gave much to the Church in cash and labor contributions.

Not being a member of the Church, he felt no obligation to observe the "Word of Wisdom." As a young man he enjoyed a social drink with his friends. Years after he gave up this vice, Ezra Swenson, a well loved citizen of Pleasant Grove said of him, "He was not a drinker, but he was a man among men." Once when he was asked why he quit drinking, he said, "I looked at all my young boys and decided that they would never see their father drink." He stayed true to this vow that he waded to himself. As a matter of fact, he became very intolerant of anyone who drank alcoholic beverages.

Martin enjoyed smoking most of his adult life, but after the bowl of his pipe fell off and burned while he was burning rubbish, he never smoked a pipe again. Some time later, he started smoking cigars. He really enjoyed a good "White Owl." While he smoked the pipe, he usually smoked "Prince Albert" or "George Washington Pipe Tobacco."

Three anecdotes having to do with his smoking are told here. Raymond says that Harry Richards, one of his favorite high school teachers, used to tell his students, "If you are going to smoke, do it like Martin Peterson; his pipe is always in his mouth, but it is never lit." On one occasion while Martin was sexton at the cemetery, it became necessary to move an unembalmed body that had been in the grave for only a short period of time to a new site. The undertaker, Lewis Olpin, a Mormon bishop, was helping to move the body. When the box in which the coffin was placed was opened down in the grave, Lew

looked up and said, "Martin, for Hell sake, get down here and get your cigar lit; it smells a lot better than the stink down here."

Dan remembers as a small child that on a couple of occasions he had a severe earache. He crawled up on his father's lap as he sat in his favorite chair in front of the old "Hot Blast" stove, and his father blew smoke into the ailing ear. Whether it was his father's holding him close, the warm air going into the inflamed ear, or the nicotine having a sedative effect upon the sore ear, Dan does not know; but he knows the ear would get feeling better, and he would go to sleep in his father's arms.

Martin had a sense of humor that was very subdued but always present. It is exemplified by a story that Dan tells. His dad often took little Dan with him in his older age. Because there was such a great difference in their ages, people on several occasions asked Martin, "Is this your boy?" Martin's response was very consistent. He would say, "That's what his mother says." When Dan was doing his undergraduate work at the BYU, he majored in speech. Martin could see very little relationship between the arts and an education. On several occasions he asked Dan, "When are you going to start learning something?"

For many reasons, Martin was a highly respected person in his community and with his family. Harry said of him, "Dad never complained. We didn't have anything, and I'm glad we didn't. He never licked me or struck me." Dal said, "I never recall his being real angry, sometimes a bit perturbed when the Model T would not start, or one of his boys flubbed an assignment they had been given. I never remember an unkind word spoken to my mother. On the only occasion that he may have reprimanded one of his boys, it would only have been a slap on the backside... just a token shot to let us know that he meant business."

Raymond tells of his meeting with Frank Atwood, a bishop, a mayor, the postmaster of Pleasant Grove, and just a well-respected man in the community. While Frank and Raymond were having lunch together, Frank inquired about Martin. As the discussion proceeded, Frank said, "I never heard any person ever say a bad word about Martin Peterson. Why should they? He never said a bad word about anyone else."

At his funeral, George W. Larsen, his brother-in-law and a partner with him in his fruit-hauling business to the Grower's Market in Salt Lake City said of him, "He was the most totally honest man I ever met." Wilford Warnick, the Timpanogos Stake President, repeated similar words later in the service as he eulogized Martin. His son Dale said of him, He made friends with everyone he met. He trusted each person as he expected them to trust him."

Martin usually enjoyed good health. As was mentioned earlier, on occasion his legs gave him trouble and he was confined to the house with very little activity. This problem was aggravated on one occasion when he was working in a well, and his legs were quite severely burned with acid or a toxic material of some kind. Even of this problem, he complained very little.

In early June of 1940, during his seventy-sixth year of life, Martin suffered a heart attack. He stayed down a bit, but still moved around the house and the yard. A week later on June 8, 1940, Martin and his son George were eating their evening meal when Martin suffered his second heart attack. He stiffened out and slid under the table. When George reached him, he was gone. He was buried in the family plot in the Pleasant Grove Cemetery where he rests between his two wives – Lena and Martha.

This short life sketch was written by Dan W. Peterson, Martin's youngest son. Some of the material used was taken from a tape recording made in 1978 following a dinner party that was attended by four of Martin's sons – Harry C., Raymond F., Jesse G., and Dan W. Others in attendance included the wives of the four brothers and a few of Martin's grandchildren. Other information was taken from thoughts submitted by Raymond F. and M. Dale in March of 1985.