

PIONEER STORY

Dorthea Jensen Bayles, Handcart Veteran

Dorthea Jensen Bayles, daughter of Peder and Kirsten Weaver Jensen, was born January 24, 1842 on the Island of Lolland, Denmark.

When a few weeks old she was sprinkled and christened by Christian Louis Golskuct, a Lutheran priest.

Her home was in a wooded district very near the sea. Here she spent a happy childhood playing in the woods, gathering beautiful wild flowers which grew in profusion, luscious berries, and nuts of several varieties which were stored for long winter evenings.

When the tide was out she used to dig bait from the sandy beach for her father's fish hooks. The hooks were set with a float at evening, and were drawn in, in the morning with their load of fish. It was the duty of little Dorthea to sell the surplus supply of fish to the neighbors, usually receiving about two cent per pound.

It was the childish delight of the little girl to watch the ships go by. Occasionally a steamship on the way to Copenhagen would go puffing by, truly a marvel at that time of history.

At the age of seven she commenced school which was always taught by the priest. As was customary, she attended every other day. During her spare time she acted as nursemaid to the small children of the neighbors.

Dorthea's father farmed in the primitive way. Her mother was an excellent housewife, and aside from her regular household duties, she raised flax and prepared it for the loom. From it she made all of the household linen and underwear for herself and family. She was of a religious turn of mind and loved to read, especially in the scriptures.

The mother and older sister, Kirsten, joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in 1854. Dorthea and her father were baptized April 12, 1856 by Jens Jensen.

At the age of thirteen, Dortehea was taken from school because of religious persecutions, this being a year earlier than the lawful age at which children could be taken from school and placed in service. She remained at home one year, and in 1856, when she was fourteen, her father and mother and two little brothers, Hans and Jens, left for America. Dortehea was placed in service with Christian Broulerson with the understanding that she was to emigrate with him and his family the following year.

Sometime in March, 1857, she, in company with her loder sister Kirsten and brother John, left her old home and went to Copenhagen. Here they remained for three weeks awaiting the arrival of other saints to take passage from Copenhagen to England. Once they had arrived in England, they took the train to Liverpool, and from there they embarked on the sailship, "West Moreland", for the New World. After a rough voyage of five weeks and four days they arrived at Philadelphia, May 31, 1857.

They remained only a short time in Philadelphia, then left for Iowa City, arriving June 9. Here they were provided with handcarts, and after traveling for three weeks they arrived at Council Bluffs the latter part of June. Here the three children met their father and little brother Hans. The mother and brother Jens had died the fall previous at Saint Louis. Cholera had attacked them and many others of the immigrants company which had pushed its way northward from New Orleans to St. Louis. Ignorance of the cause or cure of disease and poor living conditions made it possible for this dread disease to gain a foothold, among them, which resulted fatally in nearly every case. To make matters worse, designing men came among the grief-stricken, offering to give their dead a good burial if the bodies were turned over to them. Little realizing what they did,

ignorant and trusting, they did as they were asked, and loved ones whose eyes were closed in death were given to unscrupulous men who probably sold the bodies to surgical clinics for research work. This information concerning the death of mother and brother came as a shock at this time, for they had had no work concerning them since their arrival in America.

They left Council Bluffs July 2, in Christian Christianson's handcart company. Niels Rasmussen, later of Parowan, was their captain with ten handcarts in his charge.

Thus began that memorable journey across the great plains. They followed their predecessors of the year before by the graves which marked the roadside.

Little brother Hans was not well when they left Council Bluffs. On the 9th day out he died of typhoid fever and another grave was placed by the trail. The father and older sister became ill, and it fell to Dorthea and brother John to pull the handcart alone. The strain was too great for the little girl, and about half way along the journey she sickened and her life was despaired of. So very sick was she, that kind friends would open the tent flap at short intervals with the inquiry, "Is she dead yet?" Her life was spared, but she was unable to pull the handcart more, and was allowed to ride in one of the wagons provided to haul the equipment.

During this time, a great many died. When the company halted for night and they would sing, "Come, Come Ye Saints", the living would envy the dead because of the hardships and trials they were suffering. Each morning there were new graves to dig and services for the ones who had parted this life during the night.

The company arrived in Salt Lake City, September 9, 1857. Here the Jensen family remained one month. During this time the older sister, Kirsten, married Jens Nielson, a handcart veteran of 1856.

She is the mother of eight children, five of whom are living. She labored diligently and uncomplainingly as long as she was able.

She has received her second anointings, the greatest blessing bestowed on mortals here below.

She is naturally meek, kind, patient and charitable, as all who know her will testify. She has been ever faithful to duty. Her simple philosophy reveals a love of her fellow men and a great faith and hope in the glorious principles of the Gospel. Her hardships have tended to mellow and sweeten her declining years. Her light is as a beacon to her numerous posterity.

Although very feeble and in poor health, she is now nearing her 89th birthday. Up until the time when her health and eyesight failed her about a year ago, she was able to care for herself. She still resides at the home which her husband built some sixty years ago.

She died October 15, 1931, at the age of 89 years 9 months and 2 days.

Written by her daughter, Mary L. Orton

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