

Notes of John D. Frost

The following is a transcription of handwritten notes made by my grandfather John D. Frost (1896-1987) apparently written shortly before his death. These notes recount the circumstances of his parent's immigration to Davenport, IA as well as a visit he made with his mother to Løgumkloster, her birthplace, from September 1913 to May 1914. Løgumkloster is now in Denmark but from 1864-1918 was in Germany. It is unclear whether this is a finished work or whether he intended to write more. The last paragraph should be explained. According to John D. Frost, his father was not anti-German but he did have a dislike of the German government, a common sentiment among Danes at the time, stemming from the 1864 war. Jacob Frost's feelings could also be a reflection of the tensions that existed right before World War I. Also, Elsa came to the USA not initially as an immigrant but for a set time period as a companion for her aunt, who had immigrated years before. According to my grandfather, Elsa on a few occasions had expressed to her husband her homesickness for Løgumkloster.

Paul Frost, February 27, 2005

My mother was born Elsa Marie Jeppesen on September 1, 1856 in Logumkloster, South Jutland, Denmark, which area was ceded to Germany after the war of 1864.

She had one brother, Peter C., a year younger. They were very young when their father died. Soon after their mother went into the dressmaking business to support the family.

Polish troops occupied and were billeted in their area during the 1864 war and I recall her telling about how frightened they were.

She had been taught to sew and after graduation went to work for her mother as a seamstress.

Several years later she became engaged to a young man who died before their marriage. I have often thought about how strange turns of events or fate plays in our lives.

Her brother after graduation served an apprenticeship and became a master painter

and decorator. He later married and went into business for himself. They had two sons, Chresten and Johan, both of whom worked for their father.

John D. Brockman who married her mother's sister Seena or Cina had emigrated to Davenport many years before offered to pay her fare if she would serve as a companion to her aunt. She accepted for a specified time period and probably arrived in Davenport around 1889.

Another sister of her mother's named Steena had married Henry Brockman, a brother of John D. They also had emigrated to Davenport years before.

Both Brockman families are buried in the City Cemetery at Rockingham Road and Division St. in Davenport.

One day my father asked his first wife "who is that nice looking lady who is always with Mrs. Brockman". According to him she said "oh someone you can marry when I am dead and gone".

I recall my mother telling about attending the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, with one of her cousins and how they held onto their purses because of the many pickpockets.

In the meantime my father had met that nice looking lady and after his first wife died in 1893 they began to date. When my father proposed, she accepted but returned to Logumkloster to fulfill a promise to her mother. On her return they were married which I believe was very early in 1895.

My father, Jacob Jorgen Frost was born August 12, 1851 in Snurom, Island of Als, South Jutland, Denmark which area was also ceded to Germany after the 1864 war.

He had 2 brothers and 3 sisters all older. His father died on November 11, 1852. His mother died on November 19, 1883.

To escape compulsory German military service he left for Minnesota before he was 18 to work on a farm as payment for his passage.

It took 3 years to pay off his debt during which time he received a place to sleep, his board plus a small allowance for clothing, etc.

While working on the farm he said he often visited St. Ansgar, a small Iowa town near the Minnesota border. Therefore, it could be assumed that the farm must have been close to the Iowa border.

His sister Louise, 5 years older had emigrated to America ahead of him. While pure conjecture, I believe she settled in or near St. Ansgar, a Danish community, and that she arranged for my father's passage with the Minnesota farmer. This seems logical because my father could not have made the arrangement, his frequent visits to St.

Ansgar, and the fact that his sister later married a farmer from Oelwein, Iowa, not far from St. Ansgar.

For unknown reasons, which he would not discuss, he fell out with his sister and seemed very bitter. On numerous occasions my mother urged him to write or visit her but to no avail.

I believe he was influenced to come to Davenport, around the age of 21, because a Danish family he knew had settled there.

He was hired by J. H. C. Petersen, the department store founder, as a yardman and was later promoted to coach man. During this time, he became a naturalized citizen being sworn in with a large group from Davenport at the Court House in Muscatine, Iowa. (I discovered this when my mother needed proof of his citizenship for a visa.)

He became a representative for a flour mill in Walcott, Iowa, which he said was very lucrative for a number of years. He had a large territory which included the Tri-cities. For transportation he bought a pair of young, speedy, matched, pure blooded stallions. He must have been proud of this team because of the many stories he told.

One worth repeating was when a man in Moline asked him to name his price for the stallions. He replied "Mister you don't have enough money". When he found out the man was John Deere he apologized but told him they still were not for sale.

I am not sure about the sequence of the following events.

His visit to see his mother which was prior to her death on November 19, 1883. On arrival he was given 24 hours to leave Germany because skipped earlier military service. Thru a nephew it was extended to a week while there he arranged passage for his brother Hans and his wife Karen, who later farmed at the outskirts of Davenport. They are both buried a few feet from my father's grave.

I believe he married his first wife after his return from his visit to see his mother.

Thru a foreclosure he became owner of a piece of property that contained a small tavern and grocery store which he operated because he left the flour mill when it changed hands.

He bought out a larger tavern at the northeast corner of 3rd and Warren Streets closing the smaller establishment, which I believe, occurred just prior to or soon after his first wife's death in 1893.

When my parents married they lived in the apartment above the tavern where I was born. I had two brothers both born dead.

When between the ages of 3 and 4 I made daily trips to pick up meat scraps at a

butcher shop to feed an owl in a barber shop next to Henry Claussen's shop, all in the same block and always guarded by my father's Great Dane, which attracted considerable attention. I mention this because I have wondered if I actually remembered these treks or if it was because of hearing my parents talk about it because of the way the dog protected me.

To quiet a pest who wanted to buy my father's business he set what he thought was an exorbitant price and to his surprise the man bought it anyway.

Therefore, we moved into a house a few doors west of Howell St., on 2nd Street early in 1901. I definitely remember living there because I had scarlet fever and recall the removal of the quarantine sign after fumigation which killed our two canaries.

While pondering his next venture he received an offer from the Independent Brewing Co. to operate a tavern under construction on a former brewery site gutted by fire at Telegraph Road and Rolfe St. What appealed to my father was the large living quarters on sizeable grounds containing a large stable and smaller structures undamaged by the fire plus their offer to install a carbide lighting plant and minor structural changes he wanted.

My mother didn't share his enthusiasm and to get her blessing told her to hire a live-in hired girl and a woman to do the weekly washing and ironing.

We moved that summer and that fall I started to school for the first time. My father had hired a live-in handy man to do early morning and miscellaneous chores plus several full time and part time bar men.

Soon after moving my father began to build cages for rabbits, squirrels and guinea pigs plus 4 or 5 separate pens for different breeds of chickens. He said he wanted me to have plenty of pets but I am sure he enjoyed them more than I did. We still had the Great Dane and several cats housed and fed in the stable.

My father was not very tall, about 5'8" but was strong as an ox and feared nobody. It bothered my mother on those few occasions when he tanned my derriere. I overheard her warning him about coming down too hard. He was a soft touch. My mother would tell him I could hypnotize him into buying anything I wanted.

His major hobby was horses. I was taught to ride, hitch and unhitch them to any vehicle, including grooming, feeding and caring for them. I enjoyed the horse races with him in the summer time and the cutter rides with sleigh bells ringing behind a frisky horse in the winter.

He drank very little, rarely if ever drank whiskey, but was a heavy cigar smoker. He hated cigarettes. He never gambled or bet for money but along with two of his best friends, Dr. Rudolph, our family doctor and Henry Runge, the mortician, lost sizeable sums in wild cat stocks (oil, gold and silver mines, etc.) which he

considered investments. I recall how those kinds of investments upset my mother.

In 1908 he built his own establishment on a vacant half of a city block he bought years earlier as an investment on Rockingham Road bordered by Clark and Rolfe Streets. It was here that the picture of my mother and father standing in the garden was taken and where I am sitting on a horse in the background.

For as long as I can remember, as soon as I finished the 9th grade, my mother's uncle, John D. Brockman wanted me to go to work at the Iowa National Bank where he was a Director and Vice-President and where he wanted to teach me the banking business.

My father felt I should first have at least a business education before entering the bank so when I finished the 9th grade I enrolled in Brown's Business College where I took double entry bookkeeping, short hand, typing, banking and commercial law. Before I finished my mother's uncle died which ended further thoughts of a banking career.

When I finished the business courses, Brown's referred me to the Davenport Wagon Co. and went to work as a secretary to the General Manager at \$30.00 per month in December 1912. When I left at the end of August in 1913, my salary had risen to \$45.00.

Soon after my father's death in March, 1913, my mother sold the business, buildings and property for cash plus a bungalow and several pieces of rental property which were located on Hancock Ave., just east of Lincoln Avenue.

We moved into the bungalow and because it was not close to public transportation my mother bought me a new Model T Ford runabout.

Because my mother was having difficulty in recovering from my father's death our family doctor suggested a visit to her birthplace as the best medicine.

She accepted his advice and because she expected to be gone for at least 6 months I was to accompany her. We stored the furniture, rented out the bungalow, arranged for collection of rents, maintenance, etc., quit my job effective August 31st, sold my runabout and left for Logumkloster on the 3rd or 4th of September.

A few days later we boarded our liner at Hoboken, New Jersey, a slow one taking 12 days to cross. My mother had been seasick on each of her 3 previous crossings, even in calm seas, so our Doctor had suggested a slow liner. She wasn't seasick a single day on this one or subsequent crossings even on rough seas. She made a total of 9 crossings all told.

Nothing can compare with the luxury of a slow Atlantic crossing on an elegant liner particularly if not seasick. Breathing sea air on encouraged walks or while lolling in assigned deck chairs whets one's appetite. I was always hungry in spite of the 3

delicious meals served daily each with several entrees plus the in-between snacks at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.

I thoroughly enjoyed my maiden voyage. The sea was calm even in the English Channel. I was surprised at the temperature change when we crossed the Gulf Stream. I met many interesting people including the radio operators, one of whom gave me a personal tour of the ship, which included many areas not on the regular tour.

I was impressed with the cleanliness even in the boiler room where stokers, stripped to the waist, were shoveling wet coal to maintain the required head of steam. I was amazed at the length and diameter of the shaft that drove the single screw that propelled the ship. (Propellers are called screws). Smaller and slower liners are single screw ships whereas the larger and faster liners have twin screws. I was also impressed at the efficiency of the stewards and waiters, there were no foul-ups and they seemed to anticipate one's needs.

Because of low tide we docked at Cuxhaven and went by train to Hamburg. After clearing customs we left by train transferring at Tondern for Logumkloster.

European trains were strange, the smaller engines and their shrill whistles; the coaches with their compartments and different classes most of which ran on narrow gauge tracks.

We stayed with my uncle and aunt, Peter C. and Ida Jeppesen in the house where my mother and uncle were born. My uncle was semi retired. His painting and decorating business was being run by his two sons, Chresten who was married and lived a short distance away and Johan who lived with his parents and who expected to be called into German military service within a few weeks.

We had arrived late at night so the next morning my uncle took us on a tour of the house, which was U-shaped with a garden in the courtyard. He pointed out the changes and improvements he made since my mother last saw it.

A major change was from a thatched to a tile roof. I thought he might be joshing when he said storks preferred to nest on chimneys on houses with thatched roofs although I later heard it was considered good luck. At any rate, I never saw any storks because they had migrated south and had not returned by the time we left.

Their home was L shaped and always very neat. While I remember some things about their home there are many about which I draw a complete blank.

I thought it odd that they kept a cow at the extreme end of the one wing. My aunt cared for it and did the milking. I often helped her and when I did I had to wear wooden shoes like she did. They were clumsy and made walking difficult.

There were several heating stoves in different areas plus a kitchen stove for

cooking. My aunt was an excellent cook using mostly Danish recipes and I enjoyed all of them. The fuel for heating and cooking was a sort of coal dust that had been formed into what they called briquettes and were tossed into the fire which had been started with kindling.

The entry way from the front door had a large rack for overcoats, hats, etc. There was a rack of long stemmed pipes, some with meerschaum and some with porcelain bowls. I was surprised when they had company the men would select a pipe and light up. Their tobacco smelled much like Turkish tobacco.

Their home in front was built right up to the edge of the street, which was paved with cobblestones, which made walking difficult for women with high-heeled shoes. My mother fell one evening and struck the side of her head as she fell. The next morning her head was swollen and one eye was black and blue and one ear looked like a boxer's cauliflower ear. She had after effects for many years afterward.

There was no alley, as we know it. It was more like a small lane that had a hardened surface that was easy to walk on.

Lygumkloster was a small town, population less than 1,000. German was the one language taught in schools but the older generation as well as many of the younger generation spoke Danish. My uncle at one time was an elected official similar to an alderman and ran on the Danish ticket.

At times, probably because of events at the time, Danes drew together and sometimes openly expressed their feelings under German rule. A similar condition existed in Alsace Lorraine where territory was ceded to Germany after the war of 1871. In that area I seem to remember that the German Crown Prince was offering rewards to any German soldier who killed any of the French extremists.

There was only one school and German was the basic language. The first time I passed there at recess I noticed the boys were lined up in squad form.

I recall my father wanted my mother to make two promises if he died first, one was that he wanted to be cremated which she said she would not do, and the other was he didn't want me to be raised in Germany if she had thought of going back there and I am not sure what her answer was.