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## An Immigrant Story Of Peter Petersen Thisted: Itinerant, Maverik Danish Lutheran Pastor, 1859-1915

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# **An Immigrant Story of Peter Petersen Thisted:**

## **Itinerant, Maverick Danish Lutheran Pastor, 1859 - 1915**

*"Without struggle, no victory, without victory, no crown."*

2 Tim. 2:5

by **PAUL A. THISTED**

### **Introduction**

This is the story of my Danish grandfather whom I never knew except through infrequent stories from my father. I asked my father Aaron to write a family history about his dad, but he never did. I never found out why he wouldn't. I wondered about my Thisted grandparents before and after both my parents died, so I decided to piece the puzzle together as best I could, while several uncles and aunts were still alive. My best resource was my sister, LaJune Barth, who had saved my grandfather's sermons, books, almanacs, and miscellaneous papers after the death of our mother, who had saved them for six years after Dad had died. Their sense of the significance of these family documents saved most of the story that follows. My sole living aunt, Helen Thisted Shorb, has helped translate, edit and comment on this story, and her help has been invaluable. Fellow Danes and dear friends Ove Nielsen and Ruth Herman Nielsen helped translate several letters, but more importantly, suggested having the Danish Archives staff at Dana College, Blair, Nebraska, research and find any documentation on my grandfather. The Archives staff found an autobiography of Peter in an 1894 publication, **Aarsberetning** (Annual Report) which (to the best of my knowledge) Peter never shared with his children. In this, my grandfather told his story before ordination; this also told of his birthplace. A real find! This led to



finding Peter's birth record and the names of his parents by my cousin Ray McElfresh. My grandfather's documents, books and sermons, except for personal papers, have been donated to the Danish Archives of Dana College where it is hoped they may contribute to the study of our Danish heritage. This manuscript was written primarily for the family, then as an article for **The Bridge**.

## **The Early Years**

Peter Petersen was born in Hundborg Parish, Thisted County, Denmark, on September 22, 1859. Peter's birth record was found in 1991 and tells that his parents were Poul Christian Pedersen, a husmand (small holder), and Inger Cathrine Nielsdatter. His godfathers were Christen Larsen and Nels Christian Nielsen. Peter was baptized September 27 at home. Although no one knows for sure, Peter's children believed that he had seven brothers and sisters. Aaron, my father and Peter's oldest child, wrote to his sister Mary in 1967 and said, "My father was raised around Lemvig, Denmark; that's where he had a brother who was a mailcarrier. . . Father was a coachman for a preacher. He would visit a beer hall while the preacher had services." Peter's early occupation was as a skilled carpenter and cabinet maker. He was confirmed but was neither faithful nor committed to his faith. Preparation for confirmation and confirmation itself left no impression on Peter. According to his own words, he turned away from God and toward a life of sin.

At twenty years of age, Peter was converted through the work of the Inner Mission, a pietistic movement within the Danish Lutheran Church. He then began to suffer from an illness, namely 'preaching sickness,' which was very common among the newly converted. While preaching and telling people about his conversion, Peter approached the ministry several times but never heard the Lord call him into that profession for his life's work.

Eventually the Lord called. Seven years later when he was 27, the call came to Peter through Pastor N. Hansen, who was visiting Denmark from California. Pastor Hansen urged Peter to think about the ministry in America. Since

Peter had been converted, he had felt a "call" to help save others through the ministry. Peter immediately wrote to P.C. Trandberg who was teaching at Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS), a Congregational Seminary which had a special program for Danish immigrants. Pastor Trandberg himself came from Denmark to America in 1882, just five years before Peter. Trandberg was active in synodical meetings and preached at various congregations of the Danish Synod. His personality and witness had an awakening, inflammable, stimulating influence on many in the synod. (*Danske i Amerika*)

The result of Peter's correspondence with Trandberg was that in the spring of 1887 Peter traveled to Chicago with the objective of being educated for the ministry. Peter met the admission requirements of the CTS by being of good moral character with either a collegiate education or an equivalent preparation for theological studies. (Since I have found no documentation of a Danish college education, I assume the latter.)

## The Preparation

Many Danes who left the Old Country were in search of a better life. I like to think that with a new challenge and a goal in his life, Peter came to America full of enthusiasm, ready to embark on fulfilling his dream. He left Denmark as Peter Petersen and arrived in his new country with a new surname: Thisted. Although no one seems to know his reason for the name change, his children offered these ideas as to why he changed his name to Peter Petersen Thisted:

His son Moses said, "The only assumption I have ever made is that when Dad, whose name was Peter Petersen, came to the U.S. and settled near LaSalle, Illinois, he found there were so many Peter Petersens that he added Thisted to his name."

Daughter Mary said, "Since he was a minister and wishing better identification for himself, he changed his name to Thisted after his arrival in America. He said he picked the name of his birthplace because no other minister in the country would have that name."

Peter may have shared these reasons with his children, yet he probably had a Biblical basis for changing his name, also. To break with the past and start fresh in a country of opportunity and to change his name was shedding the old wineskin of Denmark for the new wineskin of America.

"And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does, the wine will burst the skins and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but new wine is for fresh skins." Mark 2:22.

In September of 1887 Peter started a three year course under the guidance of Pastor P. C. Trandberg at the CTS. Concurrent with his studies, he performed mission work in which he proclaimed the Word for about four years in and around Peru and Clear Creek, Illinois. While doing mission work, Peter met Miss Katie Mortensen, from the island of Bornholm, Denmark.

Peter graduated from the CTS in April, 1890, and then married Kate Mortensen. Pastor Trandberg performed the ceremony in Chicago. Their wedding pictures were taken in LaSalle, Illinois, and then the couple traveled to Denmark and visited such places as Copenhagen, Sonderborg, Holsted, and Humlum, by Struer, where Peter's parents lived. They returned to Illinois and settled in the LaSalle and Magnolia area.

## The Wilderness

The American midwest was generally settled by other Scandinavians and Germans before the Danes immigrated to the United States. An obstacle for many immigrants, then as now, was that many foreign-born nationals stubbornly clung to their native tongues, making few attempts to accept and practice the language of their new country. Many parents taught their children at home in their native tongue and then sent them to public schools where students were busy becoming Americans and speaking English.

As Danes were farmers for the most part, they were spread throughout the upper midwest and usually in the rural parts of farming communities. Centrally located congregations, therefore, were not yet possible. So "the tendency seems to have been... for the establishment of



numerous smaller preaching centers without resident pastors, whose strenuous task it became to serve many widely-scattered, smaller groups of Lutherans... such small congregations... were scarcely more than preaching posts. Frequently, visiting pastors would serve these groups, perhaps once a month, baptize infants, give confirmation instruction to the young... and hold worship services." (A Great Past... A Greater Future, A History of Wisner, Neb.)

Into this situation Peter was thrust. The demand was probably there for rural, itinerant pastors, but Peter was called to serve neither a mission nor a congregation for some time.

It is puzzling that Peter did not receive a 'call' from a congregation soon after seminary graduation. Based on his correspondence, I believe that contributing factors may have been both Peter's outspokenness and his uncompromising nature in theological issues with other pastors and congregations in the Danish synod. Peter worked as a carpenter and as a missionary during these trying years. On March 13, 1891, Aaron Jeremiah, their first child, was born in Magnolia. Aaron was baptized in Clear Creek on March 31 by Pastor Hansen.

Peter kept in touch with Trandberg after his seminary days. Although, for some unknown reason, he harbored some bitterness and hard feelings towards Pastor Trandberg. In December, 1891, Peter received a letter from Trandberg suggesting that he should go to Warren, Pennsylvania, to start a congregation. Peter's reply was rude and surprising, stating:

"I do not dare to be helped into a mission field either through or by you, as long as you can associate hardly with anybody but yourself and try to keep, as far as I can see, what does not actually belong to you. Consequently, as long as you keep your present posture toward almost everybody outside of yourself, instead of associating with you as I prefer if it should be, to work with my hands for my living either as a carpenter or farmer. Remaining your pitying friend, P. P. Thisted."

This reply was written in English at the end of Trandberg's letter. Peter certainly didn't want to be aided by Trandberg, especially to go so far from Chicago. Trandberg appeared well-meaning in his letter; however, Peter wanted no part of his plan. Peter probably thought that mostly Germans settled in Pennsylvania and with no known Danish settlement there, he would be out on a limb personally and professionally.

In 1892, Peter and family moved from Magnolia to Graettinger, Iowa, in hopes of finding a congregation. Instead of receiving a 'call,' Peter continued to work as a carpenter to support his family. Phoebe Katherine was born September 2, 1892 in Graettinger.

The Danish Church in America suffered a division in 1892, the result of years of accentuating differences among pastors. The causes of the disagreement seemed to focus on the posturing between a conservative and sometimes pietistic concept of the Bible by some pastors as opposed to the Grundtvigian view, identified by some with humanism (the Grundtvigians tended to keep the old Danish songs and customs and produced a number of their own). Basically, the Pietist to whom Peter related, maintained the traditional Lutheran view of the Bible as a literal inspiration and as the only norm and source of Christian faith and life. Followers of Grundtvig's teachings were seen as bestowing emphasis on the Apostle's Creed as the source of faith; they interpreted the Bible, especially the Old Testament, historically. They saw Jesus Christ as the living word of God. They turned out to be the ones who kept the Danish language longer than the other group and taught the folk dances and customs — their heritage. All the evidence indicates that Peter was a Pietist, rather than a Grundtvigian, in part because of his strict interpretation of the Bible. Additionally, Danish songs and customs were not significantly emphasized later on by Peter's children. Pietists were capriciously known by some as 'Gloomy Danes' or 'Holy Danes' while Grundtvigians were called the 'Happy Danes.' Peter was probably a happy Pietist!

Speculation is that Peter, now 33 years old in 1893, was a



maverick of sorts, as a letter of counsel was sent to him in February by the President of the Danish Lutheran Synod. Theodore Hansen, from Hutchinson, Minnesota. The letter stated, in part,

"It has been impossible for me to obtain a recommendation for you . . . you must have unconditionally stood in your own way . . . you must not forget that when the congregations say no to an unripened worker, others can not proceed any farther . . . if we wish to be martyrs we ought to examine whether we suffer for the sake of truth or for the sake of self-will. The synod does not seek thoughtless and mindless workers, but neither does it seek trouble makers . . . You can only win over the opposers who have risen against you at home (Denmark), Chicago and those in the synod who want to settle accounts, . . . these thoughts are not set forth to produce strife, but harmony . . . in Jesus name I sign, unprejudicially, brother Th. Hansen."

Since I was unsure if Th. stood for Theodore or Thorvald; I tried to unravel this mystery. I turned to Ove Nielsen for help. Ove and his wife Ruth entertained a friend for dinner in 1986. During their conversation, this pastor, who at one time served the Lutheran congregation in Hutchinson, Minnesota, said that Theodore Hansen had served the Hutchinson church in the early 1890s and had later served as president of Dana College in Blair, Nebraska. We therefore now know that the correspondent was Theodore rather than Thorvald.

Peter's draft reply in March 1893, on the reverse of Th. Hansen's letter, stated, "...in the last two years I have sought fellowship with the synod at its meetings and among its individual members . . . you wrong me by declaring prejudice from home as grounds for not really opening the synod's arms and lap to me . . . I am on board completely . . . I need to struggle with that which through ignorance or blind zealously, I have done . . . I know of no one with whom I can not work in total harmony . . ." Peter continued to struggle to maintain his faith.

Despite his rude letter in December, 1891 Peter kept in touch with Pastor Trandberg. Trandberg wrote a well-

meaning and cordial letter in September, 1893 encouraging Peter to come to Chicago and replace Trandberg as pastor of his church, but to be under his guidance! Trandberg wrote:

"You are often in my thoughts...the kind of love a father has for his grownup children I have for all the men who have attended divinity school under my tutelage...I am sad, dear Thisted, that you are not yet proclaiming the Gospel and administering the sacraments...what can the reason be that the Lord has not yet taken you into his service to spread the Word? 'He has to go through a conversion before the Lord can use him,' a man said about you, and some people look at you with a critical eye...and the times I heard you preach when the Holy Spirit was on you, and the gentleness and goodness in you came out — there was not one of all my students I would rather listen to than you... can you not travel to Chicago and come to grips with preaching for my congregation there? ...I need someone who in my place could take over my congregation in Chicago, but that would have to be a like-minded man... you might preach there on a trial basis and be under my guidance... Maybe the Lord wants you elsewhere..."

Peter seems to have been determined to be ordained and 'called' on his own and not under the sponsorship of his professor and mentor. Peter's reply was probably a lengthy, "Thanks, but no thanks, as I have been prevailed upon to take up work in Monona County, Iowa, starting in November, 1893."

## The Liberation

Peter gladly accepted an invitation to minister to a Danish community in Monona County, Iowa. Peter proclaimed the Word at Ingemann's congregation throughout the winter of 1893-1894, then enthusiastically accepted their 'call' in 1894. Prior to his ordination, Peter wrote a brief yet revealing autobiography for the synod's annual meeting in June.

"Who is the man who fears the Lord? Him he will instruct in the way that he shall choose.' (Ps. 25:12)...My upbringing and instruction occurred, unfortunately, in such a

manner that I did not fix my eye on the Lord and therefore did not either enter into fellowship with Him. Preparation for confirmation and the confirmation itself left no impression whatsoever on my soul. Following my confirmation I stepped, with soul and body, onto the public road of sin, and remained there until the dear Lord in heaven stopped me in the spring of 1879. . . it was among the 'Inner Mission's' people in Denmark that I got my spiritual up-bringing. . . Eventually the Lord called in 1886 through Pastor N. Hansen visiting Denmark from California. . . I corresponded with Pastor Trandberg at the CTS, then traveled to Chicago in 1887 to be educated for the ministry. . . I completed my studies and mission work in Illinois where I proclaimed the Word for approximately four years. . . I still was not healed. The Lord distanced me and sent me into the wilderness, where I had to wander about lonely and abandoned for nearly two years. That happened so, as a dear clergy brother wrote to me while I was still in the wilderness, I could learn that there is grace, grace, grace, grace first, grace last, grace day after day, if the Lord says to us sinners: Son, go and work in my vineyard. The hour of liberation came. The Lord said to me: 'Son, go over and work in my vineyard.' In November, 1893 I was, after having earlier applied to The Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church Association, prevailed upon to take up the work in Monona County, Iowa, where Pastor J. Markussen had for some years proclaimed God's Word. I have now proclaimed the Word at that place throughout the winter, by the grace of God and to honor God as best I could. In response to the congregation's desire, I now present myself for dedication to the sacred preaching and teaching office. Brothers and sisters, pray for me that my healing may occur, so I may be totally healed of my wounds, to be a vessel that is honorable, that God's house may be the bride, and that God's children may be recipients of joy and blessing. Your brother in Christ's name, Peter Petersen Thisted, Turin, Iowa in June, 1894."

### **The Ministry**

Peter was ordained at the annual meeting of the Danish

Evangelical Lutheran Church Association at the Pella Church in Omaha, June 10, 1894. Peter and family had moved to Monona County where Lydia Hansine was born in July. Peter preached in various places, such as Sergeant Bluff, Alta, Council Bluffs, Omaha and Turner County, South Dakota. Peter's home church, Bethesda Evangelical Church, Moorhead, Iowa, documented its early history and talked of Peter and his character:

"... Rev. P. P. Thisted, who had been leader of the group during the period of separation, was called to be pastor of the newly organized congregation. Jim Johnson solved the problem of a parsonage for the pastor by placing his house at the disposal of the congregation. Jim was a bachelor and was ready to build a new addition to his house, at which time there would be room for the pastor's family. The building was erected in a hurry with the help of the congregation. Rev. Thisted himself was a skilled carpenter and was quite a help in leading the work. On April 1, 1895, Pastor and Mrs. Thisted, with their three children, moved into the house, together with Jim Johnson. Rev. Thisted resigned from the congregation less than two years after its formation. He was a character of hardiness, clear cut in life and preaching. He could say most unexpected words, often in an unpolished manner, but much of what he said was never forgotten. Members, and his successors in the ministry, still remembering him, bear witness that he made deep marks in the congregation. A typical remark is, 'It was he who brought me to know myself and to find the forgiveness for all my sins'."

Peter wrote his sermons in Danish longhand in lined record books that could be handheld. His written sermons were usually short, direct, hard hitting and based on scripture. He frequently addressed congregations as 'my friends,' and he always ended his written sermons with an emphatic "AMEN!"

It is not known why Peter resigned from the Bethesda church; however, he and his family moved to Viborg, South Dakota, where Moses Nahum was born in August of 1896. During his two years in South Dakota, Peter traveled to

Saxville, Poy Sippi and Waupaca, Wisconsin, to preach and interview for a possible call. Peter received a February, 1898, letter from N. P. Jensen, thanking Peter for coming to Wisconsin, in which he said,

"...the man who came to drive you was your friend, Old Jacob, who had been converted after hearing you preach God's Word...so your work hasn't been in vain...here in Saxeville you haven't worked in vain either, because I know you have many loyal friends here who have been strengthened in the faith... Waupaca doesn't know whether Pastor Johnson will accept the call there...Jacob Nelsen thought that you'd be next on the list..."

The itinerant Pastor Thisted and family lived wherever there was a church or congregation to serve. They traveled mostly by horse and buggy/wagon. Peter had two horses, Britain and Dolly, that he cared for and took on his many trips. He entered in his almanac whenever he spent about \$2.00 for front shoes for both horses. Peter also traveled by train on several of his journeys, such as returning to Illinois and going to Kansas.

Peter had a personal embosser for his letters, seminary texts, books and documents. Imprinted in outer and inner circles in Danish were the words, "P.P. THISTED, PRÆST I DEN FOREN. D. EV. LUTH. KIRKE I AMERICA," and the scripture, "UDEN KAMP, INGEN SEJR, UDEN SEJR, INGEN KRONE 2 Tim. 2,5." Translated by his daughter Helen, the inscribed words are: "Minister in the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America" and the Bible verse, "without struggle, no victory, without victory, no crown."

Peter and family left South Dakota early in 1898 for a Palestine, Nebraska, congregation in Platte County. Their fifth child, Amos Theodore, was born in April of 1899 in Lindsay. Additional congregations in Peter's Nebraska circuit were Bethania, Looking Glass, and Bethlehem in Fullerton.

Peter was musical, he loved to sing, and he even wrote music. At home he played an old pump organ on which both Aaron and Lydia learned to play with their dad as teacher.

Late in 1899 it was time to move the family to West Branch, Iowa, where Mary Debora was born in January, 1901. Peter moved again in 1901 to serve Emanuel's congregation in Clinton, Iowa, while living in Delmar and also preaching in Davenport and Maquoketa.

In 1902 Peter and family moved to Staplehurst, Nebraska, where he was pastor of Vor Frelzers (Our Savior's) Church. The only detail of the next few years is a 1905 funeral oration that Peter gave for R. H. Brogaard. In this brief sermon, Peter spoke pointedly to all the attendees about who their God was.

"Psalm 68, 20. 'Our God is a God of salvation; and to God, the Lord, belongs escape from death.'

He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death.

Ladies and gentlemen who did not understand me when I spoke in my own language, permit me to speak a few words to you at this occasion.

To be brief let me commence by saying: 'it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment.', Hebrews 9,27. You all know the old saying: a young man may die and an old man must die. Call death a matter of course if you choose. The theory that men die like a beast, that there is no hereafter is contradicted by the scripture just quoted — after death comes judgment. Further let me say: I believe the number of men going to heaven after death to be very small compared with the number that go to Hades. How can that be? Has Christ not died on Calvary for all men. Yes, thanks be to him now and forever.

But the reason is given in my text: He that is our God, etc. The only God of salvation is not the God of the majority of people. The majority worship not God but the golden calf, do not love God but the lust of the flesh, eyes, and the vainglory of life. But the minority has a God who is able to save from all perils and dangers: To Peter he opened the doors... Joseph, Daniel, the three Hebrew youths he kept safely. Stephan



was given victory.

He delivers us, who believe in him, from the fear of death, delivers us from its sting.

My friends, my fellow citizens and even members of this congregation let me ask you this plain question: is the God of salvation your God? You attend church meetings regularly and you help support the church very well! You go to revival meetings, offer prayers, it all looks good, but my friend be not deceived, is the God of salvation thy God?

Remember that to Him alone belong the issues from death. He and He alone has the keys of death and Hades. He alone can open the gates of heaven to you. Let us Pray: Our Father . . ."

Whether Peter knew the deceased or not, Peter's words were for the living people to hear and for some, an exhortation to mend their ways while they had time. Judgment was a serious event, and Peter wanted everyone to know the implications of his or her ways.

The June, 1906, annual report of the synod lists two additional churches for Peter: St. Johanne's in Bennet and a mission church in Jamestown, Kansas. Peter's 1906 pocket almanac shows a busy traveling and ministering itinerary, being away from home frequently and going to Kansas: Potter, Nebraska; Brush, Colorado; Webster County and missions in Davey, Nebraska; and missions in Minden and Cordova. Peter preached in Kansas during Advent so he lived with and became friends with several different families. Peter received a gift photo album "til Pastor Thisted fra Dalbos og Jens Hansens, Juleminde (Christmas memories) Oak Creek 1906." Oak Creek was probably the Jamestown, Kansas, mission church.

In 1907 the Thisted family moved to Wisner, Nebraska, where Peter built a beautiful seven-room mansion for his family. His 1907 almanac showed a varied preaching itinerary, going to Kansas, Wisner and Seward, Praha, Frinsort and Staplehurst. In December Peter entered in the almanac that he received \$10.00 in house rent from their earlier Wisner home. Other interesting entries were: bought

a sow with 7 pigs; Sunday offering amounts and payments for services performed were encoded for only Peter to know; and the frequent entries to purchase Sun Cured and Duke's Mixture tobacco; and butter and egg purchases.

Peter's wife Kate contracted pneumonia and died in Wisner in February 1909. She was 47 years old and was buried in the Wisner cemetery east of town. Her death deeply affected the family, as Peter tried to do housework and cooking for six children in addition to his pastoral and carpentry duties. As a father and as a single parent, Peter had strict expectations of his children. One of the few things my dad shared with me was that his father never allowed him to play football. The children always had to be home from school on time, or suffer severe consequences. During one particular church service, Mary sat with a friend in the back of the church. Her dad interrupted his sermon and said, "Mary Debora Thisted, you come up here and sit in your place!" and made Mary move before he continued with his sermon. Later, there was nothing said, so no ill feelings were expressed about the incident. However, Mary and the rest of the children never wanted to be so embarrassed again, so they were likely, henceforth, always to be in their proper places!

Aaron graduated from Wisner High School one year later, and then Peter received a pastoral call to serve a country church near New Lisbon, Wisconsin. The June, 1910, annual report listed Peter's church as Immanuel's, Praha, Nebraska, with his address as Wisner. In October, all the family but Aaron, moved to a parsonage between New Lisbon and Camp Douglas, Wisconsin. In November, the Reverend Peter Petersen Thisted, widower with six children, became St. Stephen's (also known as Lone Rock) pastor.

Aaron stayed in Nebraska after high school graduation and worked until he was accepted at a Normal school in Wisconsin, a school he chose to be near his family. Aaron's post card to his dad in May, 1911, suggested a formal and strict relationship between him and his father.

"Dear Papa, I have just sent my application to the director and I said that you would show him my certificate and recommendations. I will send a letter tomorrow. Your

son, Aaron."

As strict as Peter seemed, he could be caring and sensitive to the needs of others. When he conducted a funeral of a small child in the wintertime, there were no flowers available, so Peter made flowers out of paper for the funeral. He also helped a Danish immigrant obtain the pension he was entitled to for his military service in Denmark. Peter baptized his son, too. A neighbor observed that Peter had a very nice team of horses and he took very good care of them.

The June, 1911, annual report lists Peter's address at New Lisbon, Wisconsin, and his churches: Praha congregation, Colfax County, Nebraska; St. Stephen's congregation, New Lisbon and Zion's congregation, Big Flats, Wisconsin, with a mission church at Roche-a-Cree. Several sermons for Big Flats were written in English, so it is assumed that that congregation spoke more English than Danish.

In February, 1912, Peter, now 52 years old, married Marie Magdalene Hansen from the New Lisbon area. Marie and her family had lived near New Lisbon since 1903 and were Peter's parishioners. Marie's church background was as a baptized believer all of her 33 years. This was in contrast to Peter's experience of wilderness, then conversion. According to their daughter Helen, (who was born after his death) Marie said that sometimes when there was a sort of revival meeting, people would in turn tell of their spiritual awakening, and when her turn came, she would say, "I can't say that I've been converted because I've always remained in my baptismal covenant." No one ever challenged her, she said, so the others must have believed her. The wedding took place in the Big Flats country church, St. Stephen's, and Lydia, attending school in New Lisbon, did not remember any of the children being at the wedding. The June annual report lists Peter's churches as St. Stephan's, Orange (Camp Douglas) and Zion's Big Flats, Wisconsin.

In 1914, Peter was taking post-graduate correspondence courses for non-resident pastors from the Theological Seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church at Chicago (now, a part of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago). He pursued systematic theological studies after

ordination, taking five post-graduate courses, including Apologetics and Old Testament Exegesis. Peter read Greek and Hebrew fluently and in two years, would have received his Dr. of Divinity degree.

### **The Death of the Patriarch**

At 55 years of age Peter died May 19, 1915, in the hospital at Tomah, Wisconsin. He died six weeks before his seventh child, Helen, was born. Peter was buried in Wisner, Wisconsin, at the side of his first wife and was accompanied to Wisner by sons Aaron and Moses and daughters Phoebe and Lydia. Amos and Mary stayed home.

The Danish Lutheran Church's obituary stated:

"... Thisted was a sterling personality, who was totally on the Lord's side, sought to have people converted and constantly let the trumpet give a clear sound, yes, so clear that several people for that reason, did not like him. But there were also people who were drawn to the Lord by those clear and distinctive notes.

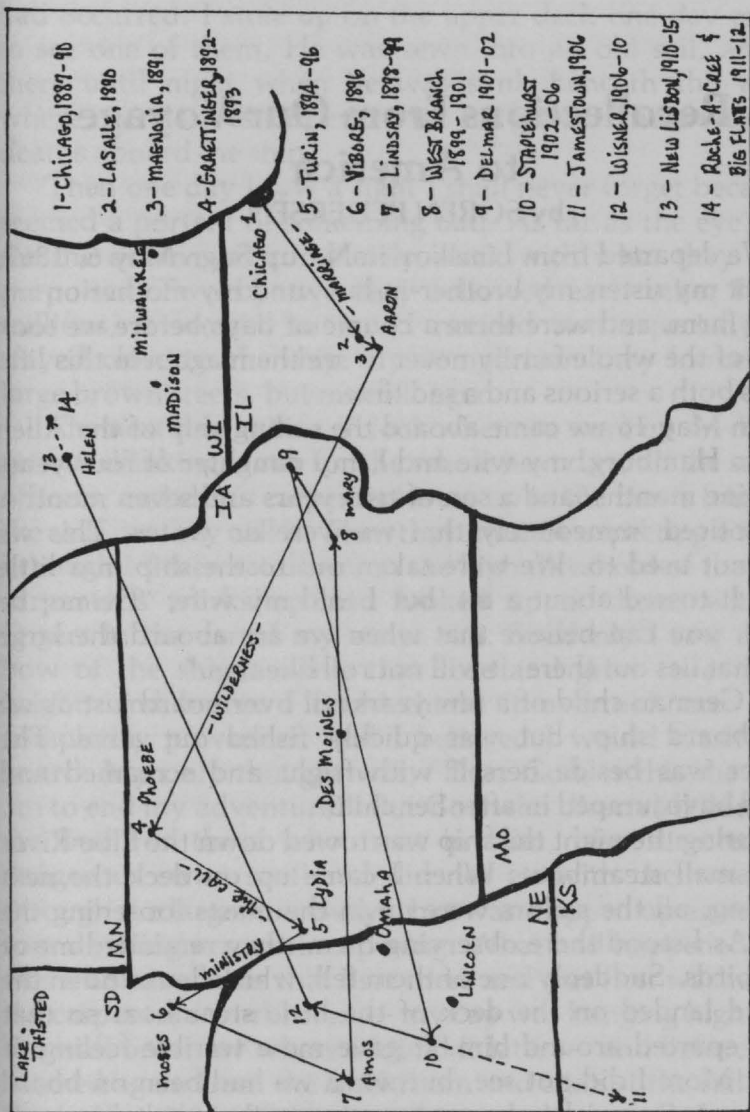
"Pastor Thisted was faithful and conscientious in the labors with which he was entrusted. For not so few years he was treasurer in the synod's committee for widows of pastors and also discharged that responsibility faithfully.

"May the Lord always give us pastors of that kind, who are totally and completely on the side of Jesus; who do combat with the one great objective target: the soul's eternal salvation. Then the great Master's work in our fellowship will bear fruit to His praise. That is better than to seek to please people in order to be praised by them."

The puzzling yet fascinating process of assembling and integrating an oral history with assorted personal documentation has revealed the man Peter as a strong maverick character. He left his home, family and country for a dream that he struggled to fulfill. His faith and family led him out of his wilderness as a cantankerous zealot to become an itinerant pastor who preached the scriptures and unequivocally told all to 'change your ways and accept Christ in your hearts now!' Peter loved his God and his mission to be God's uncompromising servant. Little evidence

is found to show a loving and caring father and husband; however, husbands and fathers were expected to work hard and provide the necessities of life without being demonstrative. Lydia said, "I have the deepest respect and love for him for his efforts for his family during those trying times. . . We children were all so young when our parents died that we never questioned them about their lives when they lived in Denmark."

Peter, heeding a self-imposed 'higher calling,' created a unique family of diverse Christian characters, whom we as children and heirs of this heritage must be thankful for. Helen's mom, Marie, said of her husband of three years, "Peter burned his bridges behind him. When we were getting our wedding license the clerk asked Peter for his mother's name and he couldn't remember it." Marie thought it so strange. He left no connections with Denmark, family or home. Marie told Helen how important education was to Peter. He really wanted his children to get a good education. Testimony to Peter's sermons came from his son Moses, who said, "I haven't heard a good sermon since my dad." We are thankful for the Thisteds who have gone before us and struggled in the life and faith. As Peter believed and said, "Without struggle, there is no victory; without victory, there is no crown." I am proud of my family, my heritage and my distinctive name of Thisted. This good name is our legacy. May we be faithful stewards of our Danish heritage.



1887-1915, CHRONOLOGICAL TRAVELS OF THE REV. PETER PETERSEN TRISTED & FAMILY.  
 SCALE: 1" = 75 miles