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Stories from the Family History & Genealogy Center ...



Tracking a Name – This now-battered trunk is what accompanied 60-year-old blacksmith Peter Øertz when he immigrated to America in 1886. Tracing records of its owner provides a good illustration of the varied ways in which older handwriting in genealogical sources gets misread, resulting in misinterpreted or misspelled personal and place-names that create stumbling blocks when tracing ancestors. Peter's death entry in the church register of the Danish church in Fredsville, Iowa, and his tombstone both spell his surname as 'Oerthz' – a reasonable transcription of how the name was pronounced -- and give his birth place as Fjaltring or Fjeltring, Denmark. An online entry for him in the 1895 Grundy County, Iowa, census – the only US census in which he appears -- spells his name 'Oertg.' The transcription of his Danish police emigration record records him as 'Peder Øerthy,' last a resident of Fjaltring parish in Ringkøbing County, whereas his online passenger arrival record is indexed as 'Peter Perthä' coming from 'Fjiltzing, Denmark.' -- As a child Peder Øertz is found in early Danish census records living with his parents, schoolmaster and church-singer Jacob Pedersen Øertz and wife, Juliane Pouline Fabricius, in Fjaltring parish. He was confirmed there, but his actual birth took place in adjacent Trans parish on December 20, 1825. After being confirmed in 1840 he left for the duchy of Slesvig, where he likely served his apprenticeship as a blacksmith and also found his wife, Ingeborg Kjær, whom he married in Løjt, Aabenraa County, in 1852. Later they returned to Fjaltring and started a family. It was only after his wife's death that he decided to immigrate, probably following other relatives who had left earlier, packing his most valuable worldly possessions in his trunk and carefully marking its destination of 'Ceder Falls' Iowa. Details of the trunk may now be viewed online on the View Our Collection section of the museum webpage.

The Danish Immigrant Museum

Danish Roots, American Branches

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