Family History (1860-1950) of a Doctor's Daughter

by

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FIRST EDITION

To my parents Paul and Marge Walstad

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PREFACE

In this 21st century, we may cling to the belief that we are masters of our fate and captains of our soul. But mirages abound on the horizon. Unforeseen winds may suddenly pop up, causing us to drift off-course. New knowledge and experience might force us to toss a cherished certitude overboard. The powerful current of social forces can nudge our ship in a whole new direction or hurtle us forward faster than we would wish.

Family stories steady the ship. A chorus of ancestral voices and ghostly whispers from the past allow us to reflect on who we are and where we might want to go. In times of serenity and plenty, the hardships that our ancestors endured remind us to give thanks. In periods of discontent, their courage and victories over disease, poverty, social rejection, and life's inevitable unfairness persuade us to keep sailing. We can never know where and when our ship will land, but we do know from whence we came.

My ancestral story is but one small vessel in a vast armada, the "family fleet" of humanity. Because it is a shared history for a general audience, I included heroes and heroines from our collective past like Robert Koch, Albertus van Raalte, and Florence Nightingale. These notables—and others—are inextricably tied in with my family's history, and their dedication to making a better world touches all Americans.

Names have been simplified to avoid confusion. Thus, I have used "Johanna" consistently throughout the book, despite numerous variations (e. g., Hanne Nielsine). For my great-grandfather Lambert Vandenberg Sr., I have used 'Lambertus' to avoid confusing him with his son Lambert Jr.

In some instances, I have paraphrased quoted material. The over-reaching goal was to make the text understandable to readers while faithfully maintaining the speaker's intent and mannerisms.

Although my immigrant ancestors are white Europeans, I would hope that my story crosses the racial divide. Thus, I included the true story of a Chinese immigrant, who as a boy got caught up in his country's horrors before, during, and after World War II. His triumph over unfathomable difficulties to later become a U.S. physician should shine like a beacon for all of us.

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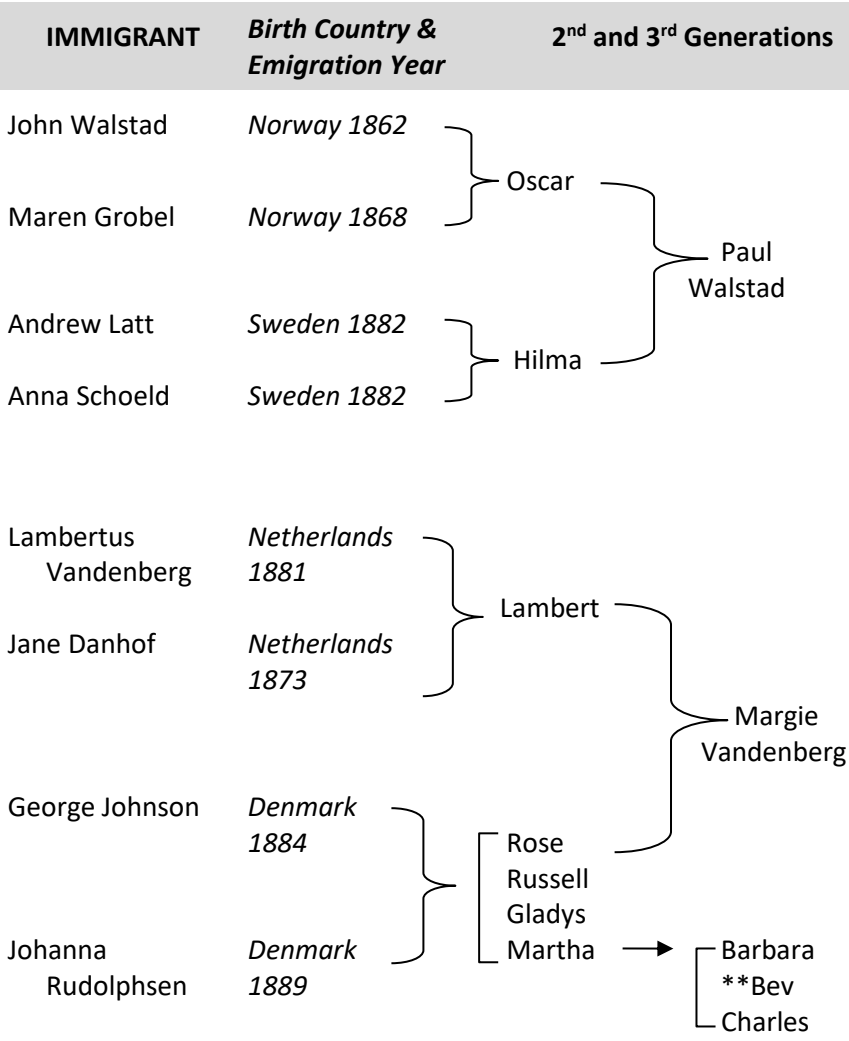
Main Characters*



*Outlying characters are Anna (Lambert's second wife) and Peter (Johanna's brother).

**Bev was the biological daughter of Lambert and Rose Vandenberg. She was adopted as a toddler by Martha and her husband (Virgil Whitchurch).

From *Family History (1850-1950) of a Doctor's Daughter*, posted 2025 by the author Diana Walstad—along with the rest of this 2017 book—on her website: http://dianawalstad.com

Chapter One

Immigrants (1860-1890)

John and Maren Walstad

When John left Norway as a single young man in 1862, there was no mention in the family lore of a farewell ceremony or tears being shed. He arrived here in the midst of America's Civil War—a time when more cautious emigrants waited out the bloody conflict.[1] (Indeed, he was drafted into the Union Army, but the war ended during his training [3].) John's decision to come at such a perilous time suggests he may have been a bit reckless and/or that he was not entirely satisfied with the staid family from whence he came.

John's surname of Walstad was derived from "Valstad," the name of the farm owned by his Norwegian ancestors. The farm—located in the rolling hills and woods about 13 miles east of Oslo—had been in the family as far back as the 14th century. [4] In 1830, the 54 acre Valstad farm had been split up, with John's parents Karen and Jacob receiving 29 acres and the main buildings. One of Karen's sisters got the rest.

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1 Norwegian immigrants had a deep-rooted aversion to slavery and believed that President Lincoln would eventually win [1]. Over 6,500 Norwegians served in the Union Army, while less than 300 fought for the Confederacy [2].

Despite the reduced acreage, Jacob and Karen Valstad appeared to be relatively well off. By 1865, they had more "big ticket items"—2 horses and 8 cows—than neighboring farms. Jacob, with the help of his adult son Hans, had planted a smorgasbord of oats, potatoes, rye, barley, and peas. [5]

In 1869, three of John's siblings left the Valstad farm for America. Before they sailed, Jacob treated the two daughters to a shopping spree in a relative's jewelry store in downtown Oslo.

Jacob and Karen Walstad were John's parents.

One can understand why they emigrated. Circumstances had forced the 1830 division of the centuries-old Valstad farm. Apparently, Jacob and Karen were unwilling to carve up the land any further. They knew that their 29 acres of rocky, hilly land in a cold climate could not adequately support more than their small household. The three emigrating children [Hans (age 39), Dorthea (age 26), and Anna Marie (age 35)] had most likely held off on marriage and starting families. Any grandchildren would have been living on the edge, vulnerable to crop failures, livestock diseases, etc.

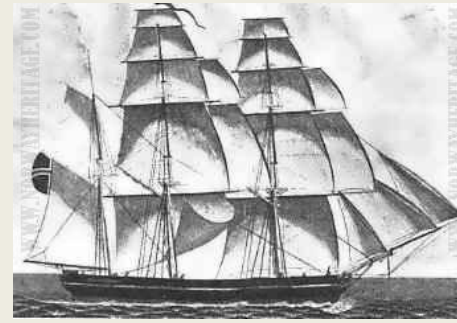
Indeed, a looming fear of poverty hung over many of their countrymen. One immigrant, who later became a prosperous Wisconsin farmer, explained (1868) what drove him out of Norway:

> I was my father's oldest son and as such was entitled to inherit a farm that was held to be one of the best in the community, but it was encumbered with a debt of fourteen

> hundred dollars. I worked at home until I was twenty-five years old and consequently was unable to save any money. It was obvious that I would assure myself a hopeless future by taking charge of the farm with its heavy indebtedness, buying out my brothers and sisters in such a fashion that they suffered no injustice, and finally, providing a pension for my father. I noticed with apprehension how one farm after another fell into the hands of the sheriff or other moneylenders. [6]

After four of their children had emigrated, one would have expected John's parents to remain in their Norwegian homeland. However in 1872, Jacob (age 64) and Karen (age 73) sold their farm to a daughter, took the proceeds and left for America. As part of their farewell ceremony, Karen—anticipating that she would never see her homeland again—planted an apple tree on the farm she loved.

In the meantime, a 27-year-old single woman named Maren Grobel had immigrated to America. She and an older brother (Edward) left Oslo on April 19, 1868 along with 281 other passengers. Because of strong headwinds, their ship the *Caroline* took over 6 weeks to cross the Atlantic; it landed in Quebec on June 6. [7] Maren was seasick the entire time.



A Bark [7] was the type of sailing ship that brought Maren to the New World. A "bark" has square-rigging on only 2 masts instead of 3, allowing the ship to sail with a smaller crew.

[*Drawing courtesy of the Norway Heritage Collection – www.norwayheritage.com*]

In 1868, most Norwegians took sailing ships, because ticket prices were 1/3 that of the newer steam ships. Sailing ships might take anywhere from 25 to 100 days to cross the Atlantic, whereas steam ships could reliably make the journey in two weeks. [7] Maren struck out on her gamble with the weather.

Unlike other European emigrants coming to America, Maren disembarked in Quebec not New York. The *Caroline* was just one of 37 Norwegian emigrant ships that landed in Quebec that year. [7] She was part of a unique Norwegian trade niche that lasted from 1850 to 1870. Norwegian sailing ships brought Canadian lumber to timber-hungry Britain and returned to Canada with Norwegian emigrants. [8]

New U.S. regulations—designed to protect immigrants—made disembarking in New York more costly than Quebec. Ship owners docking in the U.S. had to provide so much space, food, water, toilet facilities, etc for their passengers. So it was cheaper to dock in Canada where there were fewer regulations. Moreover, Quebec was closer than New York to Minnesota, Wisconsin and Iowa—the final destinations of most Norwegians. [8]

From Quebec, Maren and her brother took river boats to Montreal and then onward across Lake Ontario to Toronto. From Toronto, they crossed the U.S. border and traveled by rail to Decorah, Iowa. They may have ridden on the special trains and rail cars reserved for immigrants. [9]

A year later (May 18, 1869), Maren married John Walstad, a housepainter from Lanesboro, Minnesota at Decorah's Luther College [10].

John and Maren Walstad

Five months later, Maren gave birth to their first child Oscar. Premarital sex was more or less accepted by Scandinavians (*See* pp. 29-30)—but not all. (Walstad family lore has the marriage occurring in May of *1868*, a full year before the actual event.)

The arrival that year of John's older brother Hans from Norway may have nudged John to the altar. Hans and John's older sister Anna Marie attended Oscar's baptism at Decorah's Lutheran Church [11].

Lambertus and Jane Vandenberg

Lambertus Vandenberg came to America with a shrouded past. His ancestral background "dead-ended" in 1881 when the 21-year-old Dutchman stepped onto American soil [12]. Any family Lambertus left behind in the Netherlands were both nameless and faceless. Was he running from scandal? Was he trying to avoid the Netherland's compulsory military service?

A brief snippet from Vandenberg family lore provided a clue:

> Lambert Vandenberg Sr. (*i.e., Lambertus*) was born in Zwolle, Netherlands in 1860. When he was 5 years old, his parents died and he was sent to live with his brother and sister-in-law. He disliked living with his sister-in-law, and at the age of 12, ran away and became an apprentice in a machine shop in the Hague. He had no contact with his family from that time on. At the age of 20, he boarded a ship and came to America. [13]

The story—if true—was intriguing. Working from this story and with the help of genealogists [14,15], I discovered a little more about Lambertus' mysterious past.

It seems that prior to 1860 and Lambertus' birth, the van den Berg family lived in the farming area surrounding the city of Zwolle. His parents and grandparents were farmers and raised cattle. They passed nothing of monetary value (land, cattle, etc) onto their children. As tenant farmers, they were only one step up above farmhands and one step below those that actually owned their own land.

Included in the household were Lambertus' paternal grandparents. (In Holland, the oldest son traditionally provided life-time care for the parents.) Although schooling was not yet compulsory, the five oldest children were registered as students. [16]

On January 15, 1856, the van den Bergs moved a few miles east to a hamlet just outside the small town of Dalfsen. Their new property was owned by the Count of Rechteren. Perhaps the father could get better rental terms from his new landlord. After the move, the van den Bergs were no longer registered as owning cattle. The loss of the livestock made the family's economic and nutritional situation that much more precarious. On February 28, 1860, Lamberta at age 44, gave birth to the last of her 10 children—the boy Lambertus.

Lambertus' paternal grandparents were born around 1780 when the Netherlands was still a relatively prosperous country. Both survived past age 75.

Lambertus' parents were not so fortunate; they both died in their early 50s. A declining national economy, hard labor, and 10 children may have sped both to early graves.

The Rechteren Castle [17] has been in the possession of the Rechteren nobility since the 1300s**.** The van den Bergs became their tenants.

By 1867 when Lambertus was only seven, his parents and grandparents were all dead. The boy was put into the custody of his older brother Gerrit. This seemed reasonable. Gerrit was 28 and had a good job as a conductor/mechanic for the National Railway. His wife Aaltje was childless.

Gerrit, Aaltje, and Lambertus moved frequently—as part of Gerrit's job with the railroad—at least eight times in the five years between 1867 and 1872. The last time that the trio were recorded as living together under the same roof was when they moved to Zwolle in 1872.

After that, the population registers showed Gerrit and Aaltje residing together but without Lambertus. [15]

As indicated in the family story, Lambertus may well have disliked his stepmother. (In turn, Aaltje may have come to resent taking care of another woman's child.) Gerrit found himself in a difficult situation—choosing between his wife and his younger brother.

But did Lambertus actually run away from home? At some time after 1872, Lambertus did leave. Perhaps after yet another disagreeable encounter with Aaltje, something snapped in Lambertus. Why stay where you are not wanted?

However, such a dramatic break seems out of character, especially based on later events. And one wonders how a boy on his own could compete with the throngs of other boys looking for work during Holland's hard economic times.

In 1876, Gerrit and his wife were living in the Hague, a fairly large city (population then of 92,500). Gerrit's job with the National Railway required technical and mechanical skills. Surely, Gerrit would have known various machinists in the city looking for apprentices. Gerrit probably helped Lambertus obtain an apprenticeship whereby the boy could get job skills, and at the same time, get out from under Aaltje.

Owners of machine shops were probably impressed by this youngster who came highly recommended. Lambertus may have picked up an aptitude for mechanics from his brother. And Gerrit's constant moving had sharpened the boy's senses. Lambertus may have been a tenant farmer's son, but he was no country bumpkin.

Knowing that an apprenticeship might be his one chance to get ahead, Lambertus worked hard. Once he started his training, he would have moved in with his master. Masters were not always meticulous about registering their apprentices, which may explain why the paper trail for Lambertus turned cold after 1872. [15]

Of the 10 van den Berg children, Lambertus was the only one to emigrate. Because one brother had served as a soldier, [2] Lambertus would not have been subject to compulsory military service [15].

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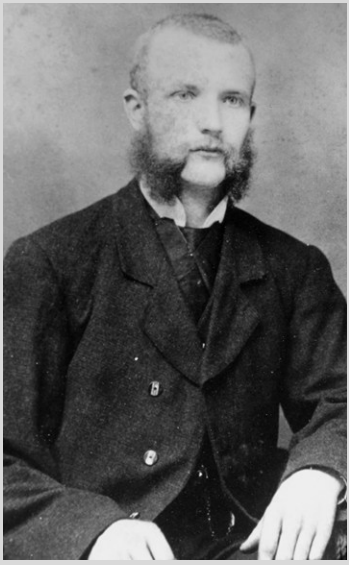
[2] Their occupations were listed as: housewife, railroad conductor, postal worker, maid servant, soldier, coachman, warehouseman, and farmhand [15].

In 1881, Lambertus departed from the Dutch port of Rotterdam for America aboard the SS *Amsterdam.* While he came devoid of family and wealth, he had skills that the Industrial Revolution coveted. The ship's passenger manifest lists his occupation as that of a blacksmith, a catchall term that included machinists. One immigrant stated in 1887, "I've never seen a good blacksmith without work in America." [18]



Lambertus (ca. 1882)

After Lambertus' ship docked in New York Harbor, he would have traveled westward for two days by rail and several train changes to reach Grand Haven, Michigan. [19]

Lambertus did not have family in America, so he had to buy his own ticket. The typical cost of crossing the Atlantic on a steerage ticket was $30 [20] {about $700 in 2015 dollars [21]}. For the cross-country trip, tickets and meals would have cost him an additional $30 [14]. The Holland Immigration Society in Michigan may have helped pay Lambertus' travel expenses [14].

SS *Amsterdam* [22] brought Lambertus to America in 1881.
(Note the smokestack between the sails, indicating that this ship had been retrofitted to be powered by steam as well as wind.)

In 1873, a tailor named Pieter Danhof left the Netherlands for America aboard the SS *Wisconsin*. He brought with him his wife Roelfje and their six children, one of whom was a 12-year-old girl named Janna or "Jane." Jane must have been small for her age, because the ship's passenger list incorrectly recorded her age as only eight.

Jane (ca. 1882)

After arriving in the Michigan town of Grand Haven, the transition for Pieter Danhof and his family would have been straightforward. The town had a community of folks from the Danhof's home province (Groningen) in the Netherlands. Pieter's younger brother Jan Danhof, who had immigrated 19 years earlier, was already well-established as the town's leading clothier. Plus, he had helped start the town's Second Reformed Church [23].

Jane helped her father in the family's tailoring shop. One day, a young man named Lambertus came into the shop. Jane helped him pick out a suit [13]. On July 1, 1882—with two brothers serving as witness—21-year-old Jane Danhof married Lambertus.

The minister who wed the couple was from the Danhof's church. Lambertus would have had to become a member, for Jane's father would not have allowed his daughter to marry someone outside it. [14]

Earlier Dutch Settlers

What brought Lambertus and Jane's family to western Michigan—of all places? Bordering Lake Michigan, the area has a daunting climate of long cold winters and deep snows.

It seems early Dutch immigration to America was spurred by religious persecution similar to that experienced by the Puritans in England. Many common folk in the Netherlands objected to the religious intolerance of their new monarch. In 1816, King William brought the state church under his control. The reorganized church now promoted the modern concepts of the Enlightenment (i.e., rational thought, morals, ethics, and good works) over the Calvinist theology of faith, discipline, and doctrine.

A group of dissenters called the Seceders separated from the state church in 1834. Afterwards, they were bullied:

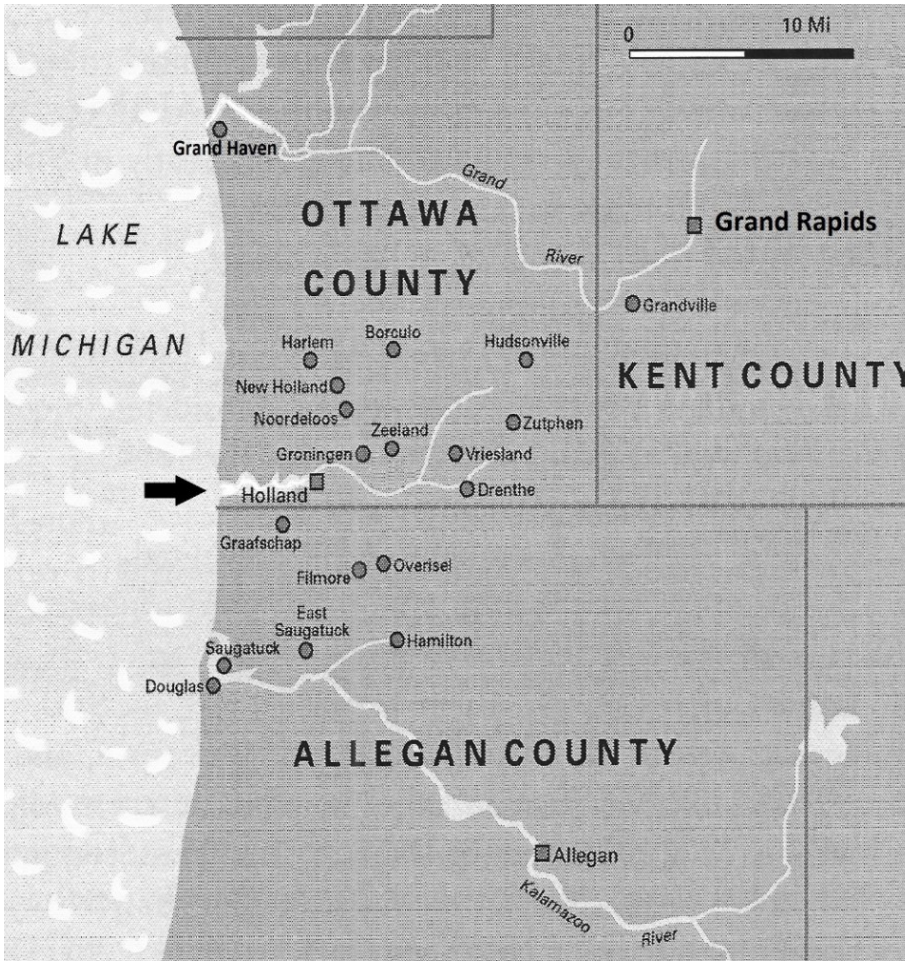
> The general public manifested its displeasure toward the Seceders in no uncertain way. Frequently, crowds met in front of houses in which they had congregated. A deafening clatter was set up, abuse was hurled at the worshipers, windows were broken, doors were beaten in, and often the houses were invaded. When ejected by the soldiers, the worshippers were mishandled, beaten, their clothing torn and spattered with mud; threats of personal violence, even of death, were not uncommon. [24]

Albertus van Raalte guided his flock (the Seceders) in colonizing western Michigan.

Reverend Albertus van Raalte, the most famous Seceder pastor, turned his gaze towards America. Originally, he had picked Wisconsin for his settlement. However, while traveling through the Great Lakes via steamer, van Raalte was persuaded that western

Michigan—with its railway connections to the East and its existing cities (e.g., Grand Rapids)—would be better than the isolated Wisconsin wilderness.

In western Michigan, van Raalte found land between the Grand River and the Kalamazoo River at "government prices." Using his



Early Dutch Settlements in Western Michigan [25]
Arrow points to the Black Lake area (now called Lake Macatawa) where van Raalte brought the Seceders.

{Map Source: Hans Krabbendam, *Freedom on the Horizon, Dutch Immigration to America, 1840-1940,* Eerdmans}

own money and that borrowed on his good name, van Raalte purchased 3,000 acres for $7,000, plus gained title to adjacent land. [24]

The Seceders themselves were generally unsophisticated, penniless folk that had rarely traveled more than a few miles from their Dutch homes and villages. Deep religious faith and trust in van Raalte's leadership convinced these simple people to emigrate and face unknown hardships.

In 1846, the Seceders began leaving Holland in earnest. During the final week of that year, three ships brought 230 men, women, and children to America. The immigrants scattered to temporary charitable housing in various cities as they waited to hear from van Raalte. [24]

In February 1847, van Raalte and five men came by rail to Allegan, Michigan. Through deep snow, they rode the last 20 miles in an ox-drawn sleigh to their final destination, the Old Wing Mission. They expounded enthusiastically upon a "virgin forest teeming with wild life as yet wholly undisturbed. We viewed with astonishment the mighty giant trees which perhaps were two centuries old, some of them a hundred feet tall and six feet in diameter." With the exception of two missionary families, their neighbors were itinerant Indians. [24]

Some observers questioned van Raalte's choice of timbered land for his settlement. (Prairie soil was easier to till.) However, good leadership prevailed over the difficulties of converting dense forest into productive crop land. Van Raalte hired Americans to teach the settlers how to: (1) fell giant trees in the desired direction; (2) build log shanties roofed with layers of hemlock; (3) grow corn, squash, and potatoes between tree stumps; and (4) collect syrup from maple trees. Van Raalte set up a factory where wood ash, the waste from clearing the forests, was recycled into soap and other profitable products. [24]

Guided by van Raalte and fired by religion, the industrious Dutch newcomers formed the thriving villages of Holland, Groningen, Zeeland, etc in western Michigan. Word of their progress, religious freedom, and social acceptance spread back to the Netherlands.

Meanwhile, Americans looked with favor on these strangers wearing quaint clothes and wooden shoes. The new settlers, who purchased their supplies in nearby Grand Rapids, were also good customers. In 1849, the city's newspaper commented:

> During the past week our streets have been taken by the Dutch. The Hollanders have resorted here in uncommon numbers and their ox teams have made quite a caravan. Large supplies of provisions, stoves, tools, and goods are carried to their colonies in Ottawa County in preparation for the coming winter. They are a very stout, apparently healthy and frugal race, and will by patient industry transform the wilderness they have broken into from its unproductive solitude to a scene of fertility and busy life. [24]

Van Raalte's initial colony attracted future Dutch immigrants to the state like a magnet. By 1870, the state of Michigan had the most Dutch immigrants (12,500) in America. In contrast, North Carolina and Alabama had less than 20 individuals apiece! [26]

Many of the early Dutch settlers encumbered debt while getting started, so family members looked for work in nearby towns and cities. In turn, Americans valued these honest, sober, hard-working people. Dutch children got jobs in American homes where they could earn money and learn English. By 1848, over 100 Dutch girls were working as domestics for "the English" in nearby Grand Rapids [24]. Gradually, the city built up a permanent and thriving Dutch community—one that attracted future immigrants like Lambertus and Jane.

Andrew and Anna Latt

In 1858, an outbreak of witch hunting took place in the small rural community of Mockfjärd, Sweden. The minister Robert Blumenberg had stirred his parishioners with his "hell and damnation" sermons in the Mockfjärd chapel. Because of his clergyman position, he had tremendous influence in the community. [27]

The firestorm began when an 8-year-old girl accused a neighbor girl of riding to Brocken some Thursday nights. (Brocken was where witches flew—on brooms—to celebrate the witches' Sabbath with the Devil.) The accused girl confessed to Blumenberg that her mother used to go to Brocken and that she may have unwittingly gone there as

well. Hysteria spread. More children began claiming they had been abducted and taken to Brocken. If so, they could no longer receive the sacraments. Desperate parishioners brought their "possessed children" to Blumenberg for healing.

The Mockfjärd Church

While witch trials had been illegal in Sweden since 1675, Mockfjärd—150 miles northeast of the capital (Stockholm)—was a rural backwater. The railroads had not yet come and some residents harbored a medieval mindset. People still wore native costumes.

Anders Ersson and his future wife Anna Sköld were born during the time and place of the Brocken outbreak. Indeed, they were both christened and confirmed in the same Mockfjärd chapel where the preacher Blumenberg had riled up his parishioners [28]. Born to landowners, they grew up on farms in the rolling hills nearby.

Native Clothing for Mockfjärd

Wedding banns for young Anders and Anna, both in their twenties, were read in the summer of 1880, just days before the birth of a son (Erik). They were betrothed but their son was still listed as illegitimate. A few months later, the couple married in the Mockfjärd chapel. [29]

Why was the wedding delayed? Anders and Anna had probably known each other since children and—based on later events—must have loved each other deeply. I suspect that Anna's father Trogens did not approve of Anders.[3] While Trogens gave written permission, he did not attend the wedding [29]. His precious Anna (age 25) had become pregnant by a 20-year-old boy!

According to rural Scandinavian traditions, Anders was unseemly young to marry. He had proved nothing except that he could sire a child. He had no dwelling of his own. What land he would inherit from his father probably was not enough to support a family. Swedish farms were small (~6 acres) [30], and it would have had to be divided between Anders and his three brothers. (In Sweden, all children—not just the eldest son—inherited equal portions of their parent's estate.)

Moreover, the farm plot may have been severely depleted in nutrients from long-time cultivation. Swedish farmers kept as many cows as possible, not for meat but for the manure they produced. Without manure to fertilize crops, there was no grain harvest nor means of survival. Indeed, tax assessors used the size of manure piles to gauge how much each farm was worth. [30]

Farm scene from Mockfjärd, Sweden

Meanwhile, America's Homestead Act of 1862, with its offer of cheap, fertile land—no cow manure required—provided a powerful incentive for farmers to leave Sweden. Agents representing the owners of immigrant ships and American

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3 Trogens must have come around, for Anna, Anders, and little Erik were living in his house after their marriage [29].

railroads percolated throughout Sweden offering to assist potential emigrants. Hundreds of families from Mockfjärd and the surrounding parish of Gagnef left Sweden to establish a colony in America.

The first settlers trickled into Minnesota in 1867 and settled together in Kandiyohi County. {The former residents (Sioux Indians) used the word "Kandiyohi" to describe the place as containing masses of buffalo fish (a large, carp-like fish) [31].} By draining the marshes around the lakes, the immigrants converted the home of the buffalo fish into farmland. It was not only fertile but perfect for plowing—no rocks, stones, or tree stumps. Nearby forests provided firewood, building material, and fresh game meat. [32]

U.S. Homestead Act

The Homestead Act of 1862 was an outgrowth of Jeffersonian democracy. The goal was to make new land opening up in the West available to small farmers, rather than to wealthy planters who typically would develop it with slaves.

Anyone who was at least 21 years old could apply for a quarter-section (160 acres). Before receiving title to the land, the occupant had to reside on the land for 5 years, build a 12 X 14 foot dwelling, and grow crops.

Homesteading was not easy. Only about 40% of applicants actually gained title [33].

The pioneers wrote letters back to their former neighbors singing the praises of America and Kandiyohi County. These "American letters" were read again and again in Mockfjärd until they were worn out and had to be copied. Copies were shared throughout the parish and into the surrounding Dalarna province.

And so Anders and Anna were persuaded.… The couple emigrated in May 1882, bringing their son Erik, plus an infant daughter born in February. They changed their ubiquitous surname of Ersson ("son of Eric") to Latt, Swedish for "light-weight" or "easy." "Anders" became "Andrew."

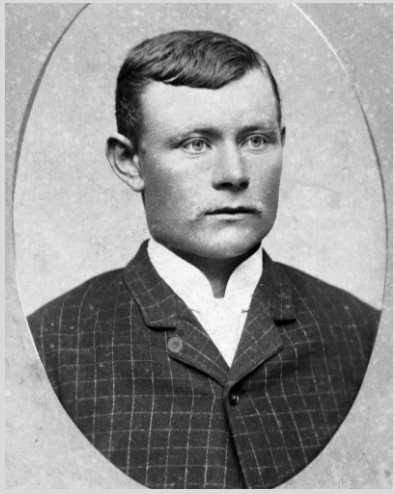
Once on American soil, trains brought Andrew and Anna Latt to the town of Wilmar, some 55 miles west of Minneapolis. Here the rails ended, so the family may have gotten a wagon ride the last 50 miles to their new home.

By 1882, much of the free homestead land was gone. So Andrew purchased a small piece of land partially in Kandiyohi county about 5 miles south of Lake Lillian. Family lore reports that the family spent their first winter, a bitterly cold one, huddled together in a drafty shack. Their nearest neighbors were almost 5 miles away. Andrew apparently carried a 50 lb sack of flour on his back from Wilmar to his home [28].

Back in Sweden, the Brocken witch matter was eventually resolved by a church investigation that forced Reverend Blumenberg to leave town. The hysteria petered out, but did not die entirely. In the 1880s, one Mockfjärd woman confessed at her baptism that she and several other persons had been taken to Brocken. [27]

George and Johanna Johnson

When George left Denmark for America in 1884 as a single young man, he was not alone. He carried with him the germ that causes tuberculosis (TB)—the world's greatest killing disease of all time. Ultimately, those germs wreaked havoc on George and his descendants. However, there's much more to George's story than disease.



George Johnson (ca. 1884)
Born in Denmark as Jørgen Christian Jensen, George later Americanized his name.

Rising barely 50 feet above sea level, Funen Island where George was born, is the country's third largest island (*See* map next page). The island is also the birthplace of Hans Christian Andersen, the famous 19th century author of children's fairy tales.

George was descended from farmers and tenant farmers. His folks, the Jensens, lived within the Vejlby parish, a rich farming area containing about 1,000 people and 10 square miles. Within the parish was the tiny hamlet of Røjle Mose (i.e., "wet meadow") where Maren Jensen gave birth to George in 1860. The closest town (Middelfart)

was about seven miles away. Dating back to the Middle Ages, the Vejlby parish was a tight, one-church community.

DENMARK (1850) Funen, the Danish island of George's birth, is shown in the center of map. Below Funen is a small island that contains Rudkøbing, the hometown of his future wife.

The Jensen family's quiet pastoral life was disturbed by two wars between Denmark and Germany over the territories of Schleswig and Holstein (*See* map preceding page). The Vejlby parish was caught up in the fighting when 16,000 German troops besieged the nearby city of Fredericia in May 1849. Thousands of Danes from Fredericia fled across the "Little Belt" sea channel—about 1300 yards wide—to Funen Island and relative safety. George's father Rasmus set aside his farm tools to fight the enemy. [34]

The good folk of Vejlby brought food and supplies across the channel to Danish soldiers in the besieged city. The Germans fired on the ferries and fishing boats transporting refugees and supplies. In turn, the Danes spiked German cannons. The local manorial estate became a field hospital for wounded Danish soldiers. A Danish war council convened in the Vejlby rectory and plotted how to break the siege. [34]

Two days later (July 6, 1849) and in the dead of night, Danish soldiers infiltrated Fredericia to attack the enemy occupiers. The Germans—still asleep in their tents—were caught off-guard. The night before, the Danes had spread straw over the city's streets to muffle the soldiers' footsteps. A dense fog further obscured their movements. Despite being outnumbered over 2:1, the Danes liberated the city after eight hours of fierce fighting. The Germans withdrew. [34]

Rasmus' Medallion [35]

Denmark's King Frederick VII presented Rasmus Jensen with a medal for military valor [**Figure**].

Although the Danes had won the first war over Schleswig-Holstein, the Germans re-invaded Denmark in 1864. This time they won. Denmark lost one-third of its territory and half of its economy. It was a humiliating blow. On the other hand, the 1864 defeat ushered in an era of peace, for the Danes soberly realized that never again would they wage war as foreign policy. The people of the little Vejlby parish could now relax and get on with their lives.

For the Jensens, peacetime was followed by tragedy. Two years after Rasmus bravely served his country, he died of TB [36]. He left his wife Maren with four young children, including 5-year-old George. Rasmus' brother was appointed as the children's guardian [37].

In 1873, Mother Maren died from the same scourge that had killed her husband. (According to burial records, a striking number of Vejlby parishioners died of tuberculosis [38].) This time, Maren's brother stepped in as the children's guardian. Each of her children inherited 65 kroner (~$400 in 2015 dollars [39]).

Jensen Family Home in the 1800s

The simple wattle and daub cottage with its thatched roof was typical of Danish peasants during the 19th century.

In 1880, George (age 20) and two of his older siblings were working as servants and/or apprentices for local farmers [40]. This was a traditional way that young people learned skills and earned enough money to buy land and get a start in life. However, the hallowed pathway of old was becoming increasingly rocky.

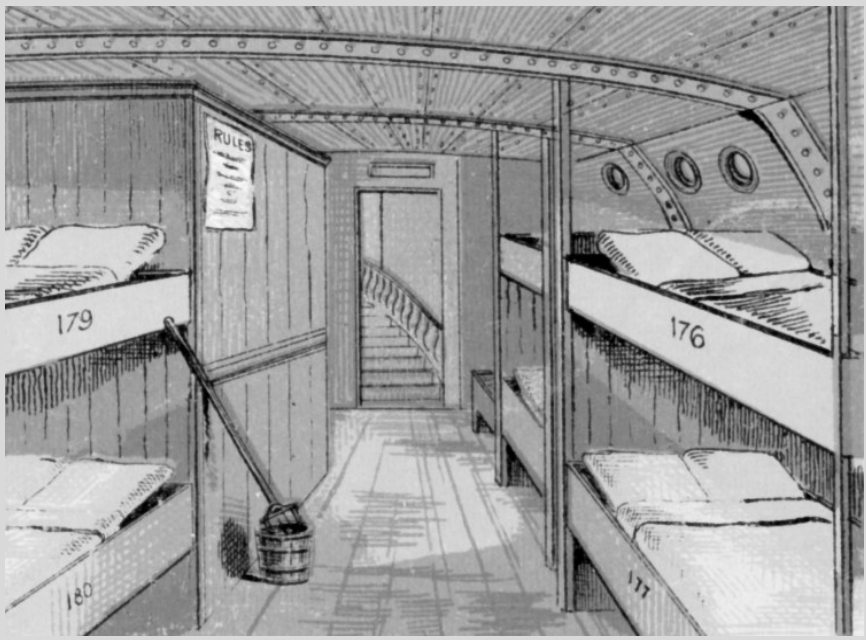
Indeed, opportunities were diminishing for members of Denmark's landless class. While people were not starving, many were hungry and malnourished. They also resented their lowly social status in a highly structured society that offered few opportunities for advancement. One Dane living in Iowa (1882) explained:

> You might wonder why I prefer America. The reason is simply this: hunger is unknown in America, and no kind of work is looked down upon here, if it is done by an honest man. In Denmark nearly every other man has to worry about food and, although there has been a lot of progress during the past twenty years, prejudices have far from disappeared. Not the least of these is contempt for work or, more correctly, for the workingman. Of course, this stems from the days when serfs did the work while the nobility went hunting and raiding. [41]

Around 1881 a large family from the Vejlby Parish emigrated to America [42]. The father purchased farm land near Sioux City, Iowa where many earlier Danes had settled. The new arrivals undoubtedly sent triumphant letters back to their former neighbors expounding on America's bounty. These "American letters" would have been big news, perhaps read aloud after church services. Surely, the Jensen siblings would have listened with rapt attention.

In 1884, 24-year-old George left the Vejlby parish to the German city of Hamburg, a major embarkation center for emigrating Germans and Danes [43]. In Hamburg, George boarded the SS *Westphalia*, a German ship that made the lucrative immigrant run between Hamburg and New York. The shipping company described conditions for prospective passengers in glowing terms:

> The steerage is spacious, light and well-ventilated and has separate compartments for single men, women, and families. An efficient corps of stewards and servants, speaking several languages, is ready under the superintendence of experienced Chief Stewards and Stewardesses to attend the wants of the passengers. The kitchens are on the upper deck, thereby avoiding odors generally so obnoxious to passengers. An experienced physician is attached to every steamer. For medical attendance and medicines no charge will be made. [7]

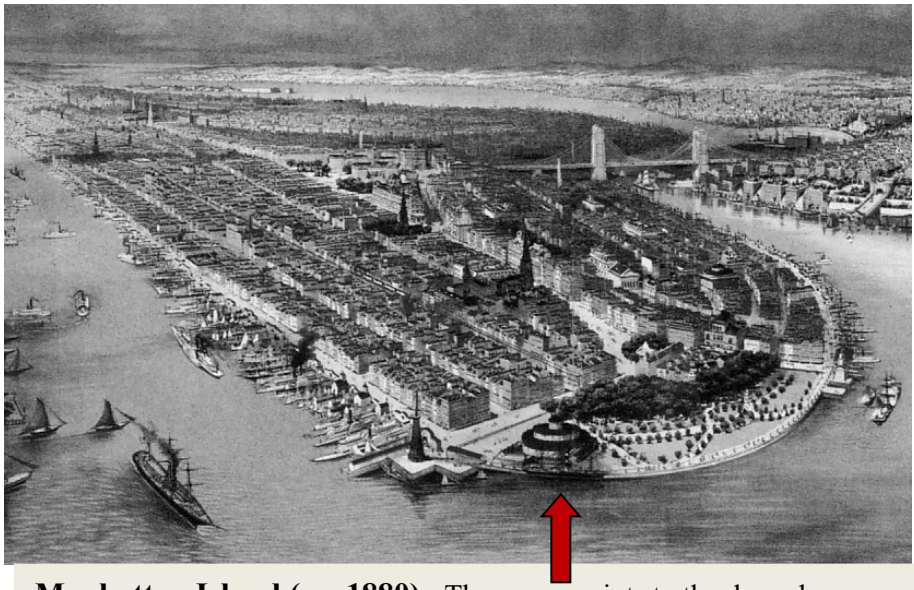


Typical Steerage Compartment [7]

Advertisements like this did not always portray the reality—bad food, mistreated baggage, etc. Living quarters were often crowded with poor, unhygienic, seasick passengers. If a storm arose, they would be forced to huddle together below deck, throwing up in their bunks.

Since this was a German vessel departing from a major port, the SS *Westphalia* would have carried a mélange of Danes, Swedes, Germans, Russians, Hungarians, Jews, and Poles [44]. As the crew assigned compartments to the passengers, George would have jockeyed his position in line so that he would not have to share his steerage quarters with ethnic groups that the Danes considered unclean. Imagine the culture shock that George, coming from the sheltered Vejlby parish, must have felt!

The *Westphalia*, with almost a thousand passengers on board, departed from Hamburg on May 21, 1884. As it crossed the Atlantic, the ship's captain reported seeing a large iceberg [45], not too far from where the RMS *Titanic* collided with one in 1912. George arrived in America on June 2, 1884 [46]. He was processed by health and customs officials at Castle Garden, a former music hall, on Manhattan Island.



Manhattan Island (ca. 1880) The arrow points to the domed building of Castle Garden, New York state's receiving center for immigrants from 1855 to 1890. (In 1892, Castle Garden was replaced by a federal facility on Ellis Island.)

Once in America, he boarded a train bound for Sioux City, Iowa. George would have felt comfortable with the city's large Danish population. One can imagine him excitedly sharing his travel experiences with earlier immigrants, perhaps some even from the Vejlby parish where he was born.

Meanwhile, his future wife Johanna was an unmarried Danish woman working as a governess and caring for other people's children. She must have yearned to marry and have children of her own. With a firm belief in the supernatural, she told a tale of thwarted love:

> Once I was engaged to a man in Rudkøbing. I even had a wedding dress. I put on the wedding dress to show my girlfriends and stood in front of a mirror. Suddenly, my dress and outfit turned black! We all gasped. I cried and took off the dress.

Johanna (ca. 1889) had poise and confidence, but no husband.

Later, I got word that my fiancé had drowned that day. I threw my engagement ring into the sea.

After that, sometimes at night, a drowned man came and stood next to my bed. [47]

Johanna Rudolphsen was born (1861) into a bourgeoisie family on the small Danish island of Langeland. They lived in the town of Rudkøbing. Her father Niels, was a "snedkermester," (*master carpenter*) who made cabinets, furniture, knickknacks, and coffins. His shop must have been in the home, for Johanna remembered playing hide-and-go-seek with her siblings in the coffins.

Johanna's Parents (ca. 1880) Five of their eight children would emigrate to America.

When she was 18, Johanna working as a servant for the family of a rope maker in Rudkøbing. (Young women frequently served in other people's homes, earning money and board by helping out with the housework and childcare.)

Rudolphsen Home (2013) [49]
In the foreground is the small white house where Johanna lived as a child.

Eventually, she left her hometown and headed for Copenhagen where she advanced to the position of governess:

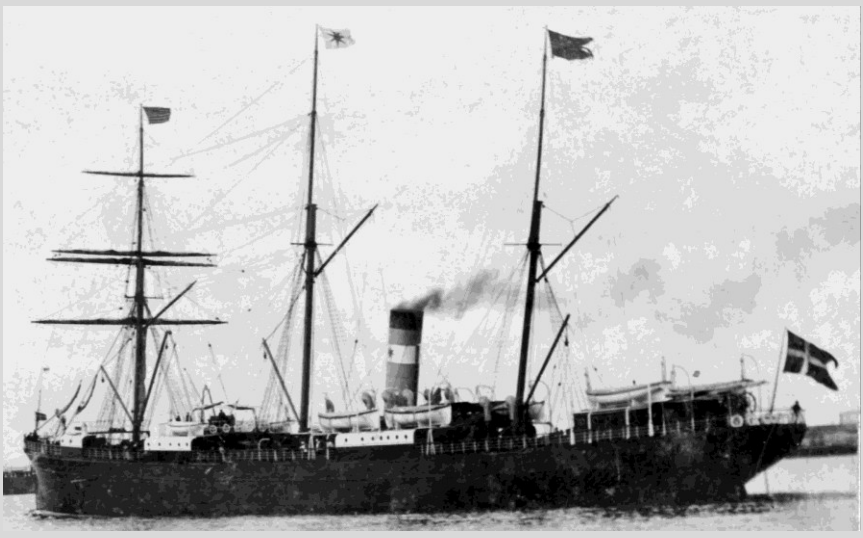
> It was an esteemed position, like a personal secretary of today. She took her charges to the park in Copenhagen and knew quite a bit of royalty. (Royalty liked to come to Denmark, because the Danes didn't pay much attention to them.) [48]

Rudkøbing, Denmark (19th Century)

While there, she had a memorable encounter with the Danish monarch: “One day as Johanna was walking down the street, the King came by. She stepped aside and curtsied, but he wouldn't pass. He stood still and told her to go by. The King of Denmark!" [50] (King Christian IX, who reigned from 1863 to 1906, apparently knew how to treat a lady.)

Johanna must have hoped that emigrating would increase her marital prospects, for three of her sisters had found husbands in America. Indeed, Johanna's chances were better across the Atlantic. Outward Danish migration at that time was dominated by single young men. In Danish-American communities, there were almost two men for each woman [51]. Many single men expressed a great longing for Danish women. One immigrant living in Wisconsin lamented in an 1876 letter, "Genuine Danish girls are just as scarce as mills here. The few who come get married immediately." [52]

The SS *Island* left Copenhagen, Denmark for Oslo, Norway with Johanna on board [53]. In Oslo, the ship picked up emigrating Norwegians and Swedes. On May 16, 1889, the *Island* began crossing the Atlantic to arrive in New York harbor two weeks later on June 1.



SS *Island* [7] belonged to a Danish fleet (Thingvalla Line) that catered to emigrating Scandinavians. It competed with German ships for the lucrative immigrant trade.

Greeting her was the newly dedicated Statue of Liberty—a gift from France commemorating America's struggle for freedom. Surely, Johanna's heart beat a little faster as the ship drew closer; feelings of anticipation were spiked with terror. This courageous woman had exchanged the familiarity and comfort of her homeland for an uncertain future. She had left family and friends in the "Old World" behind to try her lot in the "New World." Johanna was participating in the world's greatest movement of humankind in all of history!

Peter Rudolphsen

Not all immigrants coming to America were seeking opportunity, religious freedom, husbands, and land. Some were on the run! Peter, Johanna's younger brother and a somewhat lackluster fellow, may have been one of them.

Peter (r., 1878) as a butcher's apprentice

After finishing his schooling, 15-year-old Peter moved out of the Rudolphsen home to apprentice as a meat butcher [54]. This was odd. One would have expected Peter—the eldest son—to take up his father Niel's carpentry trade. Plus, butchering was low-status, smelly work. (During the Renaissance, butchers were encouraged to live out of town [55].) However, cutting up meat may have suited Peter better, for it did not require mathematics or the precision of wood craftsmanship.

Eventually, Peter left Rudkøbing and joined the throngs of young people migrating to the cities. He was working as a butcher in Aalborg in northern Denmark, when he met a young Swedish woman named Lotte Carlson. [56]. In early 1889, Lotte became pregnant.

The same forces pushing emigration to America were also pushing landless Swedes into Denmark, which was better off economically. And because southern Sweden had once belonged Denmark, its people shared a similar language and culture. So instead of crossing the Atlantic Ocean to a "New World," many Swedes chose nearby, cozy Denmark. Copenhagen was but 10 miles by ferry from Malmö, Sweden across the Øresund strait.

Lotte gave birth to Jenny Nielsine Rudolfsen in Peter's hometown. In 1890, Lotte and 3-month-old Jenny were living in Rudkøbing, but not with the Rudolphsens [57]. Some months later, Lotte brought her daughter to church for the final christening.

Lotte must have anticipated marriage with Peter. She had named Peter as the father and he had acknowledged paternity. (Otherwise, his name would not have been put on the birth record.) Surely, there were strong forces pushing Peter to marry the girl, but he didn't. Instead, Peter sailed for America in 1891 leaving Lotte and little Jenny behind. (He never married.)

The Rudolphsens did not accept Lotte, for family lore made no mention of her. In a male-oriented society, the Rudolphsens probably blamed Lotte for leading Peter astray. Indeed, Johanna later complained about Swedes crossing the Øresund strait and "stealing" Danish jobs. (No doubt, Johanna viewed with equal disdain the specter of voluptuous Swedish women seducing Danish men.)

Legally, Peter was obligated to provide child support for Jenny until age ten [58]. Danish legislation of 1888 provided that when the father failed to support an illegitimate child, the mother could draw on public funds. In turn, the authorities would try to collect from the father [59]. So Peter may well have emigrated to escape the authorities.

Lotte would have been scorned by society and hard put to make ends meet. Since the paper trail for Lotte and Jenny turned cold after 1890 [29], quite possibly Lotte found a husband to legitimize her and her daughter. Unlike other countries (e.g., Scotland), most unwed mothers in 19th century Sweden eventually went on to marry [60].

Sex in Scandinavia

Indeed, the Scandinavia countries (Norway, Denmark, Sweden) had a relatively liberal attitude towards premarital sex, relying mostly on social controls rather than church sanctions. The typical view expressed by Danish pastors was, "It is bad, but it does go on." [61]

Some premarital alliances were based on practical concerns. A recently widowed man or woman might quickly need a new partner to look after the farm and tend the children. Living together, they could take care of day-to-day demands while planning a nice wedding. [62]

A 19th century sociologist (Eilert Sundt) studied the sexual customs of rural Norway and an apparent increase in illegitimate children. In his 1857 report to Parliament, Sundt carefully documented the frequency of illegitimacy using the new science of statistics. He cited the custom of "night visiting" as a major contributing factor to illegitimacy. [63]

Night visiting was a common form of courtship in rural areas of Scandinavian countries practiced since Medieval times.[4] An unmarried man visited a girl and—if she agreed—would sleep with her. Sex was not assumed. Often parents supervised or the couple was supposed to keep their clothes on.

Sundt showed that areas of Norway where night visiting was prevalent had many illegitimate children. For example in the two years between 1851 and 1852, one eastern region (districts of Gudbrandsdal, Østerdalen, etc) had 66 illegitimate births per 100 marriages. In contrast, a southwestern region (districts of Mandal, Lister, etc.) where night visiting was not as accepted, had only 12—or 82% less. (For Norway overall, the frequency was about 33). [65]

Sundt, who trained as a clergyman, was disturbed by "half-legitimate children" (i.e., born within 9 months of marriage). In a survey of 292 parishes in 1855-1856, he found this occurred for 43% of couples, including 12.5% who had a child *before* the wedding. [66]

According to Sundt's statistics, the working class (tenant farmers, day laborers, and servants) had a much higher frequency of

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4 In Colonial America, where a similar custom (i.e., "bundling") existed, birth and marriage records suggest that fully 30-40% of New England brides were pregnant before marriage. [64]

illegitimate children than those of the owner class (farm owners, merchants, and skilled workers). For each 100 married women in the working class of Oslo (between 1851 and 1852), there were 55 unwed mothers; in the owner class, only 9 unwed mothers. [67]

One 35-year-old farmer's wife recounted her experience of night visiting. She and her future husband, children of "cotters" (tenant farmers), grew up in the same neighborhood and had become fond of each other. As adults, they became servants in separate households. She slept in an animal barn, sharing a bed with another girl. When her sweetheart knocked at the barn door, she would let him in to sleep secretly with her. He kept watch and was careful to be on his feet and out the door before the owner woke up the farm. If a potential suitor approached her, she would talk with him, but if he made signs to lie down with her, she directed the conversation to trivialities such that eventually he would leave. After nine years, she and her sweetheart had saved up enough money to buy land and get married. [68]

Betrothal or engagement had almost equal status to a formal marriage. It provided Scandinavians with tacit approval for premarital sex. Lengthy premarital associations were not unusual. If pregnancy resulted, the couple was expected to marry. [61]

Rural sexual traditions like night visiting became increasingly problematic as society urbanized during the 19th century. Landless youths from farms began migrating to the cities. They brought along their sexual customs but left behind the societal and parental controls. Many of these young people—on their own for the first time—were lonely and disoriented. Not surprisingly, the number of illegitimate births was typically higher in urban centers than the countryside [63].

Illegitimacy in Norway began to decline around 1870 [63]. Night visiting eventually faded as well. In the meantime, one Illinois farmhand, a Norwegian immigrant, complained in an 1876 letter about the absence of night visiting in America:

> I had much fun in Norway that I don't have here. There isn't much opportunity to visit the girls. I haven't been in a girl's bed yet, and I don't know when it can be. They don't have such a custom here. The rules are strict, and they are allowed to shoot those who come in to visit the girls at night, so I don't think I'll be visiting the girls much until I return to Norway. [69]

European Emigration to America

Beginning in the summer of 1845, a sewer-like smell fogged over Ireland [70]. Potatoes—destroyed by a fungal epidemic—were rotting in the fields and stinking up the homeland. Overcrowded and poorly governed, Ireland was brought to its knees. One million Irish starved to death and another 1-2 million fled to America.

Table I compares emigration rates for European countries with particularly high rates between 1850 and 1900. Notice that Ireland's rate was consistently higher than the other countries.

Table I. Emigration *Rates* for Seven Countries [72, 73]
Mean annual number of individuals emigrating per 100,000 of the country's population. Most emigrants went to America.

COUNTRY	1851-1860	1861-1870	1871-1880	1881-1890	1891-1900
Ireland	-	1,470	1,020	1,490	1,010
England	-	280	400	570	360
Germany	260	170	150	290	100
Denmark	30	100	210	390	220
Netherlands	74	69	63	98	55
Norway	240	580	470	960	450
Sweden	40	230	230	700	420

Overall, the main push for European emigration was the economic hardship brought on by explosive population growth in agrarian, pre-industrial societies. Between 1750 and 1850, Europe's population increased 83%—from 145 to 265 million people [71]. The Industrial Revolution had not yet gathered enough steam to provide factory jobs and accommodate an ever-increasing mass of landless children.

Table II shows the total number of immigrants in the U.S. from the same seven countries. The Germans and Irish had the greatest foreign presence. In 1880, they represented almost 60% of the foreign born in the U.S. [74]

Emigration from the seven countries shown in the tables peaked in the 1880s [75]. After 1900, other nations (e.g., Poland, Italy, Russia, etc) produced whole new waves of immigrants landing on American shores.

Table II. *Total* Immigrants from Seven Countries (1820-1950) [79]

COUNTRY	# Immigrants
Germany	6,200,000
Ireland	4,600,000
England	4,400,000
Sweden	1,200,000
Norway	800,000
Denmark	340,000
Netherlands	270,000

Historians have had a field day explaining the cause of Europe's population explosion around 1800. Medicine was probably not a factor, for it was not until ca. 1865 that the French microbiologist Louis Pasteur proposed his "germ theory" of disease. Up until then, physicians—believing that an imbalance of bodily fluids caused disease ("humoral theory")—had been trying to cure their patients with bloodletting, purges, induced vomiting, etc. [75]

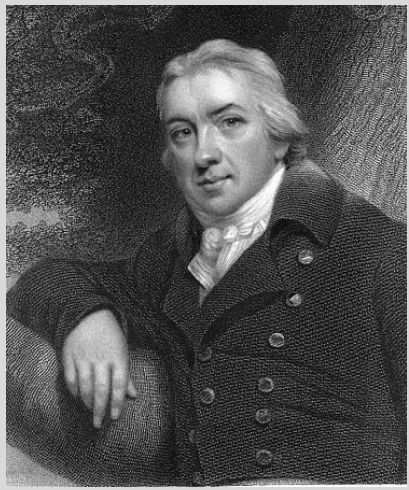
Other factors came into play…. With the onset of the Age of Enlightenment and the church's declining influence, birth rates increased. More women were marrying, and they were marrying at a younger age. Illegitimate births increased. [76]

Vaccination against smallpox—one of the world's deadliest diseases—surely contributed to the population explosion [76,77]. In 1800, approximately 12,000 Swedes died of smallpox (15% of all deaths in the country); in 1822—after smallpox vaccination became common—there were only 11 smallpox deaths for that year [76]. In 1810 Norway, vaccination was mandatory; citizens could not marry or be confirmed in the church without a vaccination certificate [78]. Vaccination against smallpox is estimated to have contributed to 50% of the increased life expectancy between 1680 and 1850 [76].

Another factor was better nutrition. By the 19th century, many European countries had adopted agricultural reforms such as

consolidating scattered farm plots and embracing private land ownership. More efficient farming increased the food supply. For example, agricultural production in Denmark doubled between 1770 and 1800 [80]. Providing more food to a weak and undernourished population almost surely would have decreased death rates.

The lowly potato, which became a popular food item for Europeans around 1800, also enhanced population growth [81].



Edward Jenner [83], an English physician, discovered in 1796 that pus from dairy cows infected with cowpox disease could immunize humans against the deadly smallpox disease. It was the world's first vaccine.

Native to South America's cold Andean highlands, the potato was well-suited for harsh growing conditions and small farm plots. Unlike maize and wheat, it did not require milling. Folks could dig tubers out of the ground and throw them into the kettle. Potatoes stored better than other vegetables, plus they made good livestock fodder during the winter.

The potato is a nutritious food, lacking only Vitamins A and D. Unlike "Old World" grains (barley, oats, wheat, and rye), the potato contains enough Vitamin C to prevent scurvy. Many an impoverished 19th century Irish family could sustain itself on a dreary diet of potatoes and cow's milk. Finally, no other food source is so productive, yielding 2-4 times more calories per acre than other grains [81].

However, what the potato provided could also be taken away, suggesting just how vital it was to population growth in the early 19th century. The same potato disease that devastated Ireland affected virtually all of Europe. Belgium and the Netherlands were the next countries most affected. Mortality in these two countries increased 32% in 1847 with regional peaks of up to 50-60% [82].

The Potato Eaters (1885) by Vincent Van Gogh depicts Dutch peasants eating their potatoes by the light of a small lamp.

More and better food almost surely attracted potential immigrants to America. Some recent arrivals touted the abundance of food in America. One Minnesota girl wrote in 1888 to her parents back in Norway: "I enjoy my food and eat a lot, and we eat every day as if at a party. I drink "silesup" [*warm milk straight from the cow*] every day like a little calf." In 1892, one housemaid described the Wisconsin table spread, starting with the meat "that comes both first and last"—beef steak, mutton, veal, fried ham, chicken, and fish. In 1891, a Norwegian girl in North Dakota explained America's dining habits, "It isn't like in Norway where food is portioned. All kinds of food are set on the table and then you can eat as much as you want." [84]

Meanwhile, America's booming frontier economy needed workers to till its prairies, build its railroads, harvest its timber, and mine its metals. The U.S. offered cheap land, plentiful jobs, and decent wages.

Circa 1870, new steamships were replacing rickety sailing ships, making the Atlantic crossing cheaper and less arduous. Many immigrant families sent money or tickets back home enticing their relatives and friends to come to America. Sometimes these were business arrangements, whereby the immigrant worked a year for the ticket. It didn't matter how they got here; they just came.