

# Odyssey of a Danish Lutheran Minister in America

This is the story of one man's struggle to bring the word of his God to Danish immigrants in America based on letters, manuscripts and family recollections. It starts with his birth in Denmark and ends with his death in California some 66 years later. Was he successful in his endeavor? If you measure accomplishments in physical terms, some of the churches he helped organize and build still stand today in Oregon and California. In terms of spiritual accomplishments, he also achieved much during difficult times, as his letters will attest. Did he recognize that America was the melting pot for all of Europe in the 1800 and 1900's, which resulted in the dilution of country specific religions? Was his fight lost before it began, or was his mission to bring hope and promise to new immigrants to allow them to blend with others of different beliefs? Let's examine his life, as we know it from the few remaining documents.

Included are three existing letters written by family members who were familiar with the life and times of P. L. C. Hansen. The first was written in 1916 by Marie Hansen (Johnson), P. L. C. Hansen's second wife, to her Mother Laurine Johnson (Kristensen). The second was written in 1935 by Austin Hansen to Laurine Johnson his Grandmother. Lastly, a letter wrote in October 1977 by Agnes Williams (Hansen) to James Norvall her nephew.

Also included is a treasure of 63 letters, written by Rev. P. L. C. Hansen to the Rev. Chris Falck. These are part of the Rev. Chris Falck collection in the Danish Emigration Archives in Aalborg, Denmark. Handwritten in Danish, they have been transcribed into English by Karen Viejn and are now part of that same collection.

Danish Parish records and census data from Denmark and the United States have been incorporated where they materially add to the telling of his life story.

The book is on CD in Adobe Acrobat Reader format suitable for both PC and Macintosh computers. It is available from the author at a cost of \$25. If you are interested in purchasing this book, send an email to the author at:

[jervin.hansen@gmail.com](mailto:jervin.hansen@gmail.com)

A few sample pages follow to show the extent of the author's work.

James Arthur Ervin Norvall  
Author

## The Journey Begins

It is the 29th of April, 1854 in the farming parish of Barløse on the island of Fyn in Denmark. The first child, a son, is born to Hans Christiansen and Gjertruid Hansdatter. This child is named Peder Lauritz Christian Hansen.

### Fødte Mandkøn

No.	Aar & Datum	Barnets fulde Navn.	Daabens Datum enten i Kirken eller hjemme.	Forældrenes Navn Stand, Haandtering og Boepael.
4	29 April 1854	Peder Lauritz Christian Hansen	Dobt I Kirken 6 Jun 1854	gmd Hans Christensen og hustru Gjertruid Hansdatter Barløse Mark, modr 28 Aar.

He was to have one brother and four sisters. Johanne, who died at two years of age, a second sister named Johanne, Christian, Maven Hansine and Jensine. An excerpt from a letter written by Agnes Williams (Hansen) may best describe the economic circumstances.

“The Hansen family history, as much as I know about it, began in Denmark, where my father and mother were born. Grandfather’s name was Hans Christiansen as it was the custom at that time that the oldest son took his father’s first name and added sen to it; so Papa’s name was Peder Lauritz Christian Hansen. Papa’s parents worked in the fields so he was raised together with uncle Chris (Christian Hansen) by his Grandmother (Johanne Nielsdatter).”

Land in Denmark during these times was owned by the gentry and either sharecropped or worked by the use of day-labor. Everyone in the family worked from childhood until physically unable to perform the demanding work. Several generations often lived in the same house due to the depressed living standard of the time.

School attendance is compulsory for children from their seventh through their fourteenth year. Quoting from ”The Americanization of the Danish Lutheran Churches in America”,

*“Excellent as are the Danish Latin schools, and in every respect fully up-to-date as are the leading municipal schools, Denmark possesses a third kind of educational institution, more peculiarly Danish and perhaps deserving of even greater notice: the rural high schools, about ninety in number, are dotted all over the country. They are all private undertakings, subsidized, however, with few exceptions, and on an increasing scale by the State. Inspired by Bishop Grundtvig, who had for years been preparing the way for them, ..... Although the spirit in which most of them work is both religious and National, practical ends have always been kept in view, and it would be difficult to overrate the importance of their work, which has now for a generation and a half, instilled into the young peasant farmer - and his wife - a vast amount of useful and always well-chosen knowledge.”*

Depending on ones learning ability as assessed by his teachers, continuing education was made available to a select few who showed promise. Such was the future for Peder Lauritz Christian Hansen. Peder was offered the opportunity to study for the ministry or to be come a physician. He chose the former perhaps based on his experience in the Danish Lutheran Church. Secondary education in Denmark at one of the folkschools almost always required attendance away from home similar to a college setting today.

The Census from February 1, 1855 in Barløse shows Hans, Gjertruid, Peder and Gjertruid's mother and father all living together.

Odense Amt.    Baag Herred    Barløse Sogn    Barløse Skoledistrikt

den 1st Februar, 1855

Hans Christiansen	31	gift	Barløse
Gjertruid Hansdatter	28	gift	Barløse
Peder Lauritz Christian Hansen 1	ugift	Barløse	
Hans Christian Jacobsen	63	gift	Barløse
Johanne Nielsdatter	61	gift	Barløse

Denmark conducted another census, which was taken on February 1, 1860. Hans, Gjertruid, two children and Johanne Nielsdatter, Gjertruid's mother, were living in Barløse Mark.

Odense Amt Baag Herred, Barløse Sogn, Barløse Skoledistrikt,  
den 1st Februar, 1860

Hans Christiansen	37	gift	Barløse
Gjertruid Hansdatter	34	gift	Barløse
Peder Lauritz Christian Hansen 6	ugift	Barløse	
Johanne Hansen	1	ugift	Barløse
Johanne Nielsdatter	68	gift	Barløse

In 1866, about the time he would have started secondary education, the family moved to Grindløse Parish about 60 miles north of Barløse. This was the birthplace of Hans Christiansen, Peder's father. The census record of 1870 reflects this change in family location and composition:

Odense Amt, Grindløse Sogn, den 1st Februar, 1870

Hans Christiansen	M	46	gift	Klinte
Gjertruid Hansen	F	43	gift	Barløse
Christian Hansen	M	8	ugift	Barløse
Maven Hansine Hansen	F	5	ugift	Barløse
Jensine Hansen	F	2	ugift	Grindløse

Peder attended Vallekilde Folkehøjshole in Hørve in 1875/1877. He was listed as "Peder Lavrits Kristian Hansen, Grindløse, O." The "O" meaning Odense, the county in which Grindløse is located. A directory published by the school entitled "Vallekilde folkehøjskoles lærere og lærerinder fra 1865 - 1923" shows that he was later the director of a summer folkschool and a priest.

The years from 1879 through 1882 were spent at Askov Højskole. He was also listed as a teacher in the free school system, founded on the ideas of N. S. V. Grundvig. Nothing else is known about his early years in Denmark.