

Across Oceans, Across Time® ...

Stories from the Family History & Genealogy Center ...



An 'Indian' from Ærø - One of the joys of working in a historical museum or library is running across unexpected treasures, such as this photograph of Ærøskøbing native **Thomas Petersen** in a magnificently crafted Native American outfit standing in a doorway next to an old-fashioned Danish window filled with potted plants. Born in 1880, Thomas was one of 13 children, eight of whom became American immigrants. He and his siblings were some of the many late 19th-century islanders with little prospect of making a decent living in their home country who turned to the west in hopes of finding a fairer economic climate. In Thomas' case an aunt and uncle in Minnesota advanced him the 200 kroner for his fare in 1897. Once here it took him a year working in Midwestern cornfields to pay off the passage. Later, he labored in forestry jobs as well as farming, ending up as the driver of a horse-drawn stagecoach. He was a member of the Danish Brotherhood in America and attended the 1915 convention held in St. Paul.

In 1925 Thomas returned to Denmark for good and lived with a sister in his childhood home in Gyden until his death. In his baggage was a rolled up panoramic photograph of delegates from the 1915 convention and a complete Native American outfit, from headdress to moccasins, which had been made for him during a stay among an unknown tribal group. Each Shrove Tuesday (*Fastelavns*) he would don his Indian garb and stroll around the streets of the town to the great joy of local young people. Thomas Petersen's death occurred just before Lent in 1971. At his funeral his casket was accompanied to the churchyard by masked children making typical *Fastelavns spektakel*. What became of his Indian costume is unknown, but the photograph of the Danish Brotherhood delegates was to come to the Museum. We would be interested in any other information about Thomas and his family.