

# *A Tribute To My Grandma*

By Elma Hansen Willes



Grandma Olena Olsen Hansen was born October 14, 1858. She was a petite young girl. She, along with her family, were converted to the Gospel in their native land of Denmark. At the age of ten they left their home and began their journey to Utah. The trip took 8 weeks. They must have encountered storms at sea and lots of sea-sickness as it was a sailing vessel. The trip across the plains was also a real hardship. Grandma walked most of the way.

The family settled in Spanish Fork. At the time Spanish Fork was a barren land. It was covered with salt that had to be removed before they could farm the land. All that existed was sage brush, salt grass and lot of alkali. The brush had to be grubbed out by hand– which was hard work. The ground had to be washed to get the alkali out. There were no shade trees! To start with, the family lived in a dug out. Dug outs were a place cut out of the hill side on the east side of Spanish Fork. It wasn't until much later that the Hansen family moved into a house.

Grandma's mother must have been a very talented lady because she taught her daughter many skills; namely, knitting, sewing, crocheting, cooking and gardening.

On 4 January 1880, Grandma married Peter Hansen in the endowment house in Salt lake City and they settled in Spanish Fork. The part of town where they settled was known as "little Denmark" (the northeast corner of Spanish Fork) and so named because most of the Danish emigrants settled in this part of town. Because of this there was the added difficulty of a language barrier to be overcome. The Northeast corner of Spanish Fork was still called "Little Denmark" when I was young.

Peter and Olena, lived in a one room log cabin for several years. Peter cut the logs in Payson, canyon and trimmed and shaped them by hand. Even now, in 1989, the cabin is considered the best built and best preserved log cabin in the state of Utah. You can still see his marks (P.H.) On the logs that were used to build the log cabin. Four children were born to Peter and Olena while living in this log cabin. Their 4<sup>th</sup> child, Rebecca Karen Kirsten was the last

child to be born in the cabin. She was born in April of 1887. The rest of the children were born in the new house that was later built on the same lot.

Grandma Olena was a beautiful seamstress and she sewed professionally. She also made quilts, by hand, from scraps of material that were left over from the many dresses she had sewn. I remember one of her quilts that was made from tiny scraps of heavy satin, velvet, brocade, and maybe other materials. She called it a crazy patch work because no two pieces of the quilt were the same size or shape. The pieces were sewn together by hand and feather stitched in red thread. As far as I know, Grandma never owned a sewing machine. Olena, was also an excellent cook; especially so with sweet rolls and cookies.

However, despite her talents Olena's life was filled with trials. She was left a widow at an early age. Uncle Henry, was only 12 when his father died. In those days widows had a hard time. There was no such thing as welfare or social security. Olena, had to support herself and her children with the help of her boys who had now grown into young men.

Grandma loved her family and she made the trip from 8<sup>th</sup> East, 2<sup>nd</sup> North in Spanish Fork to Palmyra twice a year. I can picture her yet coming down our lane about 6 or 7 miles from her home—walking. Then she would walk around our farm to see how the crops were growing and then she walked another 3/4 mile to Uncle George's farm to see his crops. After that one of the family members would take her back home to Spanish Fork.

When I was about a sophomore in high school, I was in a road show. I was suppose to be an old fashioned bride, I asked grandma for a dress to wear. She let me take Aunt Clara's – who had passed away at the age of 16 - 8<sup>th</sup> grade, white graduation dress. It is the only time I remember Grandma attending anything the grandchildren performed in. She cried when I took the dress back and she said I looked like little Clara standing up there on the stage.

I also remember the time she invited me to have lunch with her. I was working at the J. C. Penney Company, so I went and she had a nice lunch for me.

Grandma also always had a beautiful yard with many beautiful flowers and garden. This talent was handed down to her children and grandchildren. We were always allowed to pick little pink and white daisies that grew in her lawn.

If Grandma was stern, as some people remember her, it was because of the many hardships and the harsh life she was forced to live, and maybe because she was an immaculate housekeeper. But, Grandma had a loving concern for her family. She never allowed her older boys to discipline Henry because he was just a young boy and her 1<sup>st</sup> child. She was inconsolable when Uncle Henry had to go to War, World War I. She knew he would be killed.

I loved Grandma Olena and revere her memory. She was a talented and very special lady.