

The weekend of June 23, 1990 on Saturday morning at 6:30 a.m. we began our trip to Lisbon, Illinois. It was a sunny day, but cool for summer.

About 11:30 that Saturday morning we arrived at the small town of Lisbon, Il. It was very quiet with not much activity except at the softball game in progress at the ball field by the school.

We decided to drive on to nearby Norway, Illinois where there is a Norwegian Settler's Memorial.

On our way to Norway, just outside Lisbon, we passed a cemetery and decided to stop and take a look. Before we left for Norway, we copied down this epitaph from an older tombstone:

*Now has the grave become to me
A place of peaceful rest
Whence I shall gladly rise at length
And mingle with the blest.*

Norway, Illinois is also a small little town and we found the Norwegian Settler's Memorial right away. There we got our first introduction to the name of Cleng Peerson. The monument listed several books which tell the stories of early Norwegian settlers in America. Ken took some pictures of the monument, but there was no museum or building as part of the Memorial so we did not stay long. There was a small graveyard behind the monument, but we did not think it would be of interest to us since it was a family cemetery for a name we did not recognize.

On the way to the Norwegian Memorial we had seen a sign for a church so we went back that way with the intention of taking the road to that church to see what we could find.

We barely got turned onto the road when I saw a steeple over the rooftop of a building to our left. We took the road that headed that direction and found ourselves in front of the Norsk Museum. This building with the steeple used to be a church, but was now home to the Norsk Museum. We got out of the car and walked toward the entrance when some people who happened to be in the area told us the museum would not open until 1:00 this afternoon. Since it was then about 12:30 or so, we decided this would be a good time to get some lunch and then return to this museum. We also agreed we were very fortunate after making the long drive, that the museum would be open in the afternoon!

We drove to Ottawa, Illinois for our lunch. It is the closest town of pretty good size. We decided to go ahead and find a motel for the night as well. We made our reservation, checked on our room, and then headed back to Norway and the Norsk Museum.

The drive from Ottawa to Norway is only about 20 or 30 minutes.

The museum is kind of similar to the museum in Roland. (...only not as good! ...of course!) We explained that we were trying to trace our ancestry. Then, the question came to us "Were your

people Sloopers?". Well, we learned these were the Norwegians who sailed over in 1825 on the Sloop named Restauration. Apparently this was the first ship of Norwegian settlers that came over to America. We answered that we were pretty sure ours were on a later ship.

We looked through different books they had at the museum. Ken checked a book that contained records of land ownership in the late 1800's for LaSalle County. Nothing turned up." Then again, we were not sure what county Lisbon, Il. was in. Ken asked the museum lady where would be a good library for us to visit to find more information about land ownership, etc. She gave him directions to a library in Ottawa.

We continued to look at the various older books there at the museum, looking for any mention of the name Christian. We did see an old photo, maybe more than one, that had the inscription "Bifergutten, Story City, Ia.". That caught our attention.

Finally, it was about 4:00 or so and we really had not found much. There was one more book that I wanted to look into. The museum lady had put several on a table for us to browse. This book was titled "The Erickson Family History, 1837 1977" by Lois Misselt (or Missett). I looked back in the index and found a Christian. I turned to that page and started reading, on page 321: SARAH ANNA KNUDSON" ...she married Franklin Christianson Christian, the second of seven children (6 boys and 1 girl) born to Kristen Kristenson from Storvik and Anna Larson Ness from Skinevik. Frank was born on a 160 acre farm about 8 mi's. S. of Yorkville and 2 mi. E. of the village of Helmar. The Norwegian Church at Helmar was the place of family worship and many of the Christians are buried in the cemetery there. The "son" part of the name was dropped at an early date (about 1883) and the gaardnaven (farm name) likewise fell into disuse." "... Frank Christian was a true farmer with heart and soul in his work."

When Ken and I read "Storvik" we got very excited. The part about being a true farmer with heart and soul in his work gave us a strong clue we were on the right track also!

It was close to time for the museum to close. We felt like we had made some progress. We did not know if Frank Christian was one of the relatives we were searching for, but that one word "Storvik" was something we had to note. We thanked the museum attendants for their help and went on our way.

Next we went to the Reddick Library in Ottawa. This was the library the people at Norsk Museum advised us to try.

The Reddick Library has a special Reference Room called the Illinois Room. The librarian helping us suggested this would be the place for us to go for the kind of research that we wanted to do. She explained that many of the books in that room were very old and valuable. We would have to leave our driver's licenses with her before we could enter the Illinois. Room, since in the past there had been a problem of people walking off with valuable books.

Inside the Illinois Room we started our treasure hunt. We looked at a couple books and then decided we still needed to determine what county Lisbon was in since many books dealt with counties. Ken went out to the car and got our Illinois. map. We saw that Lisbon is in Kendall County.

I was looking at a book about Norwegian Settlers when all of a sudden Ken found something.. In a book titled "Genealogical and Biographical Record of Kendall and will Counties, Illinois" published about 1901, Ken looked for the name Christian in the index. He found the name Lewis Christian and turned to the page listed, where he read this excerpt: (talking about Lewis Christian's grandparents)

"...Christian Christianson and Alice Slaake, who came with their family to this country in 1847. There were five children, Christian being the oldest. The others were: John, Ole and Charles, farmers in Story County, Iowa; and Elizabeth, now deceased,..."

We got a little confused at first, but if we figured it out correctly - there was a Christian Christianson, Sr. and a Christian Christianson, Jr. It was Sr. who brought his family over from Norway and Christian, Jr. and Ole were two of his sons. (The Lewis Christian we found in this book was one of the children of Christian Christianson, Jr.).

What this boils down to is that **Christian Christianson, Sr. is Floyd's great-grandfather**. We got more information confirm this later.

While I took notes on the information we just found, Ken looked for an old map of Kendall County showing land ownership. After a while he found a book with an 1876. publishing date that had a map of Kendall County. We made a copy of that map and of the Lewis Christian biography sketch.

Now it was about 5:30 p.m. and we had enough information to keep us perplexed for a while. We just stood talking outside the library, trying to figure out in our minds what we had just seen on paper. "What relationship is Lewis?, etc."

That was enough research for the day. We decided to sight see around Ottawa.

Ottawa is a very friendly town. We parked the car at the town square and started our little walking tour. We walked down to a boat dock on the river and discovered we were at the confluence of the Fox River and the Illinois River. Ken spoke to a young guy who said he had made the trip by boat up the Illinois from the Mississippi to the Fox River and found it to be a pleasant ride. (That got us to dreaming, of course).

We walked back toward the center of town and eventually had supper at a restaurant called Carretto's. We really enjoyed it. The food was very good and the owner talked with us a bit. This was a casual, established restaurant with an old

three-lane bowling alley attached. Carretto's was doing a brisk Saturday night's business. We left Carretto's and there was still day light. We walked back to our car, drove back to our motel, and turned in for the night.

On Sunday we had breakfast and decided we would try to find the town of Helmar, its church, and the cemetery. Helmar was mentioned in the Erickson book at the Norsk Museum. That town name also appeared in the biographical sketch on Lewis Christian which we had found at Reddick Library in Ottawa.

We found Helmar on our Illinois road map, so that was half the battle of getting there. The drive to Helmar took us through some really beautiful farm country. It was quite a lot like Iowa. Such a clear day it was, too!

We stopped once, not far from Helmar, to get directions to the church and cemetery. Church was just letting out as we drove by. The town amounted to four corners at intersecting roads, with just a few houses. The Church occupied one corner. The cemetery was about a mile up a road past the church.

Once inside the Helmar Cemetery, some more history unfolded. to us. Ken said he was surprised how many tombstones had the name Christian. There on that Sunday morning we saw the graves of many of the people we had just become acquainted with through books we read the day before.

We saw the **grave of Christian Christianson, Sr.** with the original marker and a newer bronze grave marker as well. Many of his descendants were buried there also.

As we were leaving the cemetery another couple, probably in their sixties, drove up. We introduced ourselves and explained why we were there. When we mentioned our family name, they told us their last name was Christian also -- Ted and Elaine Christian. That surprised us. How lucky!

They explained they were from Aurora, Il. but had lived in Helmar area. We mentioned most of the names we had run across the day before, but none were related to them. Then they told us their family name had been Christopherson, but over the years it evolved to the name Christian. They also said they knew there were at least two other Christian clans in the Helmar area unrelated to them. (Oh no, we thought! ...lots of room for us to err!)

Then Ted Christian said he had a strong hunch that a lady named Vivian who lived near the church could help us. She might even be one of our relatives. Her maiden name was Christian, he was sure. He directed us to her house.

When we arrived at the house he described, a stone house which was easy to find, no one was home.

It was now about noon or 12:30 and we were just about to call it quits and drive back home. As we got to the corner across from the church again, we saw a man out in his yard. Ken pulled over and the man walked up to our car as we began our questions.

He was an older man than us, but not what we would call elderly. His name was Edolph Thompson found out later. We began mentioning names we were researching, and he pondered and puzzled. "I've lived here all my life, so I ought to be able to help you" he said. After a little bit he said "lets get over in the shade out of the sun." He mentioned he had emphysema and has to watch it.

We walked over to his garage and he pulled out a couple lawn chairs. We showed him the biographical sketch on Lewis Christian and he read, and thought... We told him as much as we could to help, and also about our visit to Helmar Cemetery. After a while he said "Come on into the house". We went into the kitchen and met his wife, Mildred.

The first thing we knew he had dialed a Fred Oden Christian, Jr. on the phone and handed the phone to us to talk with him. Ken had me talk. Slowly we mentioned names back and forth until relationships started to match up. "I think you're sitting in the right pew now" said Edolph as he, his wife and Ken listened.

Fred Oden and I exchanged names and addresses. He said he had some Christian family history information somewhere. If he could locate it he would mail a copy to us. He also gave the name and address of a cousin he knew had done some ancestry research.

After we hung up the phone from that conversation, we all were talking, when it seemed like no time at all that Edolph had another person on the phone!

This person was Elma Thompson. She also was a Christian Christianson, Sr. descendant. We explained Ken is a great grandson of Ole Christian. It took very little time before Elma was saying "Come spend the night at our house. We would love to talk to you.' We explained we needed to get back to St. Louis and go to work the next day. "Oh, call in sick" she said. We talked about arranging a short visit that afternoon, but she needed to go with her grandson to his softball game.

Finally, Ken said we better just go on back to St. Louis. We explained to Elma we would have to continue tracing our roots at another time, and we needed to bring Ken's parents with us next time. She said to feel welcome to stay at her house when we returned.

We talked to Edolph and Mildred a little more as we left their home. Ken learned that they had stayed with Gary Thompson's folks one time when they traveled in Iowa. They were really nice and we thanked them for all their hospitality to us. With that we were back on our way to St. Louis. We talked about all we had learned as we drove home.

P.S. We have since received information from both Fred and Elma. For a spur of the moment trip, we found more information than expected. It has all been so much fun!