Mormon Scandinavian Immigrants' Experiences among English-Speaking Settlers

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Pleasant Grove, Utah, was settled in 1850, three years after the first Mormons entered the Salt Lake Valley. The first settlers were of early American stock. The next arrived from England, and by 1860 twenty-five percent of the population was English born, making the town largely Anglo-American. These two groups shared the same language, a kinship of Puritanism, and a traditional English background, and thus there was no defiant feeling between them. It was easy for the two groups to become one in the Gospel.

Rasmus and Ingerline Petersen came to the Utah Territory with the first LDS Scandinavian company to immigrate in 1852. With the coming of the U.S. (Johnston’s) Army in 1858, the Petersens left Salt Lake City, moving south to Pleasant Grove to escape the army’s expected revengeful entrance into the Salt Lake Valley. They decided to stay permanently in Pleasant Grove rather than return to the larger city. Iver Nicholas and Catherine Iverson had already settled in the town. By 1860, six Scandinavian families had settled in Pleasant Grove. Ten years later that number had increased to 35, and in another ten years, in 1880, it had reached 110. These families consisted of 236 people born in Denmark, 81 born in Sweden, 10 born in Norway, and 130 children born in Utah of Scandinavian parents. (All will be referred to as Scandinavian in this paper.) The 110 Scandinavian families amounted to almost one-third of the 351 families that populated the town (Bureau of the Census 1860). Because of the late migration of Scandinavians, many more settled in the town even into 1920. Pleasant Grove decidedly was an Anglo-Nordic mix and the greatest concentration per capita of Scandinavians in Utah County.

Why did so many Scandinavian Saints settle in Pleasant Grove when as a rule new Scandinavian immigrants were sent to Sanpete County for settlement? The meadow land below Pleasant Grove was a day’s wagon travel from Salt Lake City for Sanpete-bound immigrants. William Stevens’s inviting springs with its plentiful grass for animals made an ideal night’s camping on the west border of town. Pleasant Grove, built on a gentle slope, offered a view of the meadows and the incoming wagon trains. When settled Scandinavian Saints saw a wagon train camped for the night or when they heard of one, “it was customary . . . to go and visit them and see if perchance they might find some of their friends.” A Pleasant Grove settler from Sweden, Paul Anderson, came to one of the camps in October 1866. Anderson had just built himself a one-room dugout and spoke to the Warnick brothers, fellow countrymen who were strangers to him. “He [Anderson] asked us kindly to remain there,” as “this was as good a place as we would find in Sanpete.” The Warnicks stayed in Pleasant Grove, as did others who were given similar invitations. Whether acquaintances or strangers, countrymen were invited to share accommodations and permanently
settle. This also was true of many converted by missionaries who had already settled in Pleasant Grove. New converts often settled in the towns of relatives who had immigrated earlier, sometimes the relative or missionary being the only person known to them in all of Utah. Their affinity to countrymen, relatives, and their native languages bound them together and offered a haven for settlement (Warnick n.d., 3:28; Olsen 2001).

Virtually all of the early settlers of Pleasant Grove were Mormon. However, there appears to have been a definite ethnic division that separated the Scandinavian immigrants from the English-speaking immigrants. Although they had all accepted the same Gospel and all had traveled west to be associated together as a religious body, there remained a language division.

Church policies, family patterns, and old world traditions all perpetuated Scandinavian language and culture and slowed adjustment to the American culture. The Scandinavians even formed their own social community within the community.

The division came early. In 1869, when only a handful of Scandinavians lived in Pleasant Grove, separate meetings were held there for Scandinavians (Knud Swensen Collection). Andrew Jenson wrote,

A number of Scandinavian Saints coming directly from Denmark, Sweden, and Norway located at Pleasant Grove, and it was found desirable that they should hold religious services in their own languages until they should acquire a sufficient knowledge of the English language to keep pace with the rest of the Saints. Consequently, Rasmus Petersen was appointed to preside over the Scandinavian meetings which, with the advice of the bishop, were held on Sunday afternoon. (Jensen n.d.)

Church authorities theorized that church services in their own language would deeply embed in them a knowledge of the Gospel. "Separate meetings were strictly auxiliary to regular congregations." However, it is doubtful that many Scandinavians attended dual meetings, especially those who could not understand English. Many who came to America as adults never mastered the English language. Many of the children who had not yet mastered English found themselves seeking schoolmates and playmates of their own nationality. One wrote, "I started school at age seven and English-speaking children would not play with me for they could not understand my language. All my friends were other Scandinavian children" (Mulder 1957, 150-51; Eggertson n.d., 13).

Andrew Jenson, a resident of Pleasant Grove for the first sixteen years that he lived in the Utah Territory, reported, "As Scandinavian meetings were held regularly, Bro. Nilson organized a choir to sing in these meetings" (Jensen 1938). Their first rehearsal occurred on 11 December 1875. Most Scandinavians loved to sing and had melodic voices. The Scandinavian choir stayed active and performed until 1929. Before the century turned the Church had published two editions of a Danish hymnal for theirs and other Scandinavian congregations and choirs to use.

A separate choir sang in the English-speaking meetings. Before the one ward was divided in 1890, a history of the ward choir and a list of the choir members were written. There is neither mention of a Scandinavian participant nor one patronymically spelled surname on the list, although the population of the ward was one-third Scandinavian (Jenson n.d.).

The late arrival of the Scandinavian population forced most of them to settle on the outlying, less desirable land. The scattered condition of the farms and residences of the Scandinavian families necessitated long roads to travel in the winter to attend meetings. For this reason, during the winter of 1876,
Scandinavians were divided into three “districts” for their meetings. Those in Little Denmark—a section of small, closely set houses west of the business district—were mostly artisans and met together. The far north section met together, and the Scandinavians in the eastern part of town met in the third group. Each district met in individual houses every Wednesday night. “These meeting were, as a rule, well attended and the time profitably occupied in speaking, praying and singing.” They soon outgrew the houses and again “met as one [Scandinavian] unit in general assembly” (Jenson 1938, 93-94).

During the four-year interim between Andrew Jenson’s two Scandinavian missions (1873-1875; 1879-1881), he still lived in town, and he wrote that he attended approximately equal “ordinary meetings” and Scandinavian meetings, 170 each. Through that period, an equal number of English-speaking meetings and Scandinavian meetings were held. (Jenson 1938)

Written materials in their native languages prolonged adjustment to their new country’s language. At the onset of Andrew Jenson’s publication of Joseph Smith’s history in the Danish language (the first book published in a foreign language in Utah and written in Pleasant Grove) Jenson reported,

On 1 February 1877, I attended a Scandinavian meeting in Pleasant Grove, I presented the plan of publishing Joseph Smith’s History and invited the people to subscribe. Nearly all the brethren present gave me their names at once, the next evening in another Scandinavian meeting, I secured several more subscribers. In a third meeting held a few days later, I added more names to my list and I secured 70 subscribers in Pleasant Grove. This meant that nearly every family of Scandinavians signed as subscribers.” (Jenson 1938, 96)

Devout Scandinavians were hungry for LDS literature in their own language.

In May 1877, Apostle Erastus Snow came to confer with Jenson on the History of Joseph Smith, and they both spoke in a Scandinavian meeting held in the church house. After Rasmus Peterson and Jenson had spoken, Bishop John Brown, the bishop of the Pleasant Grove Ward, asked if there were two Danish languages? He said that he could follow Peterson somewhat but could not understand a word of Jenson’s talk. Andrew Jenson explained that Peterson had spoken broken Danish, mingled with English, while Jenson had spoken in pure Danish (Jenson 1938, 102). Perhaps this indicates that Bishop Brown had not attended Scandinavian meetings enough, if at all, to acquaint himself with the Danish language.

There were a number of newspapers and books published in Utah in the Danish language, to which Pleasant Grove Scandinavians heavily subscribed. The 1873 Danish-Norwegian Utah Posten, only a year in publication, was immediately followed by Utah Skandinav. In 1876 Anders W. Winberg began publishing the Bikuben (The Beehive). Winberg reported that on his first campaign to get subscriptions, he sold them to thirty of the ninety families in Pleasant Grove. The Young Peoples library of the town also held a continuous subscription. With his paper Winberg published Udklip sections, chapters that could be folded to form a book. From these the paper published Bibliotek, a library of selected books, most of which were religious and previously published Udklip sections. Every Scandinavian newspaper published after this adopted Udklip sections for its paper. Utah Posten began publication in 1885 and other later papers came and went, most published in the Danish Language. The Bikuben, considered the best, ran an unbroken fifty-nine years. The abundant publication of literature in their own languages went a long way in teaching them the gospel, making them feel more at home, and keeping them in the mainstream of American life, but it did nothing to hone
Scandinavians carried over into their social lives the security they felt in Danish-speaking religious meetings and reading literature in their own languages. In 1882, Andrew Jenson wrote,

"I and my wife attended a number of pleasant little parties. It had been the custom for several years among the Scandinavians to arrange private family feasts. As a rule, 12 or 16 invited couples attended these. Usually a splendid meal was served after which the little company would engage in dancing and playing until midnight, when a light luncheon would be served prior to breaking up." Jenson added that he and his wife attended many such feasts in the homes of their compatriots. He also wrote that the best food that could be offered was served on these occasions, and "a free and happy spirit and consistent intimacy added much to the enjoyment." But after the Jensons had attended one event on Tuesday and another the following Thursday he wrote, "Felt tired having had too much of the same kind of enjoyment too quickly in succession, sometimes dancing until 2 A.M." (Jenson 1938, 128)

The Jensons attended the English-speaking New Year's Eve party in the United Order Hall and complained that "considerable confusion and disorder destroyed the enjoyment." Yet a few days later he wrote that they "attended a real good Scandinavian dance in the United Order Hall" (1938, 128).

The Scandinavians became famous in Pleasant Grove for their Grand Scandinavian Balls held in the most prestigious and newest dance halls. The last of the winter season balls was always held each year on Washington's birthday. Tickets sold for fifty cents a couple and fifteen cents a single. Refreshments were traditional coffee and buns. These balls became so popular in town, the social barrier began to break down and the English-speakers began to attend in the forepart of the 1900s (American Fork Citizen 1915).

Annie Nelson Eggertson, a Danish child immigrant, wrote,

"We were emigrants [sic] in Pleasant Grove, and were often made to feel it, but were not alone. It was really a little Danish colony when we got together. We soon began to set the pace for fine farming and for thrift in every way. The fine hospitality and social contact the Scandinavians had with each other drew the respect of the town folks to the extent that they began to edge their way into our circles. As we learned the language and went to school we began to be admitted into some of the town crowds; however, it took time before we [Danish immigrants] were permitted with the elite [English-speaking]." (Monson 1888)

Scandinavian Christmas Day programs and reunions became traditional, noted in 1914 as having gone on annually for forty years. In 1914 a newspaper item invited Scandinavians from all of the wards in the Utah and Alpine stakes, from Provo to Lehi, "Following their [Scandinavian] custom of years standing," the Scandinavians of Pleasant Grove convened at 11 A.M. in the tabernacle each Christmas Day to worship in a traditional Scandinavian way. The following Christmas a similar notice appeared. It was noted that another Scandinavian reunion would be held the following January (American Fork Citizen 1914). It appears Scandinavians enjoyed meeting together often.

In 1882 Pleasant Grove Scandinavians formed an organization simply named Scandinavian Organization. A sleigh riding party, with Swedish bells musically jangling from their horses harnesses, was one winter activity they enjoyed together. A large group belonging to the Scandinavian Organization met annually to commemorate the "Midsommarfest" holiday, an Old World Swedish celebration that most Pleasant Grove Danish also celebrated. "Each June 24th they gathered in August Warnick's orchard at 910 North 600 West and celebrated with refreshments, singing, dancing, and..."
general merry making as they had done in the Old Country. Here everyone met and visited, reminiscing of times and places in the past.” There were races for all ages and a rather lengthy program. “There was always a fifty-gallon barrel of lemonade which sold for five cents.” Homemade ice cream and pink popcorn balls sold for a nickel as well, with an occasional nickle in the middle to induce buying another. They did this for many years [into the beginning of the 1930s] until most of the immigrant generation had passed away” (Christiansen n.d.; Warnick Family n.d. 21-22).

In 1890 a new celebration began. In commemoration of the first Scandinavian proselyting that had begun in Denmark in 1850, a Church-wide Scandinavian Conference and Reunion became an annual affair. Probably because of the central location, the number of Scandinavians in the town, and the high interest in celebrations, the affair was often held in Pleasant Grove. Before the town had a local newspaper, the 1911 event was documented in a hand-written notation that reviewed the reunion held in Pleasant Grove park, where hundreds from the county and state gathered with the local Scandinavians and partook of “food galore.” Newspapers document the 1915, 1916, 1921, and 1929 events. Large crowds assembled from all over the western states for the two-day event. In 1915, seven hundred outsiders came to Pleasant Grove and along with three hundred local residents, they “taxed the tabernacle to its capacity,” and many were unable to find seats. In 1921, out-of-town visitors numbered over one thousand. They stayed at homes of local Scandinavians. During the celebration, activities consisted of three religious meetings and a grand concert given by the Pleasant Grove Scandinavian choir in the native tongues. The three national airs of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark were rendered in their several languages, “which created warmth and enthusiasm.” The Pilgrims Chorus and a Thanksgiving anthem were always favorites. And the flags of each Scandinavian country decorated the building. Programs were printed in Danish, identifying with the majority ethnic language. In 1929, on August 10 and 11 this yearly celebration was again held in Pleasant Grove under the direction of the president of the Scandinavian Conference and Reunion, John A. Widtsoe.

Almost all of the Pleasant Grove Scandinavian gatherings also went on into the 1930s. A notice in the May 5, 1933 edition of the Pleasant Grove Review read, “A Scandinavian meeting will be held Sunday 7 May at 2 P.M. in the Stake Tabernacle. A chorus of 30 voices from Provo will render the music. Special speakers will also be present. The service will be given entirely in the Scandinavian languages.”

Scandinavians felt almost excluded from the political arena, considering the large population of ethnic people in town, and those of Pleasant Grove formed their own Scandinavian “political club” in 1891. As a group they were disgruntled with their lack of representation among the elected officials. Only three of them to date had been elected to local public offices, although Scandinavians had considerably populated the town for some thirty-plus years. This small number did not reflect the one-third Scandinavian population. One of those three men, Andrew Jenson, served less than three months before he left on a mission in 1879. On the eve of municipal elections, Monday 2 February 1891, the club invited Jenson back to speak at a political rally and to participate in a political campaign. They drove about town in sleighs, campaigning, letting their wants be known to townspeople. That year they succeeded in electing two men to positions on the city council (Jenson 1938, 107).

Native foods, pleasing to the palates of Scandinavians, who tenaciously clung to them, seemed unacceptable to the
English-speaking settlers. These often brought ridicule and condemnation. Rohdin Christiansen, a Utah-born son of Danish parents, recalled some of the differences between the two cultures.

A great favorite of the Scandies was filibunk,” he wrote, “whole milk allowed to sour into a firm clabber. It was eaten with a little sugar or cinnamon. Some folks thought sour milk was crude fare for humans, and occasionally said so, but the Scandies liked their old familiar foods and cared not much what people might think. It is a matter of some wry satisfaction to a few of us, who in our early youth were scoffed at because we ate clabbermilk, to see so many paying fancy prices for yogurt.

He also wrote of other foods that seemed repellent to unfamiliar senses. “Festive occasions called for lutfisk, a dry, salted cod fish that was distinctly malodorous, which is to say it smelled to high heaven, and boiling in a pot brought out the worst in it” (Christiansen n.d., 3). In the fall when a pig was slaughtered there was sure to be such delicacies as blood pudding, headcheese made from the brains and other head meat, faggots, spaaga meat, and Danish sausage stuffed into the intestines of the animal (through a cow’s horn) and roasted in underground pits for long periods (Petersen n.d.; Freeman n.d.; Author’s memories of her mother’s cooking). These foods, reminiscent of the Scandinavian people’s frugal backgrounds, were thought of as unclean by their non-Scandinavian neighbors.

Annie Eggertson wrote, “The Danes brought with them the customs of having good milk, butter, and cheese, homemade beer, and coffee every morning, and sometimes in the afternoon. Mother and Father could not see the Gospel in a strictly orthodox way, i.e., their old custom of drinking coffee and playing cards did not seem a moral issue. Consequently they did not obey these teachings,” for which they were severely criticized. But “they would draw the line when it came to drinking the rotten [American] cider, as they called it, or getting drunk as many did. They abhorred the saloon where so many young men spent their evenings” (n.d, 13).

Different ideas of the quality of food which humans should consume brought on an argument that was neither soon forgotten nor forgiven. In fact it deeply scarred the relationship between the town’s Anglo and Nordic communities. When Jens Jenson, the brother of Andrew, found that his ox had bloated from eating too much green lucern and apparently would die, he killed it and sold the fresh meat to several of the townspeople, telling them that the meat came from a bloated ox. Evidently, he neglected to tell one prominent English-speaking citizen who purchased the meat. After hearing from another source that the cow was bloated before being killed, the prominent citizen brought suit against Jens. The citizen was described by Andrew Jensen as an “American filled with bigotry and national hatred.” He wrote, the “unrighteous judge,” a neighbor of the bigoted citizen, fined Jens “in a most unrighteous and scandalous manner” and charged him court costs. Andrew appealed the case on behalf of his brother by having thirty people declare that the meat was good. Andrew commented, “some Americans have certain notions in regard to certain food which borders on ridiculousness.” The prominent American citizen continued the case, and the argument escalated, splitting the town into two factions, the Scandinavians and a few “responsible citizens” on one side and most of the English-speaking on the other. “The whole town seemed to be in a ferment and very bitter feelings were manifest.” Bishop Brown and several other leading men “feared for the consequences of the ever increasing strife” and called a few of the dissatisfied men together, but the man who brought the suit refused to come. The meeting soothed over the
problem by retracting the fine and most of the court costs. Bishop Brown “spoke in [Church] meeting unwisely in regards to the meat case. His purpose was to cast oil on troubled waters but he made matters worse.” This dramatic occurrence left deep scars on ethnic relationships in the town for many years (Pleasant Grove 1869–1902).

The Reorganized Church established a branch in Pleasant Grove, and the Elders found a fruitful field among Scandinavians. Jenson’s brother Niels left the LDS Church and became a leader in this Josephite branch. Perhaps the meat case had a bearing on other Scandinavians of the town who apostatized (Shipley n.d., 75–77).

A situation occurred where rapid interpretation from English to Danish or Swedish would have greatly reduced friction in the united order, which was entered into by many of the brethren of Pleasant Grove. Fourteen “Rules of Conduct” had to be read and agreed to before baptism into the order, but it was nearly one and one-half years after the order began before a Danish translation was made (United Order 1876–1892). John A. Adams, who authored “An Economic History of the Pleasant Grove United Order,” suggests, “The lack of understanding due to the inability to openly communicate added strain on relationships among those participating in the Order. The language barrier caused inconveniences, but was more symptomatic of the deeply-rooted nationalistic problem. Despite the common beliefs and union of the Gospel of Christ, divisions existed among the people. The newly arriving immigrants, though welcomed and provided for, were often looked upon as being ‘inferior’ to their established counterparts.” Adams conceded that “the Scandinavians were by no means a docile and submissive faction in the community” (n.d.). They went their own way, most being grateful for their new religion and country.

A traveling newspaper correspondent noted the spirit of the people when he wrote of the Scandinavians in Pleasant Grove in the November 15, 1878 edition of the Deseret Evening News.

When they came here, unable to speak a word of English they were without means, even being indebted for the money required to emigrate. Now, through industry and economy, they are so far independent that they owe no man a dollar, they have peaceful, comfortable homes, some of them even have large fruitful fields. If their thrift were emulated by all who have equally good or better opportunities, the cry of hard time might well cease in this territory. (Fugal n.d., 1)

Their frugality had gained them much, including respect from some. Others often made jest of their ways, especially the traditional dress of the Scandinavian immigrants, some of whom clung to their old frugal ways well past the century’s turn.

Their manor of dress set them apart as well as their language. Long after the early arrivals had had time to get settled and earn means to purchase ready-made clothing, the frugal late-arriving Scandinavians were cording raw wool and weaving their own materials. They were fond of “homespun.” It stood for quality in their eyes. Like C. C. A. Christiansen stated, “Grandfather’s shirt was always white, it was made of the best linen spun at home by grandmother’s devout hands. It was paid for with an honest kiss, and lasted many years, not like the cheap dyed cloth one bought from modern merchants and tailors who were seldom honest” (Mulder 1957, 273). Hannah Carlson Fugal, a Swedish immigrant of 1868, dyed wool, spun thread, wove material for herself and others, and sewed the family’s clothing. Because her Utah-born son, Chris, was dressed differently than the other children, his school teacher always referred to him as her “homespun boy” (Fugal n.d., 1). Marie Poulson, another early immigrant
in town, until her death in 1919, sheared her own sheep and spun her wool. Her friend in Pleasant Grove's Little Denmark wove it into cloth for her.

Concerning other aspects of dress, wooden shoes were customary dress in their native lands, and naturally they brought them to Utah with them. Many Scandinavians came from rural settings in their countries and wore wooden clogs to work in the fields. Jeppa Nelson, while immigrating in 1873, was devastated when his new wooden shoes washed overboard in an ocean storm. When he arrived in Pleasant Grove he recognized a ready market for wooden shoes. He began carving and selling them to his Scandinavian neighbors. Wooden shoes served farmers as outside shoes only. A bench usually stood by the back door of Scandinavian houses, where they exchanged wooden clogs for indoor leather shoes, leaving the garden dirt behind. This kept their homes clean and neat as well as their leather shoes (Fugal n.d., 1).

Annie Eggertson wrote, "I always wore wooden shoes to school as did many others, and the boys had a great sport slipping our shoes off and running away with them." Further commenting on her inferior feelings over her backward dress, Annie wrote, "I picked ground cherries with other girls, dried them, and sold them for good money. In fact these extra things we did gave us some of the nice things [clothing] we otherwise would not have had, and helped take away some of the stings we had had to feel for being Danish emigrants" (n.d., 21). Another note along frugal dress was that of Christina Warnick, who came to Utah from Sweden in 1866. She had a very good woolen petticoat when she arrived. During the hard years her husband's coat gave out. "She took her petticoat and fashioned a coat for him and he was very pleased to get it and wore it as long as there was a thread left of it. It was hand woven and lasted for years" (n.d.).

Missionaries sent to native lands and newly immigrated converts added to the retention of Old World language and culture. These Church patterns prolonged the Americanization of the Scandinavians and even indoctrinated the second generation in old country ways. The Church policy of sending Scandinavian immigrants and first generation sons back to their native lands to proselyte among their relatives and countrymen kept new immigrants entering Pleasant Grove, thus strengthening the ties between the Old Country languages and ways and the American-born Scandinavians of the next generations. During the two to three years the missionaries served in Scandinavian countries their language skills were sharpened. They sought out relatives to convert and helped them and numerous others to emigrate. Immigrant men and sons were sent back to Scandinavian countries, and at least three served two to three missions. The constant association of new settlers had an effect on the next generation as well. Rhodin Christiansen, a second generation Scandinavian himself, wrote, "Surrounded as they were by so many from the Old Country, the second generation grew up more or less bilingual, and in some respects were almost as Scandinavian as their parents. Even after they were grown they might meet on the street and exchange a few pleasantries in Danish or Swedish, or perhaps a mixture of the two. Often one parent was Swedish the other Danish" (Christiansen n.d., 4).

Jens Monson, an 1871 Swedish convert, after serving a local mission, immigrated in 1875 at age 25. He worked to bring another brother to Utah. Together the brothers worked to bring the entire family of seven children and their widowed mother to Zion. All of the family members lived with Jens until they could get themselves established. Six of the seven, including Jens, settled in Pleasant Grove. Jens continued to sponsor family members and new converts into the
1920s, bringing many of those converted by his two returning missionary brothers and two of his sons and a nephew. Although he was far from rich, thirty-two converts were recipients of his meager means and his hospitality for many months, and sometimes years, until they became settled. In turn the language and culture was reintroduced into his home many times over. His daughter, Louisa, taught the new arrivals English. Through her almost constant association with native Swedish and Danish immigrants and with her own mother and grandmother who immigrated as adults and never leaned to speak fluent English, Louisa became bilingual. She was born in Pleasant Grove in 1889 (Olsen 2001).

It appears that a variety of factors contributed to the slow assimilation of Scandinavian-born Church members into the Anglo society of Pleasant Grove. Most prominent was their culture and language, and the nationalistic feelings on the part of both groups. John A. Widtsoe, while writing of his own mother’s experiences as an adult immigrant of 1883, also summarized much of the Scandinavian experience in Pleasant Grove. He wrote that Anna Karine Gaarden Widtsoe, his mother, had come to America as a mature woman of thirty-four and found it difficult to learn English. She “always felt an inward embarrassment when she spoke in English,” so she freely used her native language. This situation was not improved by her return to her country on a four-year mission. Because of her broken English, she “felt handicapped in her progress among her chosen people.” Therefore she was “led more than ever to use her energies among the people of her own national origin.” With them she felt comfortable. Widtsoe concluded, “Language is one of the most serious barriers among men. Failure to understand one another leads to misunderstanding and suspicion. Those who speak the dominant language of a country often fail to appreciate the virtues of those of foreign extraction who cannot acquire the native accent or the ready use of language.” He further wrote, “This was very evident in early Utah, peopled by Mormon converts from many foreign lands. In fact the native American stock were not free from unkindness due to ignorance in their views and treatment of immigrants” (Widtsoe 1942, 122). Widtsoe’s writings rang true for Pleasant Grove Scandinavians living in the mixed society of that town.

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