

Across Oceans, Across Time® ...

Stories from the Family History & Genealogy Center ...



Letters from Manitowoc - One early Danish settler in the upper Midwest was Svendborg native **Christian Pedersen**, who found himself in the dense forests of central Wisconsin as early as 1853. In his letters home to his family in the ensuing years he provided clear-eyed and humorous observations of life on the frontier. He found his German neighbors warm and hospitable, so he learned that language along with English. He mentions encounters with Indians, who at that time were being forced further west, and especially admired their beadwork and hardiness. He saw one kill a bear "as big as a good woman in Denmark" with merely a knife. Although life was certainly not the Paradise many back home thought, if one wanted to work, money could be earned. And if not, then game abounded out in the forest. Christian noted Independence Day celebrations, with their speeches, fireworks, and dancing, as well more drunken men in one place than he had ever seen. By 1857 he had started a general store in Manitowoc, located close to the Norwegian church ("Of course, it's a place I don't visit, for I am an atheist."). His household at the time consisted of himself, a Danish assistant, "3 dogs, a mouse cat, and a quick Indian pony, which runs an English mile in 3 minutes." He was then 29, with no prospects of getting a wife. It was to be 6 more years before he married Mina, a young woman 16 years younger than himself, in July, 1863 [above]. By the mid-70s Christian spoke of having lost a child when diphtheria struck the family, and of good times and bad: "But still America is the best home I could find. I have had bad luck, but still I have lived many happy years without being a slave - always my own master and having done it well with just one arm." His property at that time was worth over \$10,000. Some of his letters may be found in the Family History & Genealogy Center.