

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



**Peter Christensen** was one of three Danish brothers who came with their families to the Lake Albert area of Kingsbury County, South Dakota, from the mining area of Upper Michigan in the summer of 1878, when the trip from the closest railroad station in Luverne, Minnesota, took three days by horse-drawn wagon. In later years Peter Christensen noted down his recollections of the pioneer era for *Danske i Amerika* (Danes in America), published in 1916. In the late '70s few settlers were in the area and traces of the recently-departed buffalo and Indian population were still much in evidence. Christensen's first supply trip after the provisions necessary for setting up homesteads was long and arduous, beset by fierce hailstorms, grasshoppers, alternating torrential rains and heat waves, and not made easier by the many swampy tracts or the recalcitrant oxen and cattle. But more settlers were streaming in, so he started a small general store near Lake Thisted in a small town the pioneers called Maple Grove, and gradually the railroad - the main lifeline and source of contact with the outside world -- crept closer. The winter of 1880-81 saw heavy snowfalls; the little town became completely blocked off from the world for over four months, and the surrounding hilly landscape resembled a pancake. Those who lived in sod huts out on the prairie had to maintain shoveled tunnels to gain access to open air and their livestock. In April the snow began to melt and now the settlers faced flooding. Despite these arduous beginnings, the pioneers persevered and conquered the prairie, establishing productive farms and many small Danish towns came to dot the map of eastern South Dakota. Today, some 130 years later, times have changed. Many of these formerly thriving communities are ghostly reminders of the past, with more inhabitants populating their cemeteries than the towns. Without narratives such as Peter Christensen's their history and that of their early residents may also fade away.

**The Danish Immigrant Museum**

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