

**Across Oceans, Across Time<sup>®</sup> ...**  
**Stories from the Family History & Genealogy Center**



**The Father of the Sunset District** – In the late 1860s young Carl Gustav Larsen, the son of an Odense carpenter, arrived in San Francisco. After a few years working as a carpenter around the Bay area, he settled in San Francisco and proceeded to make his fortune. One of his first enterprises was a coffee-house called the “Tivoli Café,” which in its several incarnations became a landmark institution and the center of Danish social and club activities in San Francisco for many decades. Open 24 hours a day, a good cup of coffee and a tasty cake was always ready for customers, including those who worked the night shift in nearby businesses. As prosperity came Carl Gustav began buying property out in the Sunset district, which then mostly consisted of grazing land and sand-dunes. His contemporaries thought him mad, but he had faith that one day the district would become part of his adopted city. In the meantime, he established a ranch there to supply eggs and chickens for his café and planted grass and bushes to control the sand. -- Just after the turn of the last century Larsen added a seven-story building next to his café with larger meeting rooms. Then came the Great Earthquake of 1906. With his city enterprises in ruins, the entrepreneur started anew, rebuilding his café, this time adding “Hotel Larsen” and his residence into the structure (above). In the meantime, the Sunset District had become an attractive residential and commercial area. In 1924 Larsen gave the first of two parcels of land in the district as parkland; this became part of Golden Gate Heights. Two years later, he donated City Squares Park to the city, a park which incorporated elements that appealed to both young and old. As a benefactor of the city of San Francisco, Larsen was considered on par with famous families such as Hearst, de Young, and Spreckles, but he never forgot his humble origins and was famous for helping fellow immigrants who were just getting started or down on their luck. This Immigrant Who Made Good remained a bachelor; he died on November 5, 1928. His funeral and the following procession was one of the largest ever seen in San Francisco. After a cortege that wound through the Sunset District he was laid to rest in Cypress Lawn Cemetery.

**The Danish Immigrant Museum**

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