LIFE HISTORY OF NIELS ISAKSEN

(Originally written in Norwegian by Niels Isaksen. Transcribed from the original written in Norwegian by Bernhardt Christiansen, June 2, 1939. Rewritten (typed) by his great-granddaughter Ellis Amundsen, Sept. 11, 1940.)

Niels Isaksen was born Jan. 26, 1823 Tense, Holden, Boratsberg, (Bratsberg—now Telemark), Norway. My wife was born Dec. 30, 1815 in Brevigs, Boratsberg, Norway. We were married in Brevigs Church Dec. 28, 1845. We embraced the gospel and were baptized Aug. 22, 1852 by Jeppe Folkman, and received the laying on of hands for the gift on the Holy Ghost, Sept. 5, 1852, by S. A. Amunsen, and my wife received the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, Sept. 15 by Christian Larsen and our three children were blessed also on Sept. 15. I was ordained a Teacher the 3rd of Nov. the same year by S. A. Amunsen. I was ordained an Elder April 23, 1854 by President Knud Pedersen and was set apart as District President Sept. 14, 1855 in Rii District. I was President of that branch for five years and nine months.

When our home in Riisor got on fire, June 5, 1861, we lived in a tent for some time, but on the account of our daughter's sickness we were allowed to move into the hospital. She was sick six weeks before our home in Riisor got on fire and because of exposure she died July 31, 1861. President C. N. Darius, who was the President of the Mission called me to Christiana (now Oslo) so we left Riisor Aug. 22, 1861. We left Christiana the 22 of June 1875, for Salt Lake City, Utah which we reached July 23, 1875. I was ordained a High Priest, Aug. 29, by Peder Ostensen. My parents have fifteen children of which I am the thirteenth.

The same day as I received the laying on of hands we attended a meeting in the afternoon held by the Elders. The minister of that parish also held a meeting in the assembly room of the court house and he read a whole lot of false newspaper clipping about the Mormons and stirred people up to a high pitch of anger, and the priest and his congregation came over to our meeting to disturb and break the meeting up which they succeeded in doing. Elder Amunsen went over and tapped the minister on the shoulder and said, "Here you can see the fruit of your labor. Someday you will have to answer for all this. You profess to be a Christian and doing the will of the Lord, but the condemnation will come upon you someday for the lies you are spreading around against the work of the Lord." The minister said to the Elder that he would have him arrested for speaking foul language to him. In the meantime a lady who had joined the church sometime previously said to the minister that he could do with her as he wanted to but for him to leave the Elders alone because they have only spoken the truth.

A few days later a group of those people who came with the minister got together and they had all the brandy they wanted and each took a club in their hand and lined upon each side of the street acting like they were going to capture a group of bandits, but when they entered the room where the Elders lived they were not there. It was later learned that they intended to take the Elders down to the canal and take them five miles out on a little island where not a soul ever lived, that island is called Helgeroen. In the meantime while they were seeking to find the Elders, Elder Amunsen had gone over the Riis Madsen's where he used to live and he could stand in the Madsen home and see the whole thing. Folkman came over to my place but he did not know anything about what was taking place, until my wife came home and told the whole circumstance. These Elders were indeed the servants of God. I often felt sorry for Brother Amunsen for the suffering and persecution he had to go through. He was always an inspiration to me.

I remember at one time I was down at the Wiborg's Lumber yard and a group of men who was there began to criticize the Mormons and their religion, and also said that the Temple was nothing more or less than a disorderly house of ill fame, where all sorts of corruption took place. I told them that they were

nothing but a deluded people full of falsehood and evil thoughts and that was all they seek for themselves was to rob the women of their virtue. Four of the men came and said that I would have to pay for every work I had uttered to them. The Elders were placed under arrest and put in jail for the whole winter, and I often wished that I could have done something for them. There were three families of us left along without the aid and guidance of the servants of the Lord all through that winter. One of the families seemed to lose faith and they finally apostatized from the church. So there were myself and Knud Larsen left there alone until a Brother Jensen from Fredericia, who was sent to the city, to take charge of the church's interests there.

When the Priest saw we would not give up Mormonism and its teachings, they caused us to lose our work, and then said that probably if we lost our jobs and didn't have anything to eat maybe we would soon come back and forsake Mormonism. I told him that I would rather take my whole family to the cemetery rather than give up the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It was a hard time for all of us. I and my wife could stand to go hungry, but when our children would sit on their chairs and cry for something to eat, and we were unable to give them anything to keep them from starving it was about all that we could stand. It touched me very much.

One evening I came home without getting the family anything to eat and my little girl, four years old said, "Papa, do get something to eat tomorrow?" The tears would stream down my cheek and I said to her, "Tomorrow you shall have something to eat." I shall never forget that next morning, I went down into the city and there as I walked along I caught up with a neighbor lady, and as I walked along with her, and told her the whole circumstance she reached down into her pocket and took out 2 schilling, about 50 cents in American money, and I walked down to the bakery to get some bread for my children. I was never so happy in all my life. Another time as I walked down to visit the Elders, I went by a creamery and they gave me some milk to take home, so the Lord came to our aid and helped us out of our difficulty.

The Elders would feel good when I would come down and kneel in prayer with them. Many a time that winter I would walk in the snow so deep it was up under my arms. I am happy to think that I helped to preach the Gospel and to see it get a foothold in Norway. I appreciate that the Lord could make use of me that winter of 1852 and that I was willing to do anything the Lord wanted me to do.

After the winter was over and the Elders were released from prison it was decided that we had better move to Riisor as there were more Saints there and they thought it possible that I could get more work at my trade as a shoemaker. But it seemed that work was very scarce so the Landlord that I rented from, who was a ship-smith, gave me some work in his shop to help me along.

The winter of 1853 was the worst. Knud Larsen lived in a house which was impossible to keep warm and as he had a little worked it was decided that he and his family should move in with us as our house was somewhat warmer and we would build a fire and then we would take the hot coals from the fire and put them into an iron kettle and then set it upon the table so the children could get around it and keep warm. We divided whatever we had between the two families. It was just the same as living in the United Order. We had that brotherly love toward each other.

A little later I bought a home and payed some down, but as I was unable to finish paying for it we were turned out into the street. I secured another house to live in. It was not long after that the house got on fire and burned to the ground. All we saved of our belongings was our bedding, and we were left out in the street again. Our four year old* daughter had contracted the Scarlet Fever and being out in the open without shelter, she grew very sick and finally died.

We lived in Riisor from 1853 to 1861 when I was called to Christiana (now Oslo), and while laboring as a missionary in my native land, I had the privilege of baptizing between 150 and 200 people into the church. Many a time we had to go from seven to ten miles to find clear water to baptize in. I am happy for the experiences I had for the sake of the gospel.

The minister and another man came to my wife and said that if she would leave her husband and the Mormons they would give her and her children anything they would ask for. He said he had a right to separate people. My wife spoke up and said that he was lying because when he married people he said these words, “What God had joined together let no man pull asunder.”

Another time I was called to go and confirm a man a member of the church who lived several miles from Riisor in a city named Skien. When this man whose name was Christensen was baptized, the brother who baptized him only held the office of a Priest so for that reason he was unable to confirm this brother a member of the church. I left early one evening on foot and reached this brother’s home about 12 o’clock at night. The next morning we went down to the canal, got a boat and sailed out to a little island called Jetterland, there I rebaptized this brother and laid my hands on his head and confirmed him a member of the Church. This brother Christensen also went through lots of hardships and trials for the Gospel’s sake, but he proved faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the testimony he had of the same.

I hope that I shall prove faithful to the end. I was finally released and came to Zion. May God ever bless my posterity that they may prove faithful to the end. I would not sell my experiences in the church and the things I went through, for the Gospel’s sake, for all the wealth in the world, and I am happy I was permitted to gather with the Saints in Zion.

*Manti Temple records show Anne Caroline died 31 July 1861 so this was the daughter who died of scarlet fever and exposure and she would have been fifteen years old instead of four. This is probably a translation or typing error.

My youngest son Tyson Isaksen Saunders is named after Niels. In Judaism, there is a tradition of remembering and speaking the names of the deceased, which is considered to be a powerful act. Some say that a person dies three times, with the third death occurring when the last living person says their name aloud. After reading and learning more about my grandpapa Isaksen, Felt a deep connection to him and want his memory and life to live on. In his words, "May God ever bless my posterity that they may prove faithful to the end." that is my family and that is me. We will never forget what he and his family went through. We our his legacy and honor and remember his name every day!!!