

To the Charon's -

PIONEER LIFE IN THE BIG DANE SETTLEMENT

BY AUGUST RASMUSSEN.

FEBRUARY 1, 1902.

My experience in pioneer life commenced in 1856, after a long and stormy voyage from Denmark to America in that year. I shall, by the kind assistance of the *Independent*, give a little of my pioneer life and settlement during forty-five years.

My thoughts are running back to the first Christmas I celebrated here in America, in 1856. It was a merry one, as you will see farther on. My wife and I were then both young, about twenty-seven years each.

PRELIMINARY.

Having determined to make a voyage to the United States to seek our further fortune, we wanted to travel as wife and husband. The pastor of our church, therefore, from the pulpit made an announcement that, at 12 o'clock, April 25, 1856, there would be a double wedding. Said he:

"The old and honored folks, Sören Petersen and wife, will celebrate their fifty-years wedding day. And our young friends, August Rasmussen and Ane Fredericksen, will be



E. P. LIND.

PROFESSOR IN THEOLOGY, AND PASTOR OF SÖBY
AND HALLENSLÖW PASTORATE, 1856.

From Grandma Pearl
on her 90th birthday 1973

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publicly declared husband and wife, after which the latter will take a little wedding trip to the United States of North America. Everybody is invited to be present in the church to share in the holiday, and bid these young folks a last farewell, as most of us shall never see them again. And, if anybody has anything to oppose, he may do so within three weeks; afterward he must hold his peace. This announcement I shall make also the next two Sundays."

My wife and I said, If God will, and we live, we will see America, do a little pioneer work, try to build up a small colony to the honor of God, and then we can say we have had part in a good work.

Before I take up pioneer life, I would mention a school-mate. His name was Christian Johnson. He was a young man, of little learning, but he was resolute, fearless, and always of good courage. He was three years a soldier in the Danish and Dutch war, and took part in severe engagements. He was with the Danish troops July 6, 1849, around the city of Frederitzcia, where the Dutch army was strongly intrenched. There were three Dutchers to every Dane. At 2 o'clock in the night the Dutchers were surprised. Their fortified position was stormed, all their cannon were captured, and 1,800 soldiers were taken prisoners. Hundreds were slain on both sides. There is no question the Dutch were just as good soldiers as the Danish.

C. J. came out without a scratch; and that made him believe that no bullet could hit him, in which opinion he was much mistaken, as we shall see afterward. When the war ended, in 1850, C. J. was honorably discharged. And, as he was not satisfied with the poor board and small wages the big gentlemen paid in Denmark, he left rural work and went on the salt water.

Not satisfied with Denmark, C. J. went on a voyage to France, where he earned some money, and then started off for the United States. I think this was in 1853. He wrote some letters home to his brother, Erastus Johnson, now living in Greenville. As we were from the same village, I got hold of one of the letters and read it. I took his address, which was as follows: "Christ Johnson, Underhill's Saw Mill, North of Greenville, Montcalm County, Michigan, U. S. of North America; here anybody can find me." And I did find him three years after.

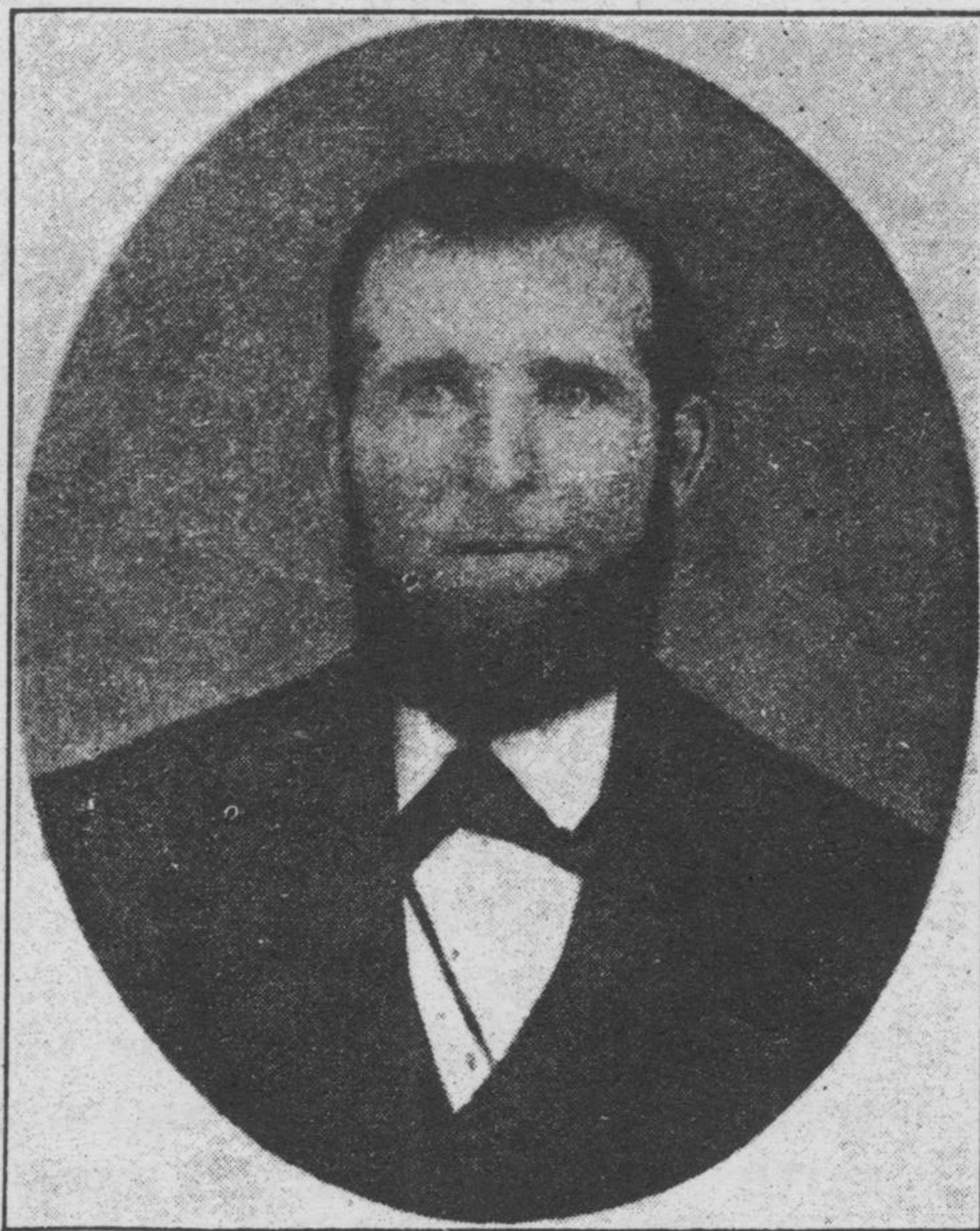
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C. J.'s epistles were short, but truthful, about America. He wrote: "Here are cheap and plenty of good timber land, good wages, earnest people, good government, nice girls; I am going to marry one of them." And so he did. But here we leave C. J. for the present.

I was now fully settled in my mind. America should be our home. But we must first get married. We did not care for the girls C. J. wrote about; but we did care for



MRS. ANE RASMUSSEN.



MR. AUGUST RASMUSSEN.

IN PIONEER DAYS, 1860, ETC.

the good and cheap timber lands, fair wages, and to live among earnest people under good government.

Well, 12 o'clock, April 25th, came at last. As no one opposed the marriage, we met in the old church, the old couple and the young couple, too. Pastor E. P. Lind had thoughtfully constructed his sermon for both parties. He praised God for the fifty years He had mercifully spared the lives of the old people. And he spoke earnestly to us. What a great responsibility was resting upon us from that hour, when we were declared husband and wife!

A good many people had assembled to look upon this

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wonderful double wedding ceremony. Many were moved to tears, thinking upon the long and fearful voyage before us. I myself had to bring my handkerchief to my eyes, and my wife likewise had to use her handkerchief.

Well, we were married, and went home, and had a good time. We spent the rest of the day talking about America. Others, too, would go to America, but they were not ready to start with us. We two should go alone and begin pioneer life, and see how many sugar cakes and golden rocking chairs they had in America, and write and tell all about it.

We separated late in the night, hoping to meet again in America. But first we had to see some rough weather, and endure some golden rocking chairs of seasickness.

BIDDING FAREWELL.

We spent a few days visiting, and then bade the folks farewell. I heard always the same words, "If it is as C. J. writes, we will soon make ready and start." One man said: "Write me a letter as big as a table. I will come, for I believe every word you write me." That man and many others of my dear friends are now sleeping the long sleep here in the graveyard on my own farm."

On the tenth of May we took our last breakfast in the house in which I was born. Sweet home, where I picked the flowers, the apples, the plums, and every kind of small fruits. Although poor and small, it was the dearest spot on earth. My old mother's eyes were filled with tears as she said, "My dear children, I shall never see you again here upon earth. May God bless and follow you to your unknown home in America." My old mother entered my new-built log house a year after. The pioneer life had been begun. How wonderfully God brings things about if we let him!

The people to whom we bade farewell last were my brother's folks, the parents of J. C. Rasmussen, who is now living here in the Big Dane Settlement. We were now babies. I saw tears on every face. I surprised my own feelings by singing: "America is full of gold; the trees are full of sugar!"

Our trunk loaded and the horses in front of the wagon, my brother took the lines in his hands, and we had started on our wedding trip. The wagon wound close by the church

where we were married. I saw for the last time the grave-stones of father, brothers, and sisters. My heart was as if it were crushed between two stones. No one said a word.

In two hours' drive we had reached Slagelse, our first railroad station. Here my brother said, "If God will, and we live, we will see each other in America next year."

ON THE JOURNEY.

At last, farewell. The train moved, and we were soon at the station in Korsör. From there we went on the first steamboat to Keel, one night's voyage.

May 11 we reached Altona. Here I had served sixteen months as a soldier, and I was well acquainted. I visited my old beloved Captain Beemand, and other friends.

May 13 we left Hamburg, Germany. After fifty-four hours, we were across the North Sea; reached Hool, England. The black horse quickly brought us across England.

May 16 we reached Liverpool.

CROSSING THE ATLANTIC.

May 22 we embarked on a great sailship, where we had our home for nearly eight weeks. Here we learned to eat salt meat and hard biscuit, if we had not learned it before. It was a small kitchen we had for a large crowd. It was a full day's work for 300 people to cook their own food in a kitchen room 10x16 feet, and get only half enough to eat. We had fog, storm, and headwind most of the time of our voyage. Sometimes we had the sun on our left, sometimes on the right side, which meant zigzag work or a halt. We saw a whale about forty feet long, and a sea serpent of about the same length. Many were very seasick. One boy died, and was buried in the ocean. And one baby boy was born; he was named Atlantic Storm, because he was born on a dreadful stormy day.

INTO NEW YORK HARBOR

The 16th of July we took on board a pilot, and July 17 we drew into New York harbor. Oh, how glad we were to set our feet on the solid and new land.

In Castle Garden, our satchel, with our most valuable belongings, such as our hymn book, Bible, and other good books, was stolen. This was something different from put-

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ting my wife in the "golden rocking chair," wasn't it? We were glad to get away from this great building where immigrants landed, and hence were distributed throughout the United States.

WESTWARD TO MICHIGAN.

We reached the wonderful Niagara Falls July 19. Here we made a short stop of four hours. We continued westward the same afternoon.

Niagara Falls is one of the most wonderful acts that God has created upon the earth, where so many thousand tons of water daily fall such depths, and make a noise that can be heard miles off; and the sun paints the horizon with a rainbow. In view of this, we could but think reverently of God who had led us through so many mountainous waves, and conducted us safely so far.

July 20, at 2 P. M., we boarded an immigrant train, and started for Kalamazoo. The passage required four days. This was the worst of all our journey,—smoke, dust, and vermin, from which it was almost impossible to escape.

July 24, at 8 A. M., we reached Kalamazoo, which was the railroad station nearest to Greenville in those days. We took a stage to Greenville. We reached the home of Mr. Osgood, a farmer in Oakfield, July 26, at 2 P. M. Here our coachman took a leaf from his note book, on which he traced the route we should take through Wolverton Plains. Then we separated from him, and at 6 P. M. we reached C. J.'s shanty, three years after I had taken his address in Denmark.

Our wedding trip had lasted from 8 o'clock A. M., May 10, to 6 o'clock P. M., July 26, just two months, sixteen days, and ten hours. We were thankful to God for His wonderful care and protection, having reached the end of our journey without a day's sickness. We were hopeful, and in excellent health. How happy we were I cannot describe.

AT C. J.'S SHANTY.

C. J. was not at home, but picking berries in the woods. His wife could talk some Danish. She was preparing supper. A little boy was creeping on the floor. When he was in the way of his mother, she leaped right over him.

And here we had our first genuine laugh in America. My wife said: "This is a new way to get around a child!"

Mrs. C. J. was glad to see us, and, as she could speak a little Danish, began to ask us questions about our journey, which we answered as well as we could. Our long and trying journey had been good for something. I bought me a dictionary in Hamburg, and, as we had English-speaking people all around us on the ship, we had learned to speak a little English there, and not so very little, either.

Meanwhile, C. J. came home, and he was very much surprised to shake hands with us. He had never before seen my wife, and not me for six years. He became as white in his face as a wall. When I noticed this I tried to divert his mind by telling him the good tidings that next year he would see many friends coming over, and his own father and brothers. And for us, it meant to commence pioneer work for them.

The first meal in C. J.'s shanty was at 7 P.M., July 26, 1856, and it consisted of fried pork, butter, raspberries, wheat bread, and fried cakes, all very good.

After supper, we talked to pretty near daybreak.

C. J.'s shanty was small, about 12x20 feet, divided in the center by a board partition, a sleeping room, and a dining room. Well, we wanted to rest a little. Mrs. C. J. handed us a pair of blankets. Dirty as we were, we laid us down on the floor. My wife could not sleep at all. We whispered the rest of the night. We were not quite satisfied — C. J. had not a house of his own after four years' work in America at one dollar, or twelve shillings, a day!

I have said that our satchel was stolen in Castle Garden, New York. Our big trunk, packed full of bed clothes and good woolen clothes, had been missent to Grandville, instead of to Greenville, and we did not secure it until ten weeks afterward; so we had only what we had on our bodies, dust, dirt, lice, from the filthy immigrant cars, all in all, to begin life with in a strange country!

Our first work after breakfast the next day was a thorough bath and a good cleansing. But how to get through this with but one suit of clothes apiece was a perplexing question. Thanks be to God, we had a few dollars left. We decided, therefore, that C. J. and I should go to Greenville and buy so much cheap overalls, calico, and underwear as

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we must have. We bought all we needed for a few dollars. I bought the goods at the store of M. Rutan, and this was the first money I paid out in Greenville. July 27, 11 o'clock A. M. My wife was a good seamstress, and she soon had the goods in proper shape; so in two days we were about playing Yankees.

A CONFERENCE OF FIRST FOUR DANES IN MONTCALM COUNTY.

July 29, 1856, there was a conference of first four Danes in Montcalm County. Where the Gowen railroad station now is, was, in those days, a sawmill known as Gregory's mill. Here was at work a young Dane, by the name of John Peterson, who, hearing of our arrival, came down the first Sunday after. And, as I was born August 1, 1829, and named after the month in which I was born, we celebrated my twenty-seventh birthday, and were quite merry. J. P. was then the fourth Dane, and we four Danes were the beginning of the Big Dane settlement in Montcalm County.

By seeing and talking with J. P., we were a little encouraged. He had just bought eighty acres of land, and he told us that Gregory & Co. had lots of land to sell at \$2 an acre, and he would take work in pay. And the next day C. J. and I went to look at it, and we bought each eighty acres, the southeast quarter of six in seven.

Having bought the land, my first work was to write a letter home to our folks. I think it may be of interest to read a few words of its contents:—

FIRST LETTER TO DENMARK.

“MY DEAR BROTHER C. RASMUSSEN, RELATIVES, AND FRIENDS: I will write to-day, August 3, 1856, to perform that promise I gave you when last I saw you, namely, write you how we got through our voyage, etc.

“We are both in life and in good health. We reached C. J. all right. We are living near a river. Here are plenty of sawmills and lots of work. It is now in haying and harvest time here. The wages are about six times as much as in Denmark.

“As we have not yet received our trunk, we are going to work a little while to earn some money. My wife has a good place with a relative of Mrs. C. J., and C. J. and I

go out to work in the harvest field. We can here get a good house to live, and all the stove wood we need free of charge. Here are thousands of acres of good farming land to be had almost for nothing. Here is more than enough land for all the people in the county where you live. Here are good and noble people. Think what a good opportunity you can secure for each of your children, while in Denmark they cannot get a poor shanty. If God is willing, and we live, my plan is to clear a couple of acres of land, and seed in with wheat, and build a good log house. I can work at this once in a while, and keep to work for the company most of the time, and thus earn our living and pay some down on the land. Now, it is for you to make up your mind and start out of the old house. I will do my part. Come out, and bring along our brother-in-law, and your wife's folks, and as many as you can get. We will provide for you all. I hope to see you once more. Let us soon hear from you what you will do. According to what you write, I shall lay my plans. Your brother,

"A. R."

WENT TO WORK.

Well, my wife went to work, as I said. C. J. and I went to work one week in haying, receiving \$1.50 a day. The next week we got work for two brethren in Oakfield, binding wheat for a bushel of wheat a day each. Four of us cut and bound about thirty-four acres in six days. In those two weeks I commenced to see that the American farmers give good board and fair wages. They were not like those long-fingered, proud noblemen in Denmark, who feed their harvest people on salt herring and barley pudding seven hundred and twenty times in a year. September 10, C. J. took his ox team, and we drove out and got our twelve bushels of wheat. Two of the bushels were the first wheat ever seeded in the earth in the Big Dane Settlement. And out of it I got twenty-six bushels of wheat the next year.

Well, we went from our job, and took the stage road to Greenville to look for our trunk; but it had not yet arrived. Going homeward, we went across Wolverton Plains, where my wife was at work. Although we were greatly disappointed in regard to our trunk, we were in good humor, anyway. My wife went home with us, and

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stayed over Sunday. Monday she went back to Mrs. Thompson's, and I began rafting lumber for the company.

As Mr. Gregory had heard us talking about our lost trunk, he came up one morning, and made me understand that he was going to Grand Rapids to get up a load of goods, and he would like to get the address of the trunk, and try to get it for us. I gave him the color and mark, which was green all over, A. F. D., 1845. Three days after we had our trunk in Gregory's warehouse. How glad we were. Mr. Gregory gave us a good house to live in for the present, and the next day I bought a milch cow of Mr. Sheldon, up on Westplains, and took home my wife. We bought an old cook stove, and commenced keeping house. And we felt as happy as any one could be. Poor people can live happy; I know they can. A poor shanty with love is better than a costly palace without it.

Mr. Gregory had a very good young man for boss. Of him I borrowed a plane, hand saw, and square, and in one day I made a bed, a table, and half a dozen of three-legged sofa chairs, and we had a whole suit of modern furniture.

Meanwhile, Mr. Gregory had heard of our preparation for more Dane people. One morning, when I was at work, he came out to me on the river. Said he: "If you like to clear a little patch of land for wheat ground, I can spare you for two or three weeks." I was very glad for this, and immediately I went to work with my ax, to clear land. And on the spot where my house and orchard now are, I put in those two bushels of wheat I previously mentioned.

For a drag I cut a big oak sapling, and worked it down to 6x6 inches; and with a two-inch auger I bored in thirteen teeth of ironwood. With this implement, C. J., with his ox team, dragged the ground four times crosswise, and it was done. A man by the name of Windewood happened to go by. He laughed heartily, and shook his head as he said, "I would rather have the wheat you sow than what you will reap. You will find that the squirrels will reap it all at your expense."

After that job was done, I worked steadily at rafting lumber to the middle of December, when cold began, with frost and snow. We ceased to raft, and began to pile lumber close to the side of the river, to be ready for more rafting in the spring.

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By this time we began to expect a letter from our folks in Denmark. And, sure enough, to our joy, we received a letter just at Christmas. The letter was written by my brother, and he announced that "Eight families and five young men are coming, in all thirty-six people C. J.'s folks will be among them. We are following your advice. We go the same way you went. We expect to reach you some time about the first of August. We are all well, and trust in God. We hope this letter will reach you before Christmas, and we wish you a happy New Year. Your brother, C. R."

This letter made our hearts glad, and we had that merry Christmas that I told about earlier in these reminiscences. We were now only four Danes, but we had the expectation of multiplying our number ten times to forty, and the newcomers were all our relatives, best friends, and acquaintances. I may here say that poor people in Denmark are accustomed to have a nice supper at least at Christmas; and here in America, few as we were, we did the best we could.

Our meal was finished, my wife was putting things in order, when suddenly there was a rap on the door. "Come in," said I, and in came our friend, John Peterson. He greeted us warmly. "Merry Christmas!" said he. "Thank you, the same," said I, and I handed him one of our fine three-legged sofa chairs, and J. P. seated himself. Meantime the door opened again, and in came C. J. and his wife. She had on his clothes, and he wore her clothes, and they played they were "niggers." They were just as black in the face as my inkstand. J. P. got hold of my wife's washboard and a broomstick; J. P. fiddled, and C. J. and his wife danced. I tell you then we had our second most hearty laugh in America.

THE NEW YEAR, 1857.

We had soon passed Christmas and the old year. The sawmill did not run steadily. I worked every day. When not at work at the sawmill I worked to prepare for a home in the woods. I hewed logs and dug a good cellar. My wife helped me to crosscut a big pine tree for shingles. I had a load of lumber drawn, and put me up a shingle shanty, and then I commenced making shingles and getting everything ready. The first part of May the mill people helped

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me to put up my log house, with a good open shanty in front, and another behind for storeroom.

May 20, 1857, our first child was born. Dr. C. M. Slawson, now of Pierson, was the attending physician. The neighbors were very good to us. And my wife recovered rapidly.

June 10 we moved up into our new log house, the first log house built in the settlement. Here we expected to spend the rest of our days. We dug a well; we planted flowers, garden stuff, corn, and potatoes. Our little piece of wheat looked green and nice. Our cow had a nice heifer calf. How happy we felt. It seemed as if the whole heaven smiled down upon us. One day Mr. Windewood passed by, looking upon my wheat, and he said: "August, I believe you will raise more wheat than the squirrels will eat, anyhow!" "I hope so," said I. "There will be a few bushels left for our baby boy!" "Ha! ha! ha!" said he, as he went his way.

After planting was over, I went to work every day. My wife was singing with other birds in the woods, and raising her baby. She was almost in the "golden rocking chair" now. She made bedquilts, and hoed in the garden. Once in a while she had a visit from some of the Indian folks.

THINGS IN 1856 AND 1902.

Those who have been born in the last twenty or thirty years cannot imagine what a change has taken place in and within twelve miles of Greenville, from 1856 to 1902. On Flat River, from Greenville to Langston, were seven saw-mills. The river was mostly full of logs and rafts of sawed lumber, ready for freshets. The river was from eight to ten rods wide where now it is a small stream. Where there were no rapids, one could stand on a log or a raft and fish in four or five feet of water. From Greenville to Kendallville, and from Lincoln Lake to Stanton, was a vast forest of great pines; only a house and a little clearing once in a while. Where the town graveyard now is, was a small cornfield. A part of Mrs. Monroe's framed house was the only one of the kind on the State road from Greenville to Langston. From the north bridge in Greenville to Rutan's Corners there were only three or four stores and a "blind pig." A little church stood where the Congregational

church now stands. The little grist mill west of the Middleton mills was the only grist mill in Greenville. In 1856, Greenville was much like what Langston is now, as near as I can compare it. Comparing the two to-day, in 1902, I, for my part, must say, This is wonderful. There was then not a factory, not a machine shop. If a man dead and buried from Greenville in 1856, were permitted to come up from his grave and look around a little, he could or would not believe that he was in Greenville. No, he would say, you are telling me nonsense. I am in New York, Boston, or Chicago, or perhaps in Washington, for Greenville it is not; I know better.

I must say one word more: Greenville has been managed by a corps of people of sound sense and excellent judgment. There has been done a wonderful business in Greenville since I first set my feet in it in 1856.

And right here I take the liberty to mention some of the men whose acquaintance I first formed in and within ten miles of Greenville: Rev. Charles Spooner, Mr. Rutan (Mr. Rutan was the first man I made a trade with), Mr. Ryder, Joseph Griffith, Mr. Baker, Mr. Rossmian, all in Greenville. On the west State road: Mr. Horton, Mr. Hart, Dr. C. M. Slawson, Mr. Osgood, Mr. Moore, Mr. Luick, Mr. Satterlee. On Wolverton Plains: Mr. Shilding, Mr. Wise, Mr. Fuller. On the north State road: Mr. Monroe, Mr. Stien, Mr. Peck, W. Wise, Mr. Watson. And here in this neighborhood: Mr. Gregory, Sr., Mr. Gregory, Jr., Mr. Clark, Mr. Rose, and all the wives. These men I learned to know the first two years I lived here. I have worked for many of them by the day. They were all very good to me. They are nearly all gone to rest. May God bless their dust!

Well, we are done with Greenville now for the present, and go to harvest our wheat, because we want something to eat for ourselves and for our friends we expect now every day from Denmark.

NEW ARRIVALS FROM DENMARK.

It was the tenth day of August. My wheat was cut. At 10 o'clock P. M., two heavy farm teams, drawing wagons loaded with big boxes and our thirty-six Dane relatives and friends, forty, including my mother, sixty-five years old, and C. J.'s father, about the same age. To see again the

people to whom we had bidden good-by in the old world was almost like seeing them come up out of the grave.

I had just thrashed my twenty-six bushels of wheat, and it came in very handy. I had made a good, strong, two-wheeled ox-cart, and I got C. J.'s ox-team, put on ten bushels of wheat, and went to the little grist mill and got it ground. That wheat was the first ever brought out of the Big Dane Settlement, August 12, 1857.

Well, we were happy and glad in each other. All were from the same village in Denmark. Erastus Johnson, his wife, children, and old father were among the party. They and a few others went to C. J.'s house, and all the rest came to our home. They were all cared for, and in a few days they were settled. Those who had money bought homes and land, and the young people got work out among farmers in Oakfield. I have sometimes gone afoot as far as Courtland Centre and Plainfield. This is pioneer work, and pioneer work is far from being easy.

If ever there was a people busy, it was we Dane folks that fall. We cleared land, and put in some wheat. We cut down trees, hewed them on two sides, and put up a nice schoolhouse well shingled. We elected a schoolboard, and hired a Miss Haskell for a teacher. But, alas! Miss Haskell could not understand the children, and the children could not understand Miss Haskell. The children went to school wearing wooden shoes; and, oh! what a noise they made.

Bicycles and golden nose-glasses were not in style then in those days. Roads were too new for that. The times called for business, and study, and learning; and the children learned fast, too. The teacher learned to speak Danish, and the children learned to speak English, and the parents, too. Miss Haskell was a good teacher. She taught in the evenings, as well as in the daytime. She did all she could to teach and break us in in our new log schoolhouse.

In this same schoolhouse Rev. Chas. Spooner, from Greenville, preached the first sermon in the Big Dane Settlement. He preached here for quite a while, and tried hard to do good among us, and he warned us against a "blind pig" in Greenville. We need the same kind of a warning now, for we have a "blind pig" now near our homes. Who will kill it?

Winter went by. Those who had money to live on con-

tinued clearing land; C. J. and I rafted lumber for the company. Our wheat looked nice and green almost to harvest time. But there appeared a great number of red squirrels. We could count them by the dozen on the stumps and along the fences. It was of no use to attempt to frighten them. They bit off one head after another, and tramped down the rest, so there was little left to harvest. I had seeded five



THIS SCHOOL HOUSE WAS BUILT IN THE FALL OF 1857.

bushels of good wheat, and harvested but five and one-half bushels! This was a sad disappointment.

A great affliction followed. Our bright and beautiful boy was suddenly taken sick. Dr. Slawson was not to be had. We used remedies as best we knew to relieve his pain, but all in vain. He died February 20, 1859, at 7 o'clock P. M. This, our child, was the first born, and the first buried in the Big Dane Settlement. We dug his grave among the bushes, logs, and standing trees, where now is our beautiful graveyard, where men and women and children have been laid to rest ever since.

Hard times came. There was no steady work at the sawmill. My shoes were worn out. So I said to my wife,

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I must go to work a few weeks to earn something to eat. I got me a pair of wooden shoes, made by a neighbor, put them on, and started out the same way I came in, by Wolverton Plains. Coming to the four corners where the little church stands, I found Mr. Wise plowing. He stopped his team, and asked where I was going. I told him I was looking for a job. As he rested his arms on the fence, he noticed my new wooden shoes, and said, "Those would be good for killing some of the many squirrels we have this year." "Yes, indeed," said I; "if you catch them, I can kill them." And we both laughed. "Do you know who has a little job of work?" I inquired. He answered: "Well, if you will thrash with a flail, you may work at both my crops, wheat and oats. You can have every tenth bushel for your work, and I furnish the machine. I took the job, and began work right off. The machine furnished by Mr. Wise was two sticks of wood tied together with a buckskin strap, one stick or pole longer than the other. With this machine I commenced flailing on his barn floor, and finished his job, and afterwards, also, one for Mr. Fuller, too. I earned in all fifteen bushels of wheat and forty bushels of oats. It was early in September, and hard work in the hot days. It took me near a month. At this time my brother and I had an ox-team, and I drew home all the grain I had earned in two loads.

When I went home after the first week's work, Mr. Wise said that if my wife would pick him a bushel of blackberries he would give her a bushel of wheat, and if I would seed down ten acres of wheat ground, he would give me another bushel of wheat. We made a bargain, and I went home and told my wife.

The next Monday I returned to my job, and my wife commenced picking blackberries. Twenty rods southeast of our house is a hollow in which in those days was a great windfall, where blackberries were abundant, and here she began to pick berries. She had one pail full, and began another when she heard a noise near by, and along came a black bear walking the trunk of a big pine tree. Through fear, she made a great outcry, and fell over the trunk of another tree. Frightened by all this noise, the bear took his way east into the woods, and my wife finished picking her bushel of berries. In those days bears were around here.

One morning, Mr. Whenwood killed three down next the creek, right west of here.

Well, Mr. Wise received the berries, and I was paid the wheat. He at the time was well off, and I was poor; but we were a mutual help to each other, and that is what people should ever strive to be.

That year we had little wheat and a superabundance of squirrels and mosquitoes. In pioneer days, generally, noses are kept somewhat near the ground.

Summer had gone, and six bushels of wheat had been sown. My wife placed over the grave of our son the first flower plant in our graveyard — a rose bush.

A MAN LOST FOR A TIME.

A young man named Hans Jørgensen had bought forty acres of land of us. His home, with board, was with us, when he was not at work in the country: It was a Sunday afternoon, at 4 o'clock. My wife was preparing supper. Hans said he was going into the woods to look for a good tree for shingle bolts. My wife told him not to go far, as supper would soon be ready. He went out, and we waited supper two hours, but Hans came not. My wife said he must be lost in the woods, and I myself thought so, too. Out I went, as far as I dared to go. Several times I called, but I received no response. I returned home; and we were greatly alarmed. My wife said: "Surely, the black bear I saw this fall has eaten him up!" It was now too late to hunt after him that night.

I carried the news to all the neighbors, and in the morning we began a thorough search through the woods. On our second advance, when we fired guns he heard them, and started in our direction, and came to us. When he saw us he was almost crazy with joy. Hans said his greatest fear was that he would be devoured by bears. Lest that he should go deeper into the woods, he tramped around a big tree all night long. He was but eighty rods in the woods, in the space right between where now are the homes of A. L. and H. S. Think what a night he had. Cold and fear had such an effect upon him that I believe they were the cause of his sickness and death. He was the first grown man buried in our graveyard. Although he left property, there is not so much as a stick on his grave. His last resting

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place has been covered with weeds and crops. He was a good and earnest man. I made his coffin, and he was laid to rest among the big pine trees. Forty-five years ago we had a big forest here, evidence of which is still here in the stump fences and in the hundreds of stumps where then there were great pine trees in green foliage. Peace be to the dust of Hans Jorgensen!

CIVIL WAR TIMES.

Men of knowledge, who had their eyes open for political affairs, prophesied war between the southern and northern States. Truly there came up black war clouds, and there was thunder in Charleston. Fort Sumter was where the play began. President Abraham Lincoln made his call for 75,000 men for three months of the militia of the States. Many thought the trouble would be over in a few days, a merry hunting of gray rabbits, etc. But the war continued four long years, and made hard times. Our thinly populated town of Montcalm had to raise \$1,000 bounty to furnish a single substitute, in 1864 I think it was. Please recollect this when you talk of hard times. In those years it took millions and millions of dollars to feed the flames of war, and thousands of the best men to feed the graves; and before it ended it took also the life of our beloved Lincoln.

Throughout those four years Dane people were constantly coming over from Denmark. Some were married; some were single. Michigan's Governor, Austin Blair, April 16, 1861, made a call for ten companies of infantry. Later, other calls were made in response to proclamations of the President. No less than six Danes enlisted, Chris Johnson one of them, and they were all volunteers. Two of them were in the cavalry; the others were in the infantry. Two were in Andersonville prison pen; one died amid its horrors. Peter Gooseman, now living two miles northwest of Greenville, escaped after six months of starvation from this prison, or rather hell upon earth. Those men had hard times.

IN MEMORY OF CHRIS JOHNSON.

I said in the beginning of this writing that "C. J. was in the Danish and Dutch war, and came out without a scratch, and that made him believe that no bullet could hit him, in which opinion he was much mistaken, as we shall see afterward."

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You recollect that was in 1849. Now he was enlisted in the Civil War of '61-'65. In the first battle in which he took part a bullet struck him in the brain, and he fell to the ground dead. That is the last report of him.

As C. J. is resting so far away in the South, in an unknown grave, I feel it to be my duty to say this: In enlisting in the Union army he left a wife and four children. The wife and one child are dead. The other children live in Michigan. C. J. did not do much pioneer work in this settlement, but it must be said to his honor that he was the first young man to leave our town in Denmark for this country, a leader to us who followed. His remains are far away from his relatives. C. J. valiantly gave his life for his country. Peace be to his dust!

HARD TIMES EVERYWHERE.

Many who now talk of hard times have never had experience of a time such as we had during the Civil War. They don't know what they are talking about. The war of '61-'65 made very hard times, especially for beginners in a strange land. Those yet living who had experience of those times know how it was; everything went zigzag, or was at a standstill. The young and healthy men left farms, stores, and shops. Men of education went to the front as leaders. Battles followed battles for four long years. Fear, death, sorrow, and prayer were the order of every day.

In the winter of 1864 I heard a man in a store in Grand Rapids with an oath say that the North would have to put its head under the yoke. That man cut his own throat; he was dissatisfied because the war ended as it did. I cannot help but pray, God forbid that America should see such a war again!

A yard of calico cost twenty-five cents and upwards; a bag open as a mosquito bar cost seventy-five cents, and every little thing in proportion. A woman would take a couple dozen of eggs, and a little butter, and trudge nine or ten miles to Greenville to get a little of what she needed most. I have seen men and women among us Danish people go six miles morning and evening to their work. I myself have gone thirteen miles before breakfast time; left my wife and child in the vast forest, where in those days the Indians traveled by almost every day.

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Some young Danes, either born here or come over with their parents as young children, think the President is the cause of hard times; and that if we had Bryan as President, we would have better times and lots more money. Let me say, the President is not placed in his office to mold money. His duty is to bring things around in the best possible way. By law shall the land be built.

CHANGE IN FORTY-FIVE YEARS.

The younger generation cannot appreciate the marvelous change in forty-five years since the building of our log schoolhouse. The house is still in existence, but now serves as a henhouse, south of P. Jensen's barn J. P. Johnson J. C. Rasmussen, P. G. Rasmussen, and K. T. Rasmussen, and others of the first Dane children, commenced studying there where the hens are now cackling. Where Rev. Charles Spooner preached the first sermon, there "King Cock" is ruler. Where was the narrow Indian trail, there is now a broad road. Where there was a log shanty, now are a fine framed house, barn, and windmill. Where we could hear the "owa, angee," we can hear the preacher. Where there was a small cornfield, stands a church. Where there were wild woods, is a costly graveyard. Where we might meet an ox-team, we may meet three or four covered buggies. Where there were only a few cows, and three or four teams, there are now hundreds of them. Where we had to buy potatoes by the half bushel, we now sell by the car load.

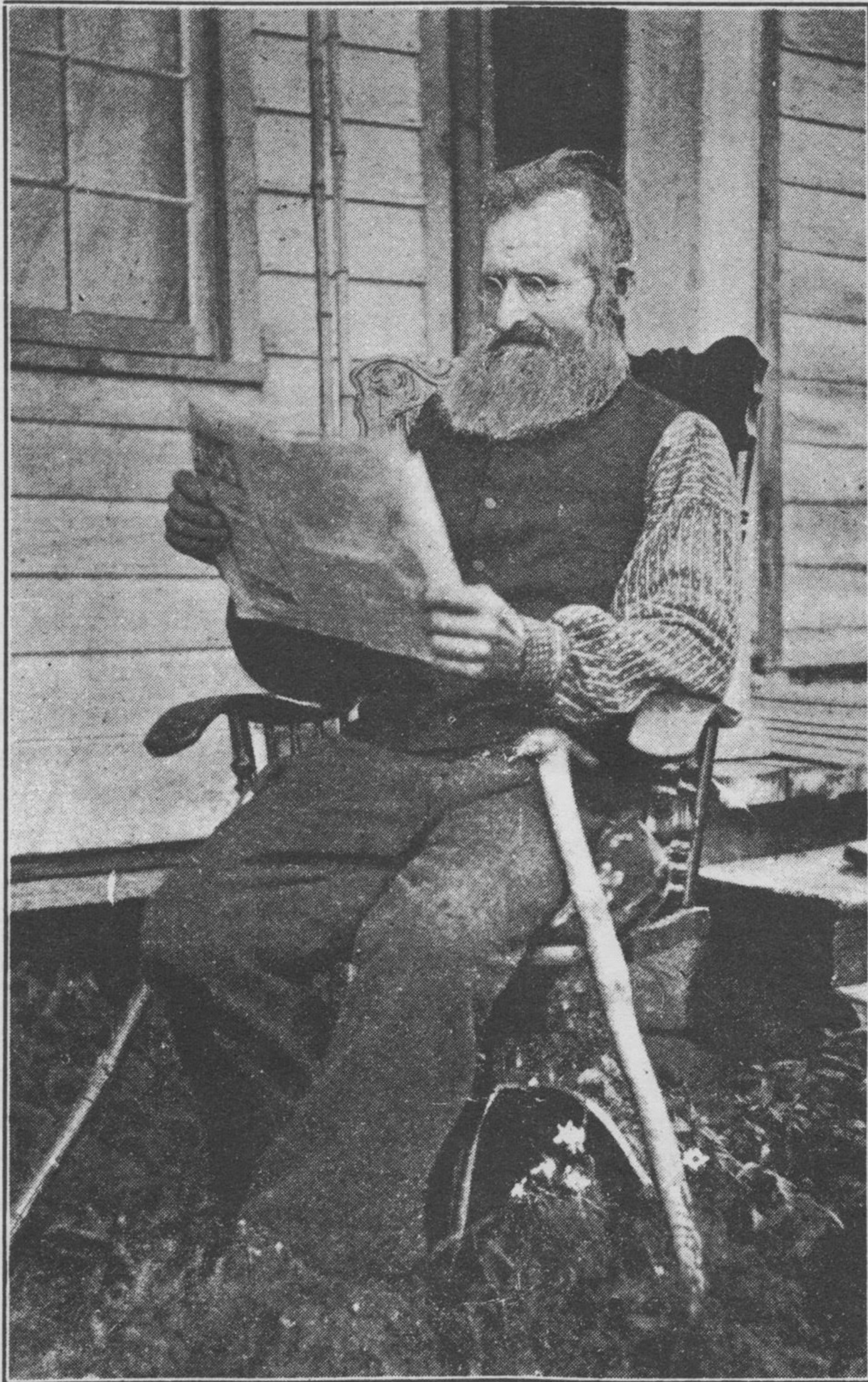
If one will take a walk up on J. Nielsen's hill, and then turn around, he can behold scores of nice houses, and barns, and windmills, all over thousands of acres of fine farming land, and then consider that this was a vast forest of pine land, where roamed the Indians and wild beasts, what a wonder it would be to our young people if they could appreciate the vast change. Then I believe our children would say, The first pioneers have done a good work for us and the coming generations.

Of those living here in 1857, thirty-six people are still living. In 1855, there were only two Danes; in 1856, we were four in 1857, August 10, we were forty. Of these there are still living: In Greenville, 3; on Fairplain, 2; in Grand Rapids, 1; in Chicago, 1; in Howard City, 1; in

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Lanston, 1; in Gowen, 2; and on our homestead, the Big Dane Settlement, 8. The rest have fallen asleep.

Forty-six years ago, in the beginning, the Dane people



MR. AUGUST RASMUSSEN.

After living 46 years on his homestead in Big Dane Settlement.

were few and unlearned. It is not so now. Now we are numbered by the hundred. The Danish language is the mother tongue, and is yet much spoken by the elderly. But even these can speak pretty plain English. Our young

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people learn English in the schools and in daily intercourse. Our Danish people have held township offices, supervisor, treasurer, road commissioners, justices, etc. Not a few of our young people have been in attendance at high schools, normal schools, and colleges. Some are preachers, some are teachers. At least one can speak three languages. Our chief business is farming, but some of our people are men and women of position and influence, with more or less leisure. Some are doing business in the large cities, and others are in all kinds of work. We have blacksmiths, carpenters, wagonmakers, engineers, telegraphers, photographers, bankers, watchmakers, shoemakers, harnessmakers, millers, creamerists, merchants, and soldiers. And daughters and sons are in service in towns and cities about; and, so far as I am informed, are held in high estimation. From the depths of my heart I can say, God lead, bless, and strengthen them to do right and live an earnest life.

FAREWELL.

And now I close these reminiscences with apologies to the editor and readers, and thanks to all for their patience, grateful for the appreciation with which these sketches have been received, and the kindly interest they have created far and near, among our own people and beyond.

THE END.

“Pioneer Life in the Big Dane Settlement” ends with the present week. These pen pictures of pioneer days in this fine section of the country have been of wide interest. Their writer, August Rasmussen, a local pioneer society of himself, should be made also an honorary member of the Greenville Pioneer Society, for the information he incidentally gave of pioneer life in Greenville and vicinity. We extend to him a hearty vote of thanks for his generous services to the *Independent* and its readers.—*Greenville Independent, February 26, 1892.*

EDITOR INDEPENDENT: The sketches of pioneer life in the Big Dane Settlement, written by Mr. August Rasmussen, and recently published in your paper, have furnished most delightful reading for many of your subscribers. Many have waited the continued story, as its installments appeared,

with much the same interest as they looked for the next number of the *Outlook*, which was to give its readers another portion of Jacob A. Riis's inimitable papers describing the manner in which he was made an American. I have almost come to believe that the art of story-telling is a Danish gift; and we have learned that Hans Christian Anderson and Mr. Riis are not the only Danes who possess this rare accomplishment, for we find in one of the most unlooked for places another Dane who tells the story of his experiences in pioneer life with an ease and grace little short of that possessed by our best writers.

Our Danish neighbors of the Big Dane Settlement are not only to be congratulated on the success of the goodly colony which they have planted in this country, but also on the good fortune which gave them a historian who shared with them the hardships and suffering incident to pioneer life, one who has been spared to rejoice with his friends of the old world and the new over this splendid triumph, not only in bettering their own condition, but that also of their descendants.

E. H. JONES.

GREENVILLE, MICH., Feb. 19, 1902.

Mr. August Rasmussen,

Gowen, Mich.

DEAR SIR: We have read your sketches of early pioneer life in the Big Dane Settlement with great pleasure. I wish to convey to you our thanks for the pleasure the reading has afforded us, and to congratulate you on your success as a writer. You have told us those things which we want most to know, and have told your story in a most pleasing manner. Your style strongly reminds me of that of your illustrious countryman, Jacob A. Riis, who has recently contributed a series of papers to the *Outlook*, a New York magazine, telling us how he was made an American. We are beginning to think that good story-telling is a Danish art, and we are proud of our Danish-American who has shown us that some of this truly beautiful art has been brought over to Michigan and planted in Montcalm County. My wife wishes to join me with thanks to Mr. Rasmussen for the best contribution to the history of Montcalm County which has hitherto been published.

I was a little disappointed in not finding any reference to

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Greenville O. Holmes, who at one time was a part owner of the Gregory Mills. I thought you might have had him in mind when you mention the "older Gregory." Mr. Holmes was a dear old man, and was a great friend of his Danish neighbors.

It will be a great pleasure to us to have you join the Pioneer Society of Greenville and vicinity, and I, as the president of that society, will be glad to extend to you an invitation to be present at its next meeting, in the month of July next. The invitation includes your wife. At that time we have a picnic at Baldwin Lake, and shall endeavor to have a profitable and pleasant day.

Thanking you once more for the pleasure you have afforded us by your local history, I remain, dear sir,

Yours very cordially,

GREENVILLE, MICH., Feb. 28, 1902.

Mr. August Rasmussen,

Gowen, Mich.

DEAR SIR: When I wrote you some days ago, I did not intend to send you a letter without a name subscribed, but it seems that I did just that thing. You will please pardon me for the omission. I have taken an interest in your papers, and if I had not been acquainted with those whom you mention, yet that interest would have not been much less. As I before wrote you, you have told in a delightful manner many things which we all wish to know. Your contribution to the pioneer history of this country I unhesitatingly pronounce the best I have seen, and I am sure Mr. Grabill has seldom published anything which has been so generally read and admired as the sketches which you have just finished. I have heard the highest compliments paid you as a writer by ministers and others who are well qualified to judge of the literary merits of your papers. If these were published together in a pamphlet, they would be sought for, and I know would be highly prized as standard pioneer history.

Yours very cordially,

EDWARD H. JONES.