

LARS CHRISTOPHER MORTENSSEN

1781 - 1847

ANNE DORTHEA HANSDATTER

1782 - after 1824

written by 5th Great Grand Daughter Laural Bushman November 1998

2nd writing April 2008

Forward: My reason for writing this story is so that the lives of Lars Christopher Mortenssen and Anne Dorthea Hansdatter might be understood by their descendants. That they might not be judged by today's moral standards. In 1700 and 1800, Denmark was very different from the America we live in today.

Preface: When prophesying about the dark ages, the Prophet Isaiah said, "For behold, a darkness shall cover the earth and a gross darkness the people:" (Isaiah 60:2) Lars Christopher Mortenssen and Anne Dorthea Hansdatter lived during the last days of the dark ages. They were born into the lowest caste of Denmark's societal class hierarchy, lower even than peasants. If they had lived in India, they would have been called "untouchables". The light of the Restored Gospel would shine forth in America while they were still living but, their son Hans Christophersson, would be the one who would join the church and emigrate to America. For them, it was a generation too soon.

Christopher Mortenssen

Christopher was born April 29, 1781 in Annissee, Sjaelland, Denmark. He was the son of Morten Christopherssen and Anne Hansdatter. His father's occupation was that of a 'nightman' and their family was despised because of it. Morton would collect garbage, skin dead animals, castrate animals, and do other things that had to be done but, were considered to be unclean by the peasantry. Peasant children were not allowed to play with a 'nightman's' children. Marriages had to be arranged with families from other parishes because they would not be welcome son or daughter-in-laws. The citizenry born into this station hated what they called, the ordinary people. It is no wonder Christopher became a vagrant and lived at the edge of society.

Many people in Denmark's lowest caste did not have homes and wandered around the countryside as vagrants. Unlike the homeless people in our society today, who usually travel alone, during the 1700's and 1800's in Denmark whole families would travel around the countryside together. They would sleep in barns, under trees, or if they had some money in an inn. Babies would be born and, oftentimes die. The men would work at whatever they could find to do, usually

castrating animals, dealing in rags, or glazier work (one who sets glass in window frames). The women would sell or trade, needles, ribbons, and other small things.

At times they would steal to survive and when caught, would be given excessively long and harsh prison terms. While in prison they would receive very inadequate diets and be forced to work at hard labour. Their children would be taken from them and placed in foundling homes by the 'poor-law authorities'. Many people died in prison. Much of the information we have comes from court and prison records that have been preserved.

When Christopher was born, his parents lived in Annisse near Frederiksborg. Later they moved to Ballerup in the county of Copenhagen. He was seven years old when his father passed away. Morten Christopherssen had always been 'on the road' and may have died anywhere, in a barn or under a tree.

After his father's death Christopher went to live with his uncle Hans Christopherssen, who was a horse cutter (castrated horses) in Ballerup. Three years later his mother married Johan Jacob Meier who was a glass glazier and moved to a parish called Gronholdt near Frederiksborg. However, like many people in their class, even though they had a permanent address, they would still travel around the countryside. Christopher stayed with them for a short time and then went to Nakskov, Lolland where he became an apprentice with a glass glazier named Pedersen. His apprenticeship lasted six years.

When he was fourteen years old, Christopher was confirmed in the Nakskov Lutheran Church by the Vicar Kryger. He would have been about sixteen years when he finished his apprenticeship and apparently could read. As an adult, Christopher was five feet six inches tall, had blue eyes, dark hair, and a proportioned build. His height was average for men of his day because most people were shorter than they are now. Dorthea was less than five feet tall and she was considered to be average in height.

After finishing his apprenticeship, Christopher traveled around the countryside earning money by the 'glazier-profession'. For a time he traveled with a family whose father was named Frederik Ahrenfeldt and he began to like one of the daughters, Kristine, who later became his mistress. In 1801, Kristine had a child by Christopher that died.

One evening in about 1799, they had made a stop by the side of the road for the night when Prefect (Dan.: Stiftamtmanden) passed by and pressed Christopher

into the navy. He was stationed on board a naval ship called the 'Arveprinsessen' which was in Copenhagen. After serving aboard the ship for six weeks and four days he was released. Whereupon he enlisted with the Hussars of Frederiksborg and served with them for the next six years.

During the Napoleonic wars, the Danish King Frederik VI sided with Napoleon and Napoleon lost. Denmark never took an active part in the war but their troops were mobilized. Christopher was a musketeer with Copenhagen Infantry Regiment's 11th company a regiment that was established in 1808 and existed until 1816.

Christopher did not take well to military discipline and in 1804 while on the 'grass-watch' near Skjoldenaesholm, he was punished with five days on water and bread for having assaulted and beaten shoemaker Niels Christenssen. Another time He was punished for a minor offence by being hogtied for 48 hours.

Anne Dorthea Hansdatter

Anne Dorthea Hansdatter was born in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1782. She was a 'drawer child'. At that time, because there were so many desperate unmarried mothers, the police would often find dead bodies of new-born children in the canals. In 1759 an institution was established called 'Fodselsstiftelsen' where women could go and give birth anonymously if they did not want to keep their baby. When she arrived, a sign with a number was hanged around her neck and no name was revealed. Anne Dorthea's mother was number 169. The baby would then be given to foster parents to be cared for until it's confirmation (about fourteen years old). The foster parents were often very poor themselves and took the child only because it gave them a little money from the town parish's 'poor relief fund'. Anne Dorthea was raised by foster parents Jeppe Ibsen and Karen Jorgensdatter in Ringsted. After Jeppe passed away, Karen married Hans Madsen which, is why Dorthea used the surname Hansdatter.

For a short period of time, another system was used. In the wall of a specific hospital in Copenhagen a drawer was established. It was lined and here a mother, who had given birth elsewhere, could place her new-born child anonymously. After having placed the child in the drawer she would pull a bell and leave. The staff of the hospital would wait for a few minutes to give the mother a chance to get away and then fetch the baby. Children born in this manner, as well as the way Dorthea was, came to be know as 'Skuffebarn' or 'drawer-child'.

Dorthea was four feet eleven inches tall, had blue eyes, dark hair and a stocky build. Her religion was Luthern. She could read. Around 1798 to 1803 she served as a maid with a farmer named Niels Christenssen in Kvaerkeby for five years. Later she served with Vicar Schroeder for a year and Peder Christophersson from November 1, 1806 to November 1, 1807.

Christopher and Dorthea

In 1807 Christopher was dismissed from the Hussars and went to Ringsted where he stayed with the chimney-sweeper Hans Christian and helped with sweeping chimneys. Here he met Dorthea and they were planning to be married. An official engagement-declaration was made in 1807. However, that autumn, the English armies came into Denmark and Christopher had to march away with the territorial force.

After the English left, Christopher went back to Ringsted to fetch Dorthea. He took her with him to the 'militia-dragoons' with whom he then served and who at that time was quartered in Falster. In March 1808 they were married and she went with him when the regiment marched to Naestved. It was not uncommon at that time for women, both married and unmarried, to follow their men into war. Christopher was transferred from one regiment to another and Dorthea followed him.

When winter came in 1809, they were living in the barracks in Kronprinsessegaden, near Copenhagen when he was sent to a drill school. By this time Dorthea had a baby and nothing to live on so she took her child and went back to Ringsted. On Shrovetide Monday (a holiday) in 1811 Christopher returned to Ringsted and told her that he had finished the drill school and had received a passport so that he no longer had to serve. He did not show her the passport. They then began traveling around the countryside where Christopher carried out his work as a glazier. They drifted around in Sjaelland and on the Small islands and late in 1811 went back to Moen.

Their first baby must have died and they had another in 1811. It was a girl and was baptized in 1812. She apparently lived less than a year. (I wonder how any children survived being born and living under the conditions that they did.) On August 23, 1812 in Ringsted they had another child, a boy named Mads Christophersson.

One day late in 1813, Christopher left Dorthea with a crofter telling her that he had to be away for a few days as he had some work to do. Actually he went

away with Kirstine Ahrenfeldt (his mistress) over to Sjaeland. They then traveled all through Fyen, Langeland, and the Small islands. Christopher worked as a glazier and a plumber and Kirstine did trading with needles, ribbons, and finger-rings.

Dorthea was pregnant when Christopher left her and gave birth to a son named Hans Christopherssen on August 14, 1814. The baby was baptized on January 29, 1815 in the church in Nykobing, Falstar. The parish register reads: Hans, parents Christopher Mortenssen and wife Anne Dorthea Hansdatter, vagrants and arrested persons. This Hans Christopherssen must have died sometime after January 29, 1815.

The year 1814 was a bad one for Dorthea. On August 31st she was arrested in Roskilde for theft of a diamond (used for cutting glass) and a silver spoon. She claimed in court that Christopher had been dead for a year and that she was now engaged to a man named Christian Holgerson who traveled around the country as a glazier and a watchmaker. (This was not true. Christopher was still alive and had run off with Kristine, while Christian was married to someone else.) After being interrogated, Dorthea admitted to the theft of the diamond and said that her fiancee had given her the spoon. She had sold the items and purchased cloth, sugar, coffee, soap and chewing tobacco. By the search was found a diamond, a wallet with many papers, and 1/4 pound of chewing tobacco. Dorthea was described, at that time, as being: of medium height, has strong limbs, brown hair, blue eyes, corpulent and red faced. She was sentenced to two months imprisonment in 'Tugt-Rasp-of Forbedringshuset' in Copenhagen.

On April 13, 1815, Dorthea gave birth to a girl named Catherine (Trine) Marie Christiansdtr. The father was Christian Holgerson. This seems improbable since she had given birth to a son eight months before, but that is what is recorded. Considering the conditions she was living in, it is not hard to believe that her baby might have been born early. What is hard to believe is that it survived but it apparently did.

1814 was not a good year for Christopher and Kristine either. They were traveling near Nykobing, Falstar when Kristine went into town to buy some glass and was arrested. When Christopher heard about this, he went into town and was also arrested. They were both charged with vagrancy and were under arrest for about nine months. During that time they had a child which, along with another child they had, was taken away by the 'poor-law authorities'. They were both sentenced to one year of forced labor in Moen's Tugthus prison.

Having served their time in prison they were given passports and were ordered to go to Nykobing on Falstar. When they arrived there, they were arrested again. This arrest was such, though, that they could go where they pleased in the daytime, but they had to stay in the arrest/jail during the nights. After several months though, they were not let out in the day time. Shortly after their arrival in Nykobing, Kirstine gave birth to a child, and during their arrest, which lasted a little over two years, they begot yet another child, and all these children were taken away by the 'poor-law authorities'.

The reason for the second arrest was that the authorities had found out that Kristine was not Christopher's wife. For the crime of adultery Christopher was then sentenced to 5X5 days on water and bread. Kristine received a sentence of 3X5 days on water and bread but her sentence was postponed because she was pregnant with the last mentioned child.

After his release from prison, Christopher was given a passport to go to Ringsted where he was employed as a watchman (a man who watches or guards premises). While there he met Dorthea and decided to live with her for awhile. Christopher did not like working as a watchman and quit after six months and started doing glazier work. Then Kristine came through Ringsted and he decided to go with her again. This time he was working as a glazier and a plumber but often met people who were dealing in rags and decided to make a living doing that as well.

As before, Dorthea was pregnant when Christopher left and she gave birth to our ancestor, Hans Christopherssen, on November 25, 1818 in Ringsted. When Hans was baptized, the parish register recorded, "...the father, Christopher Mortenssen, watchman in Ringsted has run away".

In 1819 Dorthea was caught stealing again, this time in her home town of Ringsted. She was now accused of having stolen three sacks from a mill which she had sold to some of her friends. During the time she was interrogated, it was revealed that she had stolen something more but only trifles. Dorthea was sentenced to three years in prison. However, before she could be delivered to the prison, it was revealed that two or three years before she had stolen a shirt from a man in the kitchen of the 'poor house' and she had also stolen some clothing in a garden in Ringsted. That gave her another six months added to her prison term.

During the interrogation, Dorthea revealed that the father of her daughter Catherine Marie was not Christopher Mortenssen but her former friend and supposed fiancée Christian Holgerson. She was therefore accused of fornication.

Because Christopher was inscribed in the parish register as the father, he was called in to witness before the court. Since the last trial in 1814 it had been revealed that he was not dead and so they were both accused of vagrancy.

On June 18, 1819 Christopher was arrested again and interrogated as the run-away watchman from Ringsted. At that time he was traveling with Kristine. They had stayed the evening before with a farmer where he had left her while he went into town.

An innkeeper who was brought in to testify at Christopher's trial gives us a picture of his life style. "Monday night between 8:00 and 9:00 pm Christopher Mortenssen, who had been a watchman here in this town but, who had been absent for a long time, entered the taproom and ordered a schnaps. Wicherer, the innkeeper was surprised over his presence and asked him why he had come back. He answered he had heard that the glazier here in town had died and he therefore thought that it would be possible to do some glazier work here"...a little later the town judge's head clerk entered the inn and took Christopher to the jail. The innkeeper declared that he had not seen Christopher since he left the town and his service as a watchman." The interrogation was postponed until the next day and Kristine was then arrested by some road workers.

The next day as the interrogation was continued, the main theme now was, whether Christopher Mortenssen had served or not with 'Kobenhavns Infantry Regiment'. Dorthea and Kristine were both brought in to testify. It seems that Christopher had not been released from the drill school in 1811 but, he had, in fact, deserted. Dorthea testified that he had told her he had been released but had not shown her his passport. Christopher was sentenced to life imprisonment as a 'fortress slave'. His crime: desertion in time of war, adultery, and theft. He was punished on his body (whipped) and taken to Copenhagen's military prison on September 27, 1819.

A description of Christopher at that time was; 38 years old, rather tall, mediocre of stature, has blue eyes and brown hair which is a bit curly. He wears a coat, a brown vest, blue long wide trousers with some red cloth on them, woolen stockings and shoes, a red scarf and a round hat.

Christopher deserted (escaped from prison) on May 2, 1820, was brought back on April 14, 1821 and punished on the body. He deserted again on October 18,

1821 and was brought back December 27, 1821.

Dorthea must have been released from prison in the spring of 1823 because on April 9, 1823 she helped Christopher to escape for the third time. She went to visit him at the fortress the 'Citadellet' where he worked and took clothes to him. He was caught in Koge two months later and brought back. Dorthea was then sentenced to two years imprisonment for having helped him escape. It was at this time that our ancestor Hans Christopherssen was taken away from his mother and placed with another family. In the 1834 Danish census records, he is listed as being 16 years old and living with a foster father named Thomas Lyng.

While they were together, Dorthea again got pregnant and on January 4, 1824 gave birth to a girl she named Dorthea Christine Christophersdtr. The baby was baptized January 18, 1824 and placed in a foundling home. It was this child whose name was extracted by the church, that enabled the researcher to tie everyone together. Following the birth of this daughter, the only information given about Dorthea is that twice she was sentenced to life imprisonment but was pardoned after some years in prison.

In 1829, Christopher escaped from prison yet another time, this time in company with a co-prisoner. Once they were free they had to steal to survive. They were caught and this time the escape was judged more severely because he had done it in company with another person. Following is the verdict that was imposed on him.

Verdict

Let it be known that

1. The arrested slave Johan Christoph Heeroldoff and the slave Christopher Mortenssen will have to be whipped at the whipping post, stigmatized on the forehead and then work for life in the 'Kobenhavns Rasmus' under close surveillance; furthermore
2. Both arrested shall in common pay for the expenses in connection with their escape in general.

Lars Christopher Mortenssen spent the rest of his life in prison as a 'fortress slave'. On November 22, 1845 he was put in a hospital where he stayed until March 9, 1847 when he died from consumption at age 63. The probate record of Christopher Mortenssen in Copenhagen states, "Year 1847 the 20th of March the probate court came to the Correction House in Christianshavn to carry out a probate

record on the prisoner for life Christopher Mortenssen who, according to a produced message of March 9, had died in the hospital of the prison. Present at this affair was the assistant Fischer who declared that the deceased had no salary for over-work and he showed the court his belongings which, the court's constable declared were without any value."

The lives of Christopher Mortenssen and Anne Dorthea Hansdatter might have been very different if they had been born in a different time and place. How different their lives might have been if they had known The Light of The Gospel. It is a wonderful thing that we know life continues after death and they will be taught the gospel in the eternities. They will not be judged by what they did not know. Only God knew that in five generations, a descendent of Christopher and Dorthea would be called to be an Apostle for the Lord.

Appendix

***Anne Hansdatter**, Christopher Mortenssen's mother was born in the parish of Tibob. She was the daughter of Hans Jacobsen and Birthe Olsdatter.

On April 23, 1779 a baby girl named Agnete Cathrine was baptized an illegitimate child. The mother was Anne Hansdatter. Anne had given birth in Vanlose in the house of Soren Bertelsen, to whom she came together with her father, mother and siblings who were itinerants and lived by diverse works.

After marrying Morten Christopherssen who was a 'nightman', Anne had two more children, one being our ancestor Christopher Mortenssen. When her husband died she was a widow for several years before marrying Johan Jacob Meier a glazier. Johan had also traveled around the countryside, been arrested, and been in prison:

"On January 24, 1804, Johan Jacob Meyer and his group were arrested for 'simple theft'. They had stolen money and clothes from a Peder Hanssen in Nedre Draby after having been allowed to sleep in his barn for two nights."

This is all we know about Christopher's mother but, it is enough to understand that she too lived on the edge of society.

***Ane Kirstine Ahrenfeldt** who was Christopher Mortenssen's mistress was the daughter of Trine and Jacob Frederik Ahrenfeldt. She also had a sister named Trine. Kirstine was born in the village of Lundby and baptized in Thureby Church at Lolland. Her father had been a member of a military regiment until she was two

years old. At that time he began traveling around the countryside with his wife and two daughters, curing (castrating) cattle to earn money.

When Kirstine was old enough to survive on her own, she left her parents because they treated her badly. She acquired some needles, ribbons, and finger rings and traveled around by herself until she was arrested for not having a passport or identification papers and was sentenced to one year imprisonment in Odense Jail.

After her release from prison she met her sister Trine and rejoined her parents. As they were traveling around, she met Christopher Mortenssen's family and the rest of her story is included with his.

Five children were born to Christopher Mortenssen and Ane Kirstine Ahrenfeldt (not married). The first one died in 1801. The second child was born shortly before Christopher and Kirstine were sentenced to one year in Moen's Tugthus prison in 1814. That child and another one born in the prison were taken away and placed in a foundling home.

When Christopher and Kirstine completed that prison term, they were again arrested and imprisoned in Nykobing, Falstar. Shortly after their arrival at the goal, Kirstine gave birth to a child and during their arrest which lasted a little over two years, they begot yet another child. These children were also taken away and placed in a foundling home.

We have the names of only two of Kirstine's children. Both were baptized in Nykobing, Falstar; Morten Christopherssen was born in May 1816 and baptized on March 16, 1817. Ahrenfeldt Christopherssen was born in March 1818 and baptized on Jul 6, 1818. This was the same year that our ancestor, Hans Christopherssen was born to Dorthea on November 5, 1818.

Kirstine's father, mother and sister all died in prison. We do not have any information about her after she testified at Christopher's trial in 1918.

Bibliography

*The information in this paper was all taken from research done by Mrs. Betty Christofferson Raymond and from letters written to her from Danish researcher Arne Jensen Knudby, CAND. MAG., Bispehusene 18, DK-2620, Albertslund, Danmark. The letters were all dated between March 1994 and May 1995.