

JENS RASMUSSEN

Born: July 23, 1847 Denmark

Age: 8

Hodgett Wagon Company



Hans and Maren S. Rasmussen with children in 1856:
Jens, Caroline, Bendt, Christena, Anne, Rasmus

Jens was the second oldest child of Hans and Maren Stephansen Rasmussen. Little did his parents know that as he was being born, Brigham Young was about to end a long westward journey and proclaim, “This is the place.” They could not have foreseen that on this little baby’s birthday nine years later, they would be crossing the plains of America. Jens’s father, Hans, was the only son and heir to a beautiful estate on the Island of Shetland, Denmark. He married Maren Stephansen when she was 24 years old and Hans was 21. They had all the comforts of a large estate with many servants. In 1854 they met the Mormon missionaries and were baptized in June 1855.

Almost immediately, Jens’s father began selling off his estate as the family prepared to gather with the Saints in Utah. The estate brought in enough money to pay all their expenses as well as the passage of some thirty converts who had no means to go at that time. The Rasmussen’s children were Rasmus (11), Jens/James (9), Bendt/Bent (6), Karen/Caroline (4), and 20-month-old twins, Annie and Christena. Jens is pictured above on the far left with his family in 1855 or 1856.

The Rasmussens sailed from Liverpool on the *Thornton*. Most of the Saints on board were English. One Danish brother, Peter Madsen, kept a detailed diary of this voyage. His record of Sunday, May 4, 1856, includes a Priesthood calling and ordination for Hans:

“Weather: beautiful. This morning at 2 o’clock the anchor was hoisted and thereafter the ship was towed out of the river by a steamtug. 10 o’clock the Scandinavian Saints gathered for worship. Elders Ahmanson, Svensen, and Larsen delivered sermons and encouraged us to preserve a good spirit in love and unity. Let us be an example in cleanliness and order for the English section. Next Hans Rasmussen was called to the office of a priest and ordained; Anders Jorgensen to a teacher. The good weather caused the company to be happy and they rejoiced in song. . . . Allen M. Finley [Findley], late of the Bombay Mission, and Sister Ireland, of Dundee, Scotland, were joined together in the bonds of matrimony.”

The Rasmussen’s journey took a full eight months, with hardships and heartache along the way. Before even leaving Iowa, little Christena died on June 24. Several times the Rasmussen’s journey was delayed in order to help the Martin handcart company. Winter storms left them stranded on the east side of the Continental Divide with inadequate food, warmth or shelter. Hans abandoned all the extra things he had started out with in order to help the other Saints. A stove for Maren was left on the trail. She never again had a stove to cook on. Rescuers from Salt Lake City finally found them and assisted them to Zion. (Note of interest: In the records of a Jensen family from Denmark who immigrated in 1857, the story is told of passing some Indians near Ft. Laramie who were in possession of and using a stove of this type. They wondered where it came from.)

After a brief rest in the Salt Lake Valley, Jens’s family moved to Ephraim, Utah, where their first home was a dugout. They were soon called to help settle Richfield, Utah, where their first home was also a dugout. Their Richfield settlement could not continue and they returned to Ephraim where they were given a city block of land on which Hans built another dugout. Later, Hans added a two-room adobe house, but no cookstove.

Jens became known as James or Jim in Utah. He never married, and lived with his mother until her death, and then alone in this humble home that had been his parent’s until Jim died in 1902. Jim made his living as a butcher for pigs, making adobes, and some farming. A nephew wrote of him:

“Jim’s mother had a huge fireplace; no stove, and Jim had to haul a lot of wood to keep the house warm and for cooking. . . . Jim lived so close to our house, he naturally was a frequent visitor . . . he would come and sit down on a chair just beside the door . . . The members of our family would be sitting around the table, doing various things, such as lessons for those attending school, father perhaps reading and mother darning socks. Jim had very little to say . . . He would sit for perhaps an hour or so, and then leave. . . . I think he must have often wished he had a wife and family, and the companionship which they afforded.”

Hans Rasmussen passed away in 1887. Maren died in 1889.

Sources: Daughters of Utah Pioneers history files; Journal of Peder Madsen (Danish), Church Archives (Madsen diary also online at <http://handcart.byu.edu>); “History of James Rasmussen,” by a nephew Clyde Rasmussen, familysearch.org.