

Niels Hansen and his Wives

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This document has been prepared by Mike St. Clair based on my own research and input from many other people over the years. You may contact me at mike@saintclair.org and may see the latest version of this document at http://www.saintclair.org/famhist.html/stories/Niels_Hansen_Wives.pdf.

Based on various computer files (like Ancestral File, IGI, Pedigree Resource File) and compiled paper files like family group sheets, Niels is reputed to have seven different wives and to have had children by only two of these. He was a practicing polygamist during the early days of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He was one of the early members to join the church in Denmark and emigrated to Utah with many thousands of his countrymen. Later, primarily due to the impact of federal prosecution of those with more than one wife, he emigrated from the U.S. to Alberta in western Canada. I am now in the midst of a project to try and confirm or refute the reputed spousal relationships. At this point I believe he was married six times and had children by three of them, although one wife and her only child died within just over a year of their marriage. It appears that two of his other wives either had children by earlier husbands, or had adopted children, either before or during their relationship with Niels. I welcome input from anyone who reads this document; corrections, additions, suggestions for further research, pointing out of incorrect reasoning, or anything at all you would like to say.

Following are my conclusions to date:

1st Wife: Karen Anderson. After immigrating to Utah she seems to have gone by the first name Caroline for the rest of her life. I haven't noticed this as a common change from Karen for other Danish immigrants connected with my family. She is the daughter of Jens Anderson and Maren Henningsen, born 23 Sep 1833 in Svenborg Amt, Denmark. She married Niels 12 Nov 1855, one month before they emigrated from Denmark. He had been serving as a local full-time missionary and I'd guess he met Karen during his missionary travels in Denmark. Between 1857 and 1874 she bore 9 children of Niels' in Utah. Most of these were born in Logan, Cache county, but some were born in Brigham City, Box Elder county and in Salt Lake City. Shortly after the birth of their first child, Niels and Karen were sealed in the President's Office by Brigham Young on 13 Dec 1857. Note that in 1860 they were again sealed, this time in the Endowment House. I haven't come upon any explanation for this second sealing.



It appears that Karen lived with Niels until the heavy persecution of polygamists began in the mid-1880s, which covered all of her child bearing years. It appears that she was in poor health by this time and unable to stand the rigors of the Canadian winters. Canada was very firm that anyone emigrating would not be allowed to practice polygamy within that country.

In the 1880 census for Cache county, Logan Precinct, Niels and Karen are together with their children. Two adjacent dwellings held two of his other wives. After Niels removed to Alberta, Karen remained behind in Cache valley for the rest of her life, dying almost exactly one year before

her husband. In the 1900 census, about 18 months before her death she was residing in the home of her daughter Sarah Fjeldsted in Oneida county, Idaho. The Ancestral file indicates she died and was buried in Preston, Franklin county, Idaho. When Niels died a year later in Alberta he was transported down to Preston for burial and was interred next to Karen. It appears that the relationship between Karen and Niels remained good, as many of their children joined him in Canada after marriage. I have been to Preston and seen the graves of Niels and Karen there, which are together with their daughter's family, the Fjeldsteds. Following are shots of their present gravestones. It's my understanding that they were first buried in another smaller cemetery, and later moved to the Fjeldsted family plot in the Preston City Cemetery. Note that the spelling on these stones doesn't match that which they used in life. Some of their children did begin using the spelling "Hanson" in the next generation.



Grave marker commemorating Neils Hansen. This is in the Preston Idaho Cemetery and is next to that of his first wife, Karen Anderson, and the family of his married daughter, Mary C., who married Willard Fjeldsted.



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2nd Wife: Anna Catherine Jensen. On the same day that Niels and his first wife were sealed in the Presidents Office in Salt Lake City, Niels was also sealed to Anna. I believed for a time that Anna may have been Karen's sister. I was partly justifying that by the following: Even though Karen is most often referred to as of surname Andersen and Anna as Jensen, this was a period when the standard patronymic naming practice in Denmark was changing, and it isn't uncommon for a man named Jens Anderson to have children taking both styles of surnames. At this point, I am leaning away from this theory. It now looks more likely that Anna is NOT Karen's sister of the same name and close to the same age. Their actual birth dates and places do not match up. I still don't know where Anna came from but it appears that the sealing to Karen was timed to happen before this first polygamous marriage of Niels.

Anna and Niels had one child, who died as an infant. Hans Jorgen Hansen was born on October 21st, 1858. just over 10 months after their marriage, and he died on the 4th of December the same year. His mother died less then three weeks after his birth, on November 9th, and thus didn't live as long as her little son. That's why she disappeared from the records immediately.

3rd Wife: Bodil Hanson. On 6 Dec 1862, the Endowment House sealing records include a record of Niels being sealed to this wife. It's clear from his birth date and place that this is my Niels Hansen. Bodil is suppose to be the daughter of a Maren Hansen and Claus. No surname is given in the Ancestral file for her father. I suspect this indicates she is the illegitimate daughter of Maren. I have not searched for the actual record of her birth, and that should clear this up. In the 1870 census of Cache county, Logan city, Niels is living with his first wife and their children. Next door is a person that is likely Bodil, although the name is hard to interpret. Living in that household is a 28 year old male (possibly Phistina - again hard to read) and 13 year old Maria that could have been children of a previous marriage. Bodil was already named "Hansen" before her marriage to Niels and perhaps she married a prior Hansen and had at least these two children. The male could have possibly been a younger brother to Bodil and Maria may have been his child rather than hers. There are no clues that I can find in either the Ancestral File nor the IGI as to the identification of these two dwelling-mates of Bodil in 1870. In 1880 she is living two houses down from Niels, with his 4th wife living between them. I haven't found Bodil in any other records so far.

4th Wife: Anna Christina Arvesen (or Avesen). I haven't found a marriage record for her (known as Christina) but I have found other evidence of their marriage. Several documents that discuss the building of the Logan Temple mention that Niels supervised the wood camp and brought his wife Christina to serve as the camp cook during at least part of the period 1877-1881. In the 1880 census Christina was living next door to Niels and his first wife, and the relationship was identified as wife. Of interest in this census was the fact that living with Christina was a 12 year old girl named Maria Peterson. Her relationship was given as adopted. This makes me wonder if possibly Christina had been previously married to a Peterson and had a daughter. Or this may have been an illegitimate daughter of Christina. On the other hand, it may be an adoption of an unrelated person. If so, I may be able to find them in the 1860 census but haven't succeeded so far.

I have not been able to find any helpful evidence in the Ancestral File or IGI on this matter. Nor any record of her as a child in her birth family. I have found evidence that Anna Christina was married in Denmark to a Niels Arvesen and that her maiden name was Christensen. Also that she was a sister to Jensine, wife #5, who also married Niels Arvesen. Perhaps the first husband died, or left the Church, or didn't emigrate for some other reason. My best guess now is that the Christensen/Arvesen sisters were widows or divorcees that Niels married. There is still no hint that he had any children by these two wives. Since polygamy was not accepted in Denmark, it's unclear to me how there could have been two wives simultaneously married to the same man there. Also, see my note under wife #5 about the possibility these are the same person.

5th Wife: Jensine Arvesen. The only record of this wife I can find is in the Ancestral File. The only detail about this person is that she died in December 1902. Strangely, the date is the death date of Niels, so I suspect this is not correct information. If there were such a wife, I'd guess she were a sister of wife number 4. It's possible that Jensine is just a corruption from Christina, based on the difficulty in understanding Danish pronunciation. More research is needed to confirm or refute this one.

6th Wife: Eva Leota Hochstrasser. Eva is my great grandmother. The photo shown her includes my grandmother Mary Leota Hansen Steele, Eva's daughter, on the left. It appears that Niels married her specifically to take to Canada and raise another family with, which he did. The Canadian government was adamant in the policy that pre-existing polygamous families could not be brought to Canada which must have been a great challenge and sorrow for Niels' other wives. Eva was 37 years younger than Niels, and well suited to thrive in the rough early years in southern Alberta. They had 11 children, the third being my maternal grandmother. All but the first two (born in Cardston) were born in the tiny hamlet of Aetna, a short ways southeast of Cardston, Alberta. The last of these was actually born about 3 months after Niels died. The oldest of their children was only 13 when Niels passed away, so Eva was left with a large family to raise alone. For a time she remained in the vicinity of Cardston, and later she relocated to Weiser, Idaho, which turned out to be my birthplace. I remember meeting great grandmother Eva Leota, who passed away when I was 5 years old, and I spent a most of my growing up years living near grandmother Mary Leota.



7th Wife: Anna Margrethe Jensen. I believe this entry in the Ancestral File for a 7th wife is not correct. The Ancestral File displays many of it's biggest problems in her records. She is listed with three fathers and two mothers. In these various families, she is the only one being born in her Amt, Aalborg. According to these records, she never left Denmark and lived until 1914. Niels left Denmark in 1855 and never returned. Yet her marriage to him is indicated as taking place in 1865, ten years later. I believe that she married another Niels Hansen or Niels Jorgensen and that someone made some bad assumptions in connecting her up with my Niels Hansen.