

Across Oceans, Across Time® ...
Stories from the Family History & Genealogy Center ...



"We Were a Happy Group..." -- When emigrants set foot on a sailing vessel or steamship to travel to their destination, it was the first step into the unknown. For some, this adventure turned out somewhat otherwise than anticipated. Such was the case for the 665 passengers and 70 crew members of the Thingvalla Line steamship *Danmark*. On April 3, 1889, while en route over the North Atlantic from Copenhagen to New York, the *Danmark's* propeller shaft broke loose, tearing a gaping hole below the ship's waterline. With water pouring into the hold, the ship's pumps worked furiously to keep the vessel afloat. The only vessel close by was the *Missouri*, a smaller steamer skippered by 23-year-old Capt. Hamilton Murrell that carried 37 crew members and a few passengers. Since taking on 700 extra passengers was not feasible, the *Missouri* offered to tow the *Danmark* to the closest port, St. John's in Newfoundland. The complicated maneuver of joining the two vessels was accomplished through the efforts of both crews, and the ships slowly began moving northwards. At daybreak on April 6 a new danger - pack ice - appeared, forcing the vessels to change course and instead head southeast toward the Azores, over 1000 miles away. By mid-morning, however, the *Danmark's* skipper, Capt. Knudsen, radioed the *Missouri* that his ship was sinking. Capt. Murrell ordered his cargo thrown overboard, the tow line was cut, and the *Danmark's* passengers began to be transferred via lifeboat, beginning with the women and children. No baggage was allowed, but as much foodstuffs as possible was transferred as well, since the smaller ship only had provisions for 40. The transfer took 8 hours and the refugees were fit into every available space on the *Missouri*, with some 200 sleeping on deck with little protection against the continuing bad weather. That night an additional passenger was added, when a young Danish wife going to rejoin her husband gave birth to a baby girl. She was named Atlanta Missouri Linnie and automatically became a British citizen by virtue of having been born on an English vessel. For three days the crammed *Missouri* steamed southwards, at times resembling a floating clothesline, as passengers attempted to stay clean and dry. On Sunday several Lutheran ministers held worship services, followed by entertainment by Miss Löfgren, a professional singer among the passengers.

On the morning of April 10, the *Missouri* docked at Porta Delgado, on the island of St. Michael's. After consultations with the Danish consul there and fresh provisioning, Capt. Murrell agreed to transport about half the passengers - women, children and married men -- on to Philadelphia. They arrived there on April 22nd to a welcoming crowd of 5,000. For his heroic efforts Hamilton Murrell, among other honors, was later made a Knight of the Order of the Dannebrog by the Danish king.

Among the passengers on that unforgettable voyage were several who settled in Iowa. 19-year-old Ærø-born shoemaker Lauritz Jensen later recounted the experience in a dramatic poem that he sent to his family in Denmark. It began as follows:

*We were a happy group that boarded the "Denmark"
In Copenhagen harbor on that sunny day.
We bid friends and relatives a glad farewell
And they waved us on our way.*