

MAREN ANNETTE ANDERSON CHRISTENSEN

1846 - 1921

LIFE IN FAIRVIEW, UTAH
JOURNEY TO COLORADO
1800's

From writings of Hugh Brady
Compiled by Jeane B. Eagan
1967 & 1981

Only those of experience can realize the long, dreary months of a Fairview Winter! The Christensen's little one-room cottage could be kept reasonably warm and comfortable as long as the big woodbox beside the little kitchen stove contained an ample supply of hand-chopped birch, aspen or oak. This home was typical of many others of that day, in the lives of young married people...one door and window in the south wall and a window in the east; a small kitchen stove against the north wall; and a small homemade table with two chairs placed against the east wall. Fitting squarely in the southwest corner, stood a secondhand bedstead, which might have come from Salt Lake City with earlier settlers. A latticework of strong cord was laced from side to side of the bedstead, and supported a well-filled straw tick mattress that was covered with beautiful handmade quilts. Behind the door was the bench William Christensen had made when they were married, holding the family washdish and a pail of water with a long-handled dipper. On the north wall was a cupboard fashioned from rough lumber, draped with yards of flowered cloth purchased from the storehouse at the Fort.

With the more pleasant days of Spring and the budding of trees and plants, a newness of spirit came to the home...more home improvement and preparation for family life.

William's life of necessity was divided between his two families, his school teaching, church obligations, and outside chores for the two homes. Coloring the happy days of this season, was also the constant worry of Indian raids.

There was a constant alertness for the "Big Bass Drum Signal" which called all to the Fort for protection. It was not uncommon for community mothers to hastily gather the children and rush to the Fort, which was 5 blocks away from Annette's home. Within the stone walls of the Fort were a few homes, the Church storehouse, tithing office, granaries, hay sheds, etc. Chief Blackhawk and his tribe were a severe menace, plus the Utes from the north, and the men and older boys often met in battle with these Indians.



MAREN ANNETTE ANDERSON

The people of Fairview tried to live in peace with the Indians and abide by the counsel of Pres. Brigham Young...that it was better to feed the Indians than fight them...and consequently the Indians from the North would come in small groups and beg for food and clothing. Many times during these early years Annette's children would hide under the bed when they came, while she gave of her meager supply of bread, flour and sugar to satisfy them and have them leave her in peace. (Her home was on the outskirts of town, with Cottonwood Creek running through the north portion of the lot and an irrigating ditch on the east, and the water was also a constant worry to the mother, concerning her little ones.)

About this time (1870), the father William and his first wife separated. He then brought his two boys by that marriage into Annette's home, which added complications. A larger house had to be provided, and a two-room adobe home was built. Also, the children's quarrels and troubles had to be met and solved, along with more clothes, food and beds as constant daily needs.

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Diphtheria came into the home during this long winter, and a son Edward passed away. Doctors were not available, but with home remedies and family love along with blessings from a Heavenly Father, the two girls and Charles recovered.

These were momentous years, which of course have much to do with the molding of character and dispositions of children. William possessed a stern disposition, and a look from his eyes was all the children ever needed to put them in their place. Occasionally the girls would get to giggling during family prayer, and he would severely reprimand them and usually send them outdoors till they could sober down, which ordinarily did not take very long!

With pioneer children, shoes were a real luxury and some had to go barefoot even in the winter time. The Christensen children were spared this anguish; however, the trial was not as serious to them as it may seem to us now, as their feet became calloused and they could run anywhere! Barefoot children have their fun along with trials too. Homes in that day were not equipped with bathrooms, and it was not uncommon to see a child dash from the house to the outside "privy", even through deep snow and cold.

Winter brought the joys of the "good old days"...snowball fights, sleigh riding, warm stoves...and summers gave time for playhouses, picnics, and games of hide-and-seek and run-sheep-run in the twilights.

FOOD was delicious, consisting simply of coarse unleavened bread ("salt risin"), potatoes, saltside bacon, white gravy, milk, butter, eggs, and a few vegetables and wild fruits such as chokeberries. Because of no refrigeration, the milk would quickly sour and come to a heavy stage called "clabber". Often this clabber, with a little sugar and cinnamon, and a slice of bread and butter, constituted the evening meal. Many times supper was only a bowl of sweet milk and broken bread. Annette often made a delicious dish of "Thicken milk", where she made a lumpy mixture of flour and butter, adding it to sweet milk and cooking it to a thick jelly-like mixture, resulting in a pudding.



ANNETTE AND HER CHILDREN
(Backs: RENA - MARY - AMELIA
Front: WILL, ANNETTE, FRED)

The children of Annette were taught that a house must be kept clean, and the rough board floors were scrubbed, mopped and dried almost daily. Washing, carding and spinning wool into yarn was an important task, so that it could be knit into stockings, mittens, and other family clothing. (The children hated to wear this scratchy, itchy underwear!) All clothes were handmade, and also cotton material was used when it later became available.

William tutored some of his children in their younger years. Very few books were available at this time, and slates and slate-pencils constituted writing materials. Children were considered qualified and old enough around age 10 to assist elders in Church organizations, such as Primary which little Rena helped in.

Church authorities now called William to fill a MISSION in Denmark. This would mean traveling mostly without "purse or script", and his family would be deprived of his earnings. Now Annette must care for her four children alone, plus the foster son Charles and a new baby that was due soon. William left on 28 Oct 1877, and 10 days later the baby, Frederick Thorwald, was born on Nov. 7.

A harrowing and difficult experience was now to try the Norwegian mother. She would have added responsibilities, provisions for her family, and also sustaining her husband on his mission. It is assumed there was a cow or two, chickens, and good neighbors to help them through the following two years.

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It was a joyful occasion for all when William returned from this mission, in the fall of 1879, but the happy horizon was not to be as of old.

WILLIAM called his family together and told them of the policy of the Church then, which favored polygamous marriages in order that all women converts might have the assured blessings of marriage and family. Then he told them he had received advice and permission for the Church authorities to have a young lady convert from Denmark become his third wife.

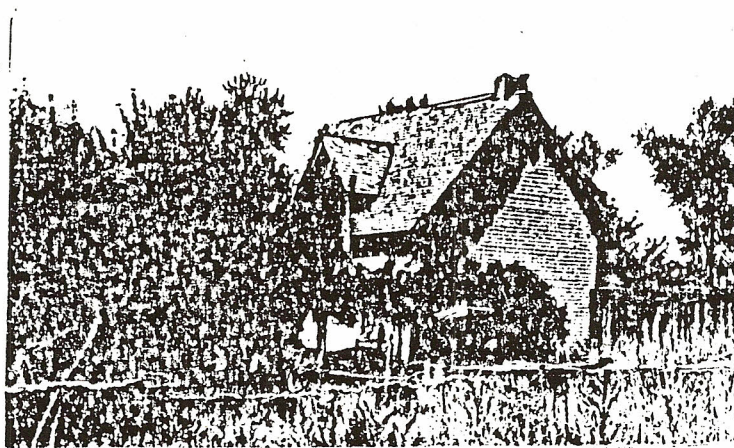
This was naturally a great shock to the family; however, being true to the Gospel she had embraced in her youth, ANNETTE gave her consent. She was well-aware of the sacrifices and problems of sharing her husband with another woman, and knew the children too must share his love and affection, as well as his earnings and help. The young convert, Wilhemina Peterson, arrived from Denmark and they were married and sealed on 9 Oct 1879. William provided another home nearby, and both families remained in Fairview until the fall of 1880.

At this time, William was asked by the Church to go to COLORADO to help establish a settlement there. He took his son Charles, his wife Wilhemina and infant daughter and went to the San Luis Valley in Colorado, while Annette and family remained in Fairview for the time being.

Now the children of Annette had to learn even more skills again, being without a father and his assistance.

Boys and girls alike milked cows, chopped wood, planted and harvested, stacked hay, grew gardens, harnessed and drove horses and mended fences.

The family bathtub was also used for laundry purposes, and it was a busy item on Saturday night! It was brought from its nail on the north side of the house, and placed beside the kitchen stove. A fresh bucket of water was brought in from the open well and warmed with a kettle of boiling water, softened with homemade soap. A real Norwegian scrubbing followed, from ears to toes, and a small brush applied to the rough and calloused feet. This was always a part of the Sabbath Day preparation.



ANNETTE'S HOME IN FAIRVIEW, UTAH
(Birthplace of Fred T. Christensen)
(Photo 1958)

The Norwegian mother observed and revered the Sabbath Day. Through spring blossoms or winter snows, she and the children attended Sunday School at the Fort, walking the distance in their clean clothes and Scandinavian scrubbed look.

Nearly 2 fatherless years passed. Then Annette received word she should dispose of the Fairview home, and accompany an outfit of Saints moving to southern Colorado. They envisioned the difficulty and seriousness of this move, but joyous anticipation of an abode with, or near, their father and husband overshadowed problems. It would be a long and tiresome trek to Colorado, but they had experienced the adversities of pioneering in unbroken lands before, and they remembered the years spent in a two-room lumber home. They had not forgotten the sorrow in sharing William's love, affection and security; but they yearned for his kindness and love of their yester-days to return.

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So there was only one way...the Church had called, and surely this was the right way. Following days of deliberation, the decision was made and plans for the great journey began. Little did they realize the trials that awaited them, both on the trip and at its end.

They sold the beloved home...one with many memories. All was bid a tearful goodbye...the splashing creek, the flowering trees, each adobe in the wall, and a departed grandmother (Anna Gurena) at rest in the cemetery.



Otto Edward
William Thorwald
CHRISTENSEN

In August 1882, the family began their trek to Colorado with a purchased team and wagon, 2 cows, ("Old Brinnie" and "Spot"), and packed belongings. The caravan of 12 wagons, 35 people (14 adults and 22 children), with horses, mules, cows, a few dogs and some riding ponies, departed Fairview, Utah on that hot August day, 1882.

Members of this company were:

Jordan BRADY, wife Mary Howell, 9 children
Jordan H. BRADY, wife Alberta Sanderson
Peter W. CHENEY, wife Keziah, 1 child
William Cheney, wife Agnes, 2 children
Annette CHRISTENSEN, 5 children
William DAVIS

Newton (Knut) WILSON, wife, 5 children
Elizabeth WILSON (later wife of Brigham Young)
Christian CRUSER (driver of Annette's wagon)

These 12 covered wagons were packed with a large water barrel securely fastened to each side. A mother and a small child rode in the high "spring seat", but most children walked beside the wagon, with cows tied behind it. Because of reluctant cattle, they covered only about 6 miles the first day, camping near what is now Milburn, Utah. The route was to be through the mountains to Huntington, since there was no real road through Cottonwood Canyon then.

Supper was fresh, warm milk; potatoes with bacon, and bread and butter from home. Prayers were offered and beds prepared on the ground for the older girls. All of the Christensen family especially carried dreams and thoughts of what the new home would be like, and who would be their new friends.



Annette's Mother
Anne Gurena
ANDERSON

They had their last look at Fairview from the top of Horse-shoe Ridge, remembering the life they had had there.

The Sabbath Day was observed, as they camped in the mountains for rest and relaxing, telling stories around the campfire, bearing testimonies and singing.

The great San Rafael Desert faced them now, and they experienced many doubtful, fearful feelings as they gazed back at the cool aspens of the southern Wasatch Mountains and looked ahead at the miles of hot, dry sands with greasewood, desert grass, alkali, and the towering sandstone monuments....and endless, tiring, yet interesting wilderness.

With the San Rafael River as the only water supply, they moved carefully and looked forward to reaching Green River City, where at last they found green grass, trees, and rest. Here, one of the company lost a cow with a new calf, and located her calmly standing in a farmyard, apparently corraled by the owner. Jordan knocked at the door, explaining the situation and asking if he might take his cow and go on, but the man insisted the cow was in his corral and therefore was his! "You have camped on my ground and used my feed, and I should keep this cow to pay for it all, but if you will give me 10.00 you can take your cow and calf". Seeing he was dealing with a hard, unjust man, Jordan paid his only money and took the cow to camp.

Now the Red Sandstone Arches of the Grand Colorado River Basin could be seen, and soon the boxlike stone rims of the Grand Canyon.

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Two of the men crossed the river on horses to Moab for a guide to help the company cross the treacherous stream, and the company enjoyed watermelons in Moab. The watering places along the way were to be Kane Springs, Kane Creek, Monticello and Dove Creek. A distance of 120 miles, to a higher elevation, would be the goal for the week.

The great San Luis Valley was now 18 days nearer; and in the "promised valley" would be a comfortable home and a loving Father waiting, which continued to give them hope and courage.

The sunbaked plains of the Dolores River, Durango, Mancos and on to cross the Los Pinos stream...then the San Juan at Pagosa Springs, the Navajo, and across the great Rocky Mountains through Cumbres Pass...and finally dropping into the Conejos River Canyon...thus traveled this company.

Although many shoes had worn thin and many were barefooted, the children were cheerful and lighthearted because the trail's end was near. These people were not trail-breakers, as at least two other groups of Mormon people had answered the same call...one in 1881 in which little Frederick Thorwald's future wife had traveled, yet unborn.

At this time, the mail system throughout the Mormon colonies of Utah, Arizona, Idaho and Colorado was taken care of by "runners" from Church headquarters to various localities. This runner consisted of a man and saddle horse, or man and buckboard. It was this way that William sent word from Colorado to Annette in Fairview, and how he kept track of her on her journey.

The journey was completed on 20 Sept 1882. It was a beautiful fall morning by the Conejos River, which channeled into the open country of the peaceful San Luis Valley.

The caravan was met by a small group of men, including William. Joyful weeping in re-unions and happy chattering took place, then the wagons rumbled along again to the tune of a thousand questions.

Then William informed them that Manassa would not be the settling place, since the Church desired them to go beyond it and help settle a place called "Ephraim". He said it was only a beginning, and people had to live in tents until houses could be built. As he told them of the tent he had ready, dreams of a new home in Manassa faded and there was a temporary silence.

Then at last, the brave Norwegian mother said, "We will endure to the end. We will do according to the instructions of the Church and your Father. It will be alright".



ANNETTE IN HER SANFORD HOME

So they came to Ephraim, alone, and the little tent that was theirs was surrounded by greasewood and rabbit brush...a far cry from the apple trees and wild roses of their Utah home. But again the Latter Day Saints made the desert "blossom as the rose", and from Ephraim on to Sanford...the final, permanent home.

MAREN ANNETTE ANDERSON CHRISTENSEN raised her family here, in the ensuing years alone...creating and nourishing a strong Norwegian heritage of faith, courage... and endurance. (JBE)(1981)

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(Hugh Brady)

(SEE ALSO THE HISTORIES OF MAREN ANNETTE BY HER SONS, WILLIAM C. AND FRED T.)