

Across Oceans, Across Time® ...

Stories from the Family History & Genealogy Center ...



This passport photograph of a happy baby hides a tragic story and blends the histories of two Danish-American families. **Lauritz Dam**, a young gardener from Nykøbing Mors, came to America in 1910. Making his way to Audubon County, Iowa, he became an agent for the Standard Oil Company and married Danish immigrant, **Elli Christensen** in 1918. The couple had 3 children, Arnold, Esther, and Norma Eleanora (pictured above), born on Sept. 15, 1921. Two months after Norma's birth the young mother unexpectedly died following an operation. In May of 1922 Lauritz applied for a passport for his infant daughter, intending for her to travel to Denmark with neighbors and be placed in the care of a sister. Apparently, this plan did not work out, for all three children were living with their father in Exira. Shortly thereafter, the family's fate took a turn for the worse and the children were placed with neighbors. In August, 1926, a local newspaper reported the death by suicide of the despondent widower at his home. -- The children continued to live with Danish-American families in the Exira area. Whether she was ever formally adopted is not known, but Norma found a home in the household of **Anker P. Sams**, who came from the same town in Denmark as her father. She took the Sams name and was raised with the children Anker and his wife Edna later had. After attending Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois, Norma married Dr. Herman E. Sheets in 1942, and had six children of her own. But she too died young, at the age of 49, in Groton Long Point, Connecticut. Although she named her eldest son Lawrence, perhaps in honor of her dimly-recalled father, her obituary names Anker and Elna Sams as her parents, setting the stage for potential genealogical confusion. Further information on these families may be found in the files of the Family History & Genealogy Center.

The Danish Immigrant Museum

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