

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



(1785 midwife's 'shingle' - Danish National Museum)

Before hospitals and maternity wards were widespread, children were born at home, brought into the world by midwives. Often these were neighborhood 'grannies' experienced with the process of childbirth, but sometimes the person on the receiving end was a professionally trained birth attendant, or *jordemoder*. In Denmark these women -- often referred to as 'Madam' -- were allowed to hang out a shingle to advertise their craft like other skilled tradespeople and were respected members of the communities in which they lived.

One of several Danish *jordemoder* known to have immigrated to America in the 19th century was **Maren Kirstine Nielsen Andersen**, a native of Thisted County, who received a diploma from the Dept. of Midwifery at the University of Copenhagen on June 30, 1879. After practicing in Denmark for 3 years Maren Kirstine immigrated to Omaha, where she worked for 2 years before being invited to settle in the heavily Danish community of Nysted, Nebraska. Arriving there in July 1884, over the course of the following 38 years she delivered 1040 babies in Nysted and surrounding communities before her retirement in October, 1922. When called out on a confinement case Maren would either drive out by horse and buggy or by bobsled (usually a lumber wagon converted with runners) when winter snows were too deep, to deliver the baby, cook the meals and care for mother and child until a hired girl or other help could be found. For over two decades her standard fee for these services was \$5; a fee raised to \$8-10 only in 1908. In 1917 her records recorded her largest fee ever -- \$30 -- for delivering her own grandchild!

After several years in Nysted, Maren sent for her two children by a previous marriage in Denmark, Oline K. and Niels C. Olesen, who resided with her for several years. Oline married and produced six children, all delivered by her mother. In Nysted Maren also found a second spouse, local farmer Jens Andersen. They lived together until Jens' death in 1920. Maren died in 1929; both are buried in the Nysted Cemetery in Howard County, Nebraska. (Biography by grandson Emil Andy Dwehus, Dannebrog, NE)

The Danish Immigrant Museum

Your Museum in the Heart of the Continent
2212 Washington St., Elk Horn, Iowa 51531

Become a member

Contact us: 1-800-759-9192 or www.danishmuseum.org or follow us on Facebook