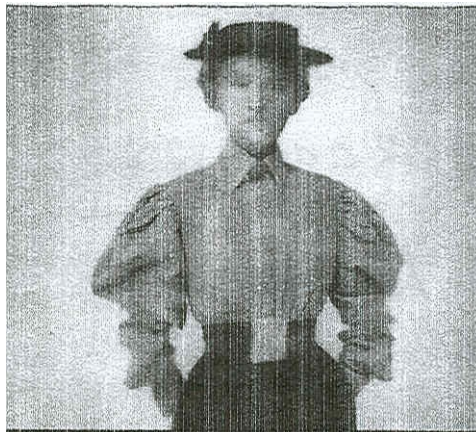
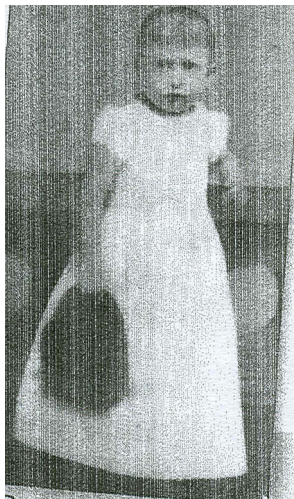


Across Oceans, Across Time® ...

Stories from the Family History & Genealogy Center ...



The Mysterious Orphan Girl – The arrival of the “orphan trains” in Midwestern communities was a frequent occurrence in the latter half of the 19th- and early 20th-century and is a fascinating aspect of American social history. They were a means of placing orphans and indigent young children from the slums and streets of New York City and other northeastern cities in new homes in the Midwest, rather than having them fall prey to the vices of urban poverty. One of the hundreds of children settled in Iowa was a young girl of Danish descent, **Dorothea Emilie Caroline Dagmar Kniess**. Dorothea was said to have been named after each of her godmothers, but became known as Dorothy in later life. She was born in New York City in November, 1888, according to one account, shortly after her pregnant mother and older sister had arrived to rejoin their husband and father, who had emigrated previously. Within a short time Dorothy’s father reportedly returned to Copenhagen, leaving his wife and children to fend for themselves. Dorothy’s sister succumbed to tuberculosis, and within a few years her mother, Emily, also died. Dorothy was taken in by the New York Juvenile Asylum, and in 1898 she and several other children traveled to Burlington, Iowa, to be displayed to families seeking foster children. Dorothy joined the family of Charles and Ida Fleenor of Pleasant Grove Township in rural Des Moines County, who treated her as one of the family. Later she married a young farmer, Noah Landrum, with whom she had eight children and a long life together. -- In the 1925 Iowa state census Dorothy’s parents were reported to be Julius Kniess, born in New York, and her mother, Emily Sloemacher (possibly Emilie Shumacher), born in Denmark, who had married in Philadelphia. We don’t know if Dorothy or someone else in her family supplied this information, which contradicts one family account, but searches of New York death records, and immigration and Danish emigration records have not yet turned up any documentation on individuals with these names in Denmark or New York City. So Dorothy’s actual origins remain a mystery. Is she the only Danish child to have come out on an orphan train? If there are others, the Family History & Genealogy Center would like to have their stories.