

# 4

## *Danish and Norwegian Connections*



Larsens, Hansens and Isaksons

On my first evening in the northern Wairarapa in March 2001, just a few hours after my first visit to Normandell, I was sitting by the fire in a cottage on North Road in Mauriceville North browsing through its collection of books when my gaze fell on G. C. Petersen's *Forest Homes* (1955). I opened it, and a new chapter of New Zealand history unfolded before me. It is a wonderful book, telling a story unknown to most New Zealanders about the Scandinavian settlements of the Seventy Mile Bush.

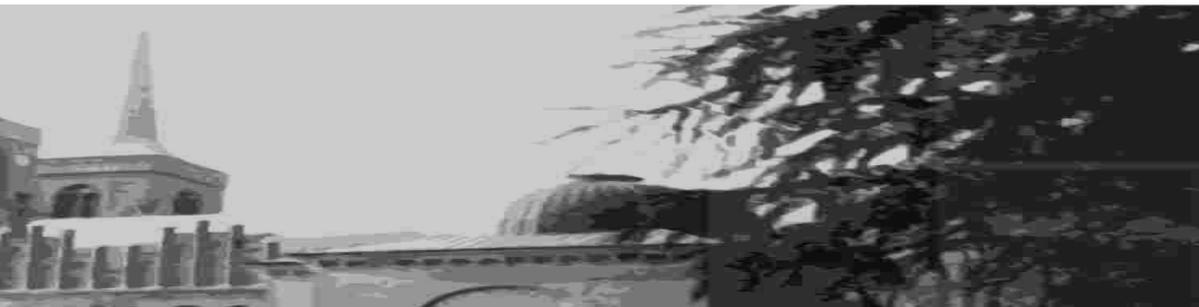
The next day, as I explored the tranquil churches and churchyards of Mauriceville North and Mauriceville West, as well as the beautiful old Mauriceville West School dating from the 1880s, I realized that one of the tasks of New Pacific Studio, because of our location next to Mauriceville, would be to carry on Dr Petersen's work. We should start, I thought, by looking for the descendants of the Scandinavian families, mainly from Denmark and Norway, who had emigrated in the early 1870s to this remote and densely forested area in distant islands of the South Pacific.

What risk-takers those parents were! What drove them out into new lands in the southern hemisphere? With the help of their descendants, I knew we could uncover the stories – and especially women's stories, behind these stones and buildings. I dreamed of an ongoing two-way flow between New Zealand and Scandinavian creative communities. Artists, musicians and writers would use their time at New Pacific Studio to create new work drawing on the stories of the Mauriceville settlements. New conversations would flow between families divided between New Zealand and Scandinavia, discussing the joys and perils of migration in past and present.

How had young parents felt about leaving Denmark or Norway with their children and making a new start in the South Pacific, months of



*Old map of Scandinavia.*



dangerous sea travel away from their old homeland? I knew that many children died during these months at sea.

What was it like for members of an older generation to say goodbye forever to their friends and tackle life in a new language?

My own experience of migration had shown me how hard it was to grow a sense of feeling at home in foreign cities. I had been an outsider and a new migrant, first in London and then in Saarbrücken, Germany in the mid '60s, in Liverpool in the '70s, and in Berkeley, California in the '80s. And when I came back to New Zealand after almost forty years away, I was an outsider there too, though with deep memories of the land. But my migrations had happened between English-speaking cities apart from Saarbrücken, and at a time when communication between everywhere via phone and later via email was instant. How much harder it must have been for these early families, when an exchange of letters took so long to travel from north to south and back.



*The first generation: Peter and Margrethe Larsen, c. 1890. Ron Neighbours archive.*

### In Search of Peter and Margrethe Larsen

I was fascinated to discover right away that my neighbour, Bridget Percy, who was now farming Braestone, which had belonged to the Burtons, was of Danish descent. Her great-grandfather Foster Percy had married Mina Larsen, younger daughter of Peter and Margrethe Larsen, and farmed at Alfredton and raised three children.

Peter and Margrethe had emigrated from Roskilde near Copenhagen, and settled in Mauriceville West. Their old house was still standing, though in a ruined state. Peter and Margrethe were buried in the old cemetery next to the Danish Lutheran Church at Mauriceville West, while Mina and her husband Foster were buried in the small graveyard at Alfredton, close to their farm. After Bridget's mother Jody Percy showed



me the Shaw Savill shipping ticket of Peter and Margrethe Larsen, I wrote these fictional diary entries:

### Margrethe's Diary From Copenhagen to Mauriceville, New Zealand

*Copenhagen, at my grandmother's writing desk in my old bedroom*  
*Greetings. I, Margrethe, am the wife of Peter Larsen. Peter is 32, and I am 28. Today is October 20, 1871. We married almost six years ago on December 8, 1865, in our hometown of Roskilde. I love Roskilde – it has a very old cathedral and is a fishing village close to the city of Copenhagen.*

*We both grew up there – I was Margrethe Olsen then. Peter's father is a fisherman. Peter decided to work on the land, rather than the sea. He also knows how to build, and loves working with wood. I love to cook and to sew and weave.*



*Now we have decided to emigrate to New Zealand with our three young sons. To go or to stay? That's the question we have been struggling with over the past few years. This is a very difficult time to be trying to bring up a family here. Denmark has lost so much land to Germany. There is little work.*

*We know the risks of immigration to a country so far away are great. First are the known dangers of the voyage. Then are so many other unknowns. What will my life there be like? How will Peter get on? How will my children manage? Would it not be better to stay at home in Denmark? Stay here, things are not so bad, some of our friends and relatives keep on saying.*

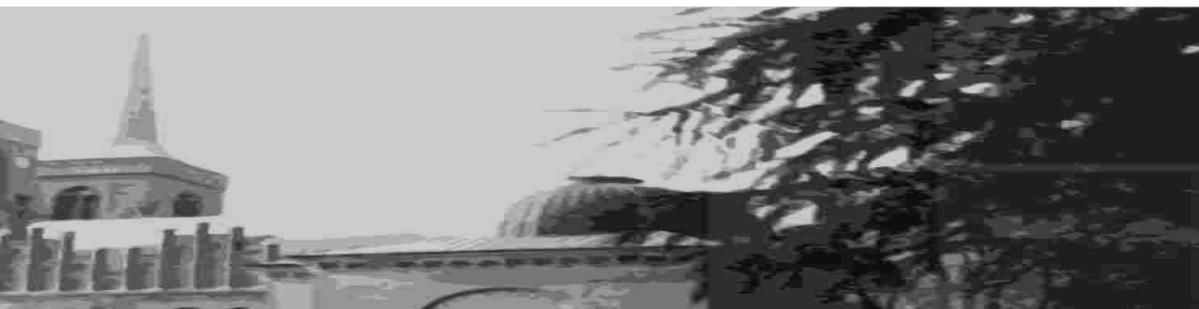
*But our parents understand our wish to find a better life. If you've decided to take the risk, we'll support you, they keep saying. You are young, and the reports we have had about New Zealand make it sound so promising. You will be an owner of land, something impossible here in Denmark. You are hard workers, and may do well.*



*Old Larsen homestead in Mauriceville West, 2003 (later demolished).*



*Gravestone placed in Mauriceville West Lutheran churchyard by Larsen descendants.*





*The ship left Gravesend on December 8, clearing Customs the same day. Down the crowded river and out we sailed, past Deal. On the 9th we were in the Straits of Dover, facing the full force of the wind and the sea.*

*Goodbye, shores of Europe. Will I ever see you again?*

*Lloyd's List reports "The weather is still very cold on the Eastern shores of the North Sea...Some snow has again fallen in the East of England."*

end of Margrethe's Diary

Thanks to another Larsen descendant, Ron Neighbours, a grandson of Lars Peter, the eldest son of Peter and Margrethe, I was able to see a letter from Copenhagen, written by Olsen relatives to Margrethe Larsen and her family in New Zealand in November 1874.

*Denmark Copenhagen Central,  
7 November 1874*

*Dear Relatives:*

*We have been delighted to receive a personal greeting from you over there from the lady from Copenhagen who made your acquaintance. She asks us to convey her greetings to you. Thank you for sending us the joyful message and greetings with the photo of Edward, which we received in August.*

*Copenhagen street scene. Sketch by Rosalind Derby, 2002.*



*It was very enjoyable to hear a little about you and your life over there. We had a conversation with the lady for about three hours and she described everything to us: the clearing the land for agriculture, how you shear the sheep, what working conditions are like, how you live deep in the forest and mountains, your easygoing hospitality, your journey*



*The fourth generation: Ron and Pat Neighbours, 2007. Ron is the son of Rita (née Larsen) and Les Neighbours.*



Danmark Høsten den 16 d 1874.

Kære Nøkklinge

Vi har haft den Glæde at modtage en  
Personlig Hilsen på eder derover på, og min  
den Dame her på Løbenhavn som ved en  
Tilfældighed var kommen til at gøre eders  
Bekendtskab hvorfor vi skal hilse alle fra  
vedkommende Dame som var her og overbringe  
os det gladelige Budskab og Hilsen med Tønde  
guld af Sølv som vi modtog i August  
måned hvorfor vi hermed skal bringe vor  
bedste Tak. Det var morsomt at høre lidt  
fra eder da over vi havde en Samtale med  
vedkommende Dame i ca 3 Timer og fik fuld  
skændig at vide hvorledes det gaar derover, hun  
forhale om Agerbrug og hvorledes Tønde  
Taar om Arbejdsforholdene hvorledes hun  
var med i Skov og Bygge om eders skov  
og ligesomme Tøndepræd, om hendes  
Rejse derover, og hvad hun oplevede  
paa Rejsen her tilbage

Letter from Olsen  
relatives in  
Copenhagen to  
Larsen family in  
Mauriceville, 1874.  
Ron Neighbours  
archive.

from Denmark to England, and from England to New Zealand, and her experiences on her journey back home to Copenhagen. It was all very interesting.

We were also told that Lars Peder speaks Danish really well but that he can't read or write it. We hope he keeps practising in his Danish book so that he will soon be able to read our Danish letters himself.

It was such a surprise to meet her. It was as if we were speaking to a member of our own family. We learnt that you would like to hear a little from us over here. August will have the pleasure of sending you some photographs of himself and his fiancée – next time we write they hope to be married. We are enclosing four cards with a greeting for each.

In spite of the changed conditions over here in the middle of Europe we are struggling on. There is a lot of unemployment and some foods have become more expensive. 8 øre ryebrød has gone up from 52 øre to 87 øre. 2 øre wheatbrød now costs 3 øre per loaf. We have to cut down on lighting, electricity and gas, also save on coal, which has become more expensive. We are getting by, but things won't be at all good before the war is over.

Your former guest Fru Olsen is sending you enclosed a little greeting with a small journal, The Soldier's Journal. It contains an article written by herself under the pseudonym Jelma Jelmarek, describing your difficulties and struggles on arrival in New Zealand. We have read it and find it very interesting. It lets us see that our sister and sister-in-law has not forgotten anything and keeps her sense of humour. At the same time we are also sending you a magazine, Social Democrat. This is the



The second generation: Lars Peter and Dorothea Marie Larsen, c. 1890. Ron Neighbours archive.



Home of Lars Peter and Dorothea Marie Larsen. Ron Neighbours archive.

*Workers' Party magazine. Perhaps we will also enclose some other magazines.*

*Now we hope that this letter has the good fortune to reach you right before Christmas, so we send you all our Christmas greetings and best wishes for a happy New Year. We hope you continue to do well and thrive in the future. We can let you know that Cousin Peter is ill and has been in the hospital for a long time. He is suffering from a severe nervous ailment and has been admitted to a Clinic for Nervous Ailments. Otherwise the rest of the family is doing fine.*

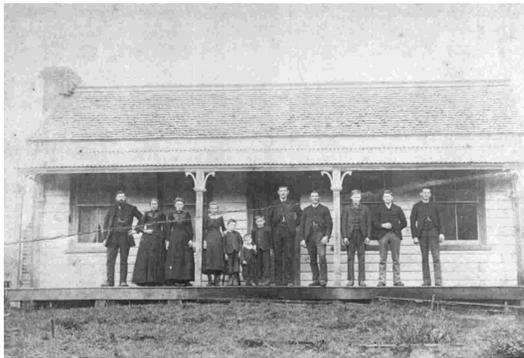
*With warm greetings to you all from us all here in Copenhagen, and a friendly greeting from Fru Olsen.*

*T.P. Olsen and family*

*Since no one can be sure in these times when sending letters, please let us know as soon as possible that you have received this letter.*

*p.s. Cousin Peter is the eldest son of Aunt Marie and Uncle Jens, brother of Oline, Anna and Camilla.*

Twenty-one years on, a photograph shows Peter and Margrethe standing on the verandah of their home in Mauriceville West with their ten children, eight boys and two girls. Their original section, # 56 expanded



*The Larsen family. From left: Peter, Margrethe, Mary, Mina, Waldemar, Jens, Edward, Christian, Lars Peter, Hans, Carl, Nils.*

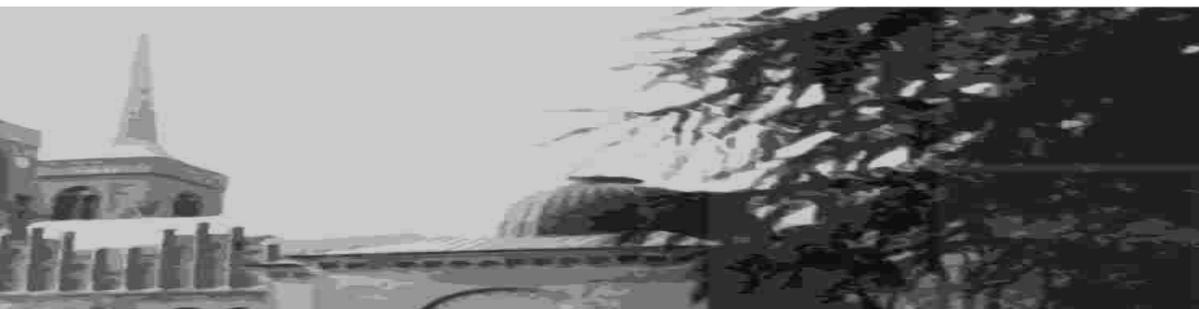
as the sons acquired their own pieces of land. Mary and Mina married local men, William Nation and Foster Percy. Lars and Christian, born in Denmark, had six brothers born in New Zealand – Hans, Carl, Nils, Edward, Waldemar and Jens.



*The third generation: Rita and Mary Larsen, daughters of Lars Peter and Dorothea Marie Larsen.*



*Braestone farmhouse, built for Norman Burton, is now owned by Bridget Percy, a great-great-granddaughter of Margrethe Larsen.*





*Simon and Maren Ol(e)sen and family, Rongokokako.*

## Hansens

By the 1890s, when Kaiparoro was being settled, the Danish families who had settled in Mauriceville West in the early 1870s were already more widely dispersed. Some stayed in Mauriceville, while others moved on to Eketahuna, a busy rail terminus for some years, or to

Rongokokako, where a dairy factory was established. The same was true of the first Norwegian settlers who had occupied 40-acre plots along North Road in Mauriceville North.

The major Danish presence in Kaiparoro was the family of Anders and Mary Hansen, across the road from Normandell. Anders emigrated to New Zealand at the same time as his fellow Danes, Maren and Simon Olsen (or Olesen). The Olsens moved on to Rongokokako and had a family of four boys, Neil, Chris, Bill and Jens, and two girls, Mary and Johannah. Mary married Anders Hansen, and had a family of ten, and Johannah married Alf Reading.

Two members of the Hansen family have contributed memories: Florence Reading Crosland, and her niece Ursula Morrison.

## Memories of Kaiparoro

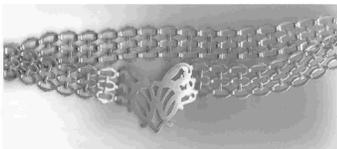
by Alice Florence (Florrie) Crosland (née Reading):

*My mother, Johannah Reading, (née Olsen) only sister to Mary Hansen, sadly passed away when I was only a few days old and so my Auntie Mary, whom I then called Mum, brought me up. Johannah and Mary also had four brothers, Uncles Neil, Chris, Bill and Jens Olsen. Their parents (my grandparents) lived in Rongokokako, and all were of Danish descent.*

*Mary and Anders Hansen had a family of three daughters and seven sons. There were only four months and twenty-two days between her youngest Ken and myself. His birthday was on 31 August 1911 and mine on 22 January 1912.*



*Wedding of Johannah Olsen and Alf Reading, 22 January 1908.*



*Silver belt worn by Johannah Olsen on her wedding to Alf Reading.*



*Sadly, 'Pubber', as Anders was called, died just before Ken and I turned five. What a wonderful mother Aunt Mary was to me! She had a big heart with a family of ten and then caring for me too, for about twenty-two years, until I got married and went to live in Wellington.*

#### *The ANZAC Bridge*

*It is now 2006 and I am ninety-four years of age and was ten years old when the ANZAC Bridge was opened. I still remember it quite clearly, along with many other happenings in the area.*

*Originally there was only a narrow rickety walking swing bridge over the Makakahi and when the river was in flood I didn't like walking across it and preferred to crawl on hands and knees. Sometimes Minnie Miller, Bill's daughter, would help me across the bridge, because I was scared. So the new bridge was a great relief.*

*Cars had to ford the river at a spot just north of the ANZAC Bridge. Many got stuck and had to be pulled out by George or Jim Hansen using their mother Mary's draught horses. They probably pulled out over two hundred cars over the years, as it was one of the main roads between Masterton and Eketahuna.*

*I remember when I was about eight going home from the Kaiparoro School one day and seeing the Wairarapa Farmers (WFCA) order man and his little car stuck in the middle of the flooded Makakahi. He couldn't move his car. So I called out. "Don't worry, Mr. Kemp, I'll run home and get Jim to pull you out with the horses." So I ran all the way home, only a mile from where the cars crossed the river. So Mr Kemp was soon pulled out on to the green grass and graveled road.*

*Many years passed, and I was married and living in Island Bay, Wellington, when I heard that Mr Kemp's wife passed away. So I wrote a sympathy note to him, and said "You probably won't remember me, but Mrs M. Hansen brought me up after my mother passed away."*

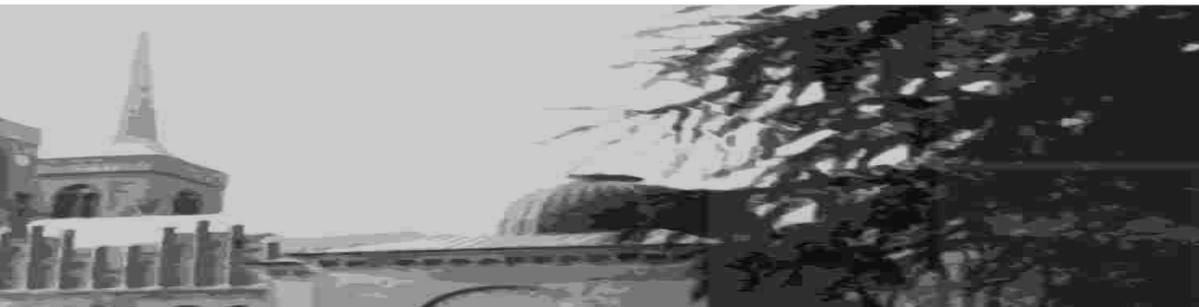
*Well, I received a letter from him, saying "Yes, I do remember Florrie Reading, and she ran all the way home and got Jimmy to come with the horses and pull me out of the river."*



*Florrie with her aunt and uncle.*



*Florrie as an adult.*





*Kaiparoro Creamery Factory.  
Second from left: Mr John Lozell Sr. Up in the  
factory receiving the milk is Alf Reading, the  
factory manager.*



*Alf and Johannah Reading outside the Creamery  
house, Kaiparoro.*

### *Working in Kaiparoro*

*Before I was born, my father, Alfred Reading, of English descent, had a bullock team that he used to pull logs out of the bush to Alfred Falkner's steam-driven saw mill. The mill was just below the schoolhouse on the left-hand side of the intersection just over the bridge heading north.*

*Later, my dad managed the Kaiparoro Creamery Factory, taking over from Mick McAnulty. It was just up the west road intersection a bit. The Creamery vanished years ago but the Creamery house is still there and being lived in, but a veranda has since been built on the front.*

*Mick McAnulty then managed the Kopuaranga Creamery until he bought the farm next to the Kaiparoro hall. Dad then went and managed the Kopuaranga Creamery until all those small creameries closed down. The railway, which ran close by, then became the depot for the Kopuaranga area, and the cream was railed to a factory in Masterton.*

*I was born in the Kopuaranga Creamery house on 22 January 1912 and my birth mother died there a few days later. I still have cuttings growing of a red rose of my mother's that she grew by the house.*

*I have been back to Kopuaranga recently but there is no sign of the factory or house. I did hear that the house was shifted south further along the road and I guess the factory was made good use of by the farmers.*

*I remember concerts being held in the Kaiparoro Hall to raise money to build the Memorial Bridge. Cora Bannister was an excellent organizer and she trained us school kids for the concerts.*

### *Elwyn Welch and birds*

*The Bannisters, at that time, had the farm across the road where the bird sanctuary is now. It was really started up by Elwyn Welch. His mother was Ethel Falkner, and she married Owen Welch. They lived in the last house on the left heading south before climbing the Mt Bruce hill.*



*Alf Reading with his daughter Alice  
Florence (Florrie).*

*Elwyn was a lover of birds. He would go out in the back yard and they would be all around him and even magpies would settle on his shoulder.*

*The bird sanctuary started up further up the road where there was more bush and now they have kiwis and lots of other birds of interest. So many tourists and buses stop there to have a peep in, what a great asset that is to the area.*

#### *Sharemilkers at Normandell*

*Just north of the bird sanctuary, Mr C. Burton had a concrete house built which is still standing. His son, Chris Burton, lived in the house and employed sharemilkers to milk his cows. I can remember the first sharemilkers were Harry and Millie (née Harvey) Cherry. They had one son while there; he was named Jack Cherry. Two more sons arrived after they left Mt Bruce. The last time I saw Harry Cherry, he was foreman of the road being built along the sea front from Pukerua Bay to Paekakariki known as the Centennial Highway.*

#### *Lost in the Bush*

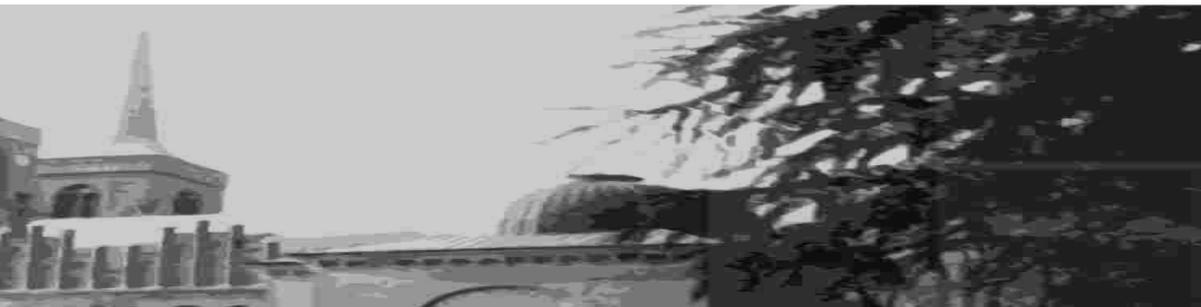
*I must tell you what happened to Jack when he was about three or four years of age. Ken and I were not much older than Jack was and as we lived over the road from them he often came over to play.*

*We had a pet lamb in one of our paddocks and the three of us went to play with it. When it was time to return home we did so like 'Brown's cows'; me first, then Jack and Ken last, but when we got back to the house there was no Jack.*

*So a search party was set up to find Jack. Mary Hansen provided meals for them during the search. I think it was the third day he was found by Jacob Isakson, another resident of Kaiparoro. Jack had followed an old tram track up the back of Bannister's farm, where he had sheltered in an old hollowed-out stump. He was OK. He said he had the moreporks for company at nights, and all he wanted was a loaf of bread and a bucket of water. What a relief and joyful day that was. I have a photo of Jack taken just after he was found and he looks pretty good after his ordeal of being out in the open for three days and nights.*



*Wedding of Leonard Mortimer and Alice Florence Reading Crosland, 1934.*





Hansen home and farm, c. 1910.

*Jack Cherry's uncle, C.G. Harvey joins the other names on the Memorial Bridge.*

*I often wonder if Jack is still living. He married Dora Baulchi (not sure how to spell), and the last I heard they were living in the Hutt Valley, but that's years ago. It would be great to see him again, if he is still on this land with us.*

*The roll call records will show me as surname Reading at school and Hansen at Sunday School.*

#### *New World Inventions*

*In the later years more homes had telephones installed, so grocery orders were taken over the phone and so an order man wasn't needed. Then about the year I left school, electric power was installed. So no more candlelight to see our way to bed, what a thrill that was, and an electric stove, hot water, washing machine and all the goodies. Power in the cowshed too. We sure thought we were living a new life in a new world.*



Mrs Ursula Morrison, granddaughter of Mrs Mary Hansen.

#### Granny Hansen

by Ursula Morrison, Palmerston North, March 2006:

*We all loved Granny Hansen. She was not only special to us but to the district and all who knew her.*

*Most Sundays we would go and visit her (between milkings) and usually there were others visiting too. There would always be a big hot dinner at midday. She would have a roast of meat and usually mashed (or baked) potatoes, mashed carrots and parsnips (or baked parsnips), cabbage, gravy etc. She grew the veggies in a garden by the creek and would water them as the water flowed down from the cowshed! (Liquid manure.) I have not seen such big carrots and parsnips since (and very tender).*

*The kitchen table was enormous. There was a bench for the children to sit on, on one side. The more children, the closer they sat! She had a huge pie dish. It would just fit in the oven. Dessert was often cooked in this. (A big apple pie or rice pudding!) Sometimes she would cook a big plum pudding.*



Mrs Mary (Granny) Hansen.



*Her biscuit tins were always full. She had her favourites. From the same mixture she would make Lady's fingers (the mixture was rolled into a sausage shape and rolled in sugar) and also white mice. For these the mixture was rolled around a date. Then there were ginger biscuits and queen cakes. To be always ready for a crowd she would have large squares of commercially-made biscuits. I always enjoyed being there when a tin was opened as there was a selection of specials on the top. Really delicious!!*

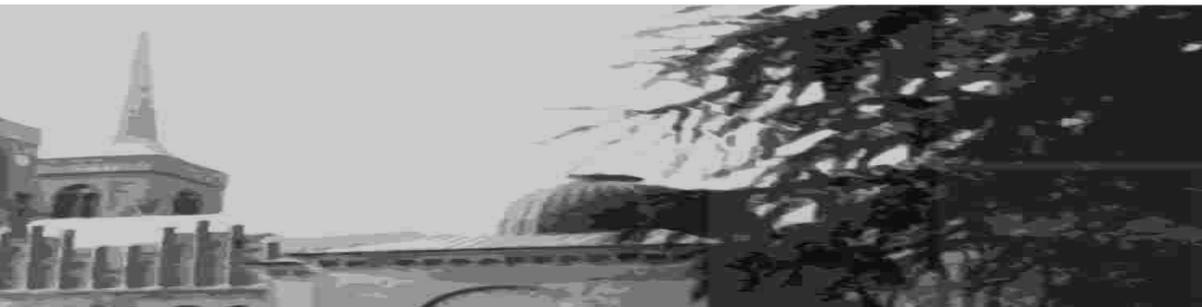
*I've not seen these biscuits anywhere else! I don't think she ever ate one herself, she always gave them to the children.*

*Great Granny (Maren) and Great Grandfather (Simon) Olsen (Olesen) arrived at Wellington in 1873 on the Halcione. They were on their honeymoon. Great Granny became pregnant on the way and my Granny (Mary or Marie) was born at the camp in Kopuaranga.*

*They walked from Wellington (over the Rimutakas) through heavy bush, to Kopuaranga where they were housed in no more than sheds. Four walls & a roof opening, but no covering on windows & doors. The men later put up oiled canvas coverings. The floors were non-existent, just dirt. My grandmother was born there.*

*The men worked on building something a little more substantial in Mauriceville where they balloted for small farmlets (all bush covered!).*

*The men had to go and work on roads and railways, leaving the women & children at Mauriceville to take care of things at home.*





*Hansen family and Alice Florence (Florrie) Reading c. 1915. From upper left: Grace, George, Ellen, Hans, Gert, Bill. Lower left: Peter, Anders, Florrie, Mary, Jim. Front: Ken and Albert.*



*Hansen family and Florrie Reading, c. 1949. Back row from left: Ken, Jim, Bill, Hans, George, Albert. Front row from left: Grace, Gert, Mary Hansen (mother), Ellen, Florrie, Peter.*



## Journey to Denmark

In May 2002, pursuing the idea of New Zealand –Scandinavian exchanges, NPS architect Rosalind Derby and I spent a month travelling in Denmark at our own expense. Rosalind is of Danish descent on her father's side. "The night before I left, I went down to Paraparaumu Beach," said Ros. "I wanted to get as far as the estuary, a huge expanse at low tide. There was a loud racket, tons of seagulls, and an enormous flock of swallows about to fly away. Like me, about to fly out into the wide world. I felt very birdlike."

It was a joyful time, as a moist and sunny spring came to the low-lying country. Birds remained the motif of our journey, as we made our leisurely way from Copenhagen to the old cathedral of Roskilde, down to Nykøbing Falster, to visit the former home of Bishop Ditlev Monrad and his wife Emilie, across to Odense, birthplace of Hans Christian Andersen, and up through Jutland with stops at Ribe, Aalborg, Aarhus, and Frederikshavn until we finally arrived at Skagen, topmost point of Denmark, where a bird-filled sandspit stretches out between the

Kattegat and the Skaggerak seas, joining the North Sea and the Baltic. We visited the Skagen Odde Nature Center, and met the director, who talked about bird migration. Then we strolled along the sand, like artist Anna Ancher a century before, and scratched 'End of Journey' on its flat surface before starting on the return journey to Copenhagen and New Zealand.

We spent a day at Rungstedlund, once the home of author and bird-lover Karen Blixen. The house now includes a museum in a wing attached to the rooms of the original house. Forty acres of woodland adjoining the old farmhouse are now a bird sanctuary, with a special interest in



*Roskilde Cathedral*



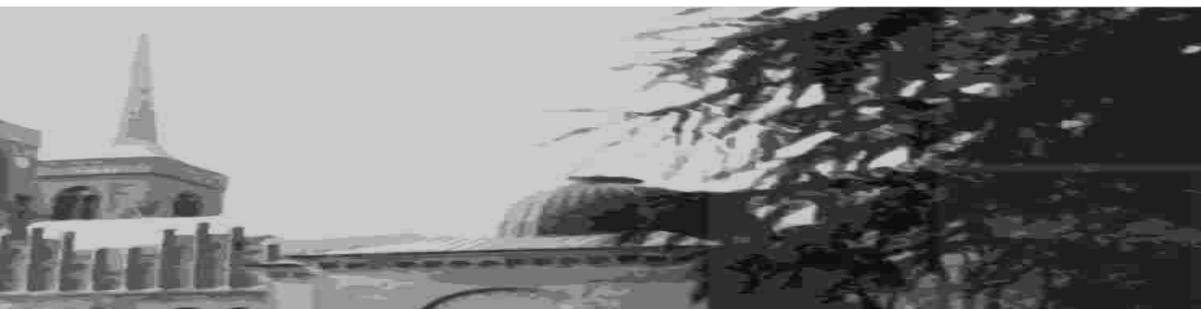
*Carved by Kay and Rosalind into the Skagen sands, 2002.*



*Skagen Odde Natur Center, designed by Danish architect Jørn Utzon, famous for the Sydney Opera House.*



*Grenen sandspit, the largest sandspit on earth.*





*Rungstedlund, home of Karen Blixen, now linked to a museum and bird sanctuary.*

migratory birds. Many birds whose flight paths pass through Denmark start their flight in Africa.

Karen Blixen dreamed of such a sanctuary, but she did not have the funds to buy the land herself. So she appealed for help to the Danish public through a radio program, inviting every listener to send in a single kroner. The

response was overwhelming. As in every fairy tale, you just need to find your helpers. After the film version of Karen Blixen's novel *Out of Africa* gained international renown, the future of the property was assured.

Rungstedlund is a pilgrimage site on the itinerary of all cultural tourists to Copenhagen and its surroundings. One day, Mauriceville will be too – that's my dream. Its now-deserted roads are the perfect place for a public art project. As you drive along North Road or West Road, you could pause by the roadside at a series of audio stations and listen to the stories of this area just a hundred years ago, told by their descendants. Whispering roads, keepers of memory, inspirers of songs, films and new books.

According to the Danish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, New Zealand is the country outside of Europe with the largest percentage of people with Danish blood.



*Bishop's residence (Bispegård), Nykøbing Falster, garden side. Former home of Bishop Ditlev Monrad and his wife Emilie. Thanks to the Rt. Rev. Bishop Holger Jepsen and his wife Pastor Luise Ipland for graciously providing a private tour of the house and garden in May 2002.*



*Exploring Old Copenhagen: Rosalind Derby in an attic in Frederiksberg, 2002.*



*Interior of Bishop's residence, Nykøbing Falster, with Neoclassical murals by J.F. Hilker.*



*The second generation: The Monrad home in Karere, Palmerston North, New Zealand, 1880s.*

*Bishop Monrad's donation of his rare print collection to New Zealand, 1869.*





*Isakson-Love cottage commemorating Isakson family, Normandell, 2003.*

### Norwegian Connections: building the Isakson-Love Cottage

In October 2003 Ken and Joyce Isakson made their first visit to NPS. I had an idea to put to them over a glass of wine as we sat on the grass outside the derelict cottage behind the main house of Normandell; how about renovating it and creating a Norwegian cottage, which would be named in honour of Ole Isakson and his family? They liked the idea. Five months later they were guests of honour at the party to celebrate its opening. And Ken also donated a large number of photographs and family mementoes.

Much of the inspiration for its design came from an article by Trine Bell with photographs by Solvi dos Santos of a country cottage in the Hallingdal valley, northwest of Oslo, belonging to a Norwegian artist couple, Jens and Brit Johannessen. Jens is a painter, Brit a textile designer and watercolourist.

Murray Love, builder of Woodville, took my little gouache drawings as working drawings, and skillfully combined old heart rimu and new macrocarpa.

### Migration to New Zealand

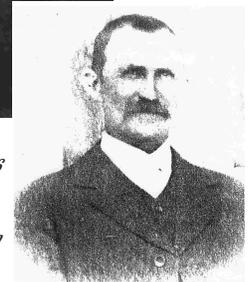
Ken Isakson's grandparents, Jacob and Karen Isakson, along with Ole, 7, and Carl Lauritz, 5, had set out in August 1873 on the first leg of their long journey to New Zealand.

They travelled on the second voyage of the *Hovding*, and arrived in Napier on December 1. Their daughter Annie Mary Isakson was born that month. She is shown in a Charles Mariboe photograph taken in 1874, sitting on Karen's lap.

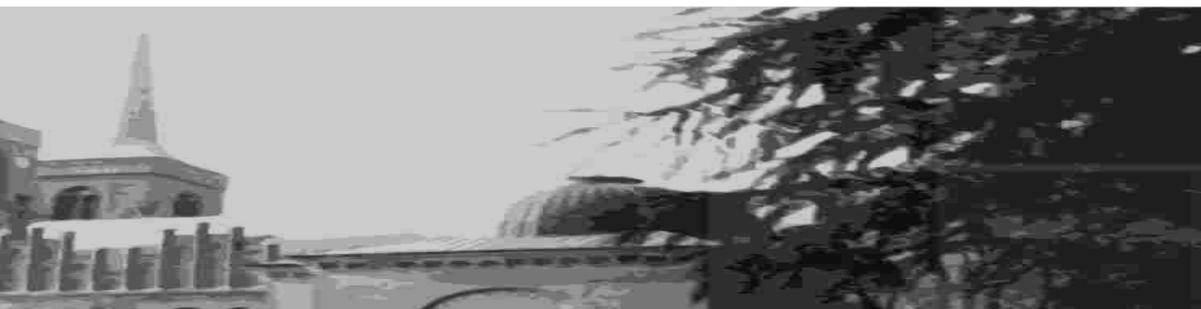
In November 1873 the remaining members of Karen's family – her widowed mother Eli Larsen and her four younger siblings, Lars, 20, Elizabeth, 16, Halvor, 14, and Carl, 12, also emigrated on the *Invererne*



*Jacob and Karen Isakson (née Larsen) with daughter Annie Mary; b. 12 December 1873 in Napier; and either Ole or Carl Lauritz.*



*Ole Isakson, b. 8 January 1866 in Denmark, son of Karen Larsen and Hans Hansen Disenmyr.*



Haskwell Oct 1<sup>st</sup> 1892  
 Mr. C. Burton  
 To Ole Isakson

For the felling of 60 acres of Bush @ \$1-2-0 per acre	\$66-0-0
7 1/2 acres @ \$8-0-0	\$6-0-0
	<u>\$72-0-0</u>
Oct 1 <sup>st</sup> Advanced through M.A. Haskner	\$20-0-0
Nov 24 .. .. .	\$20-0-0
.. 30 .. .. .	\$10-0-0
Balance owing	<u>\$22-0-0</u>
Paid, Ole Isakson	\$50-0-0

Invoice from Ole Isakson to Christopher Burton for felling 63 acres of native bush at Normandell, 1891-92.



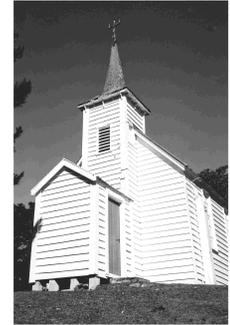
Jacob and Karen Isakson's home at Mauriceville North, 1902. From left: Charles (24), Jack (17), Karen (60), and Hans Jacob (14).



Second generation: Karen Isakson with her sister Elizabeth and brothers Hans, Halvor and Lars.



Third and fourth generations: Hans Jacob Isakson with his wife (née Mary Jane Deadman) and children Thelma and Ken (Toby).



Mauriceville North Methodist Church.



Ken (Toby) Isakson, m. (1) Mavis Trass (2) Joyce.

and settled in Mauriceville North. (Eli's eldest son, Hans, had already emigrated with his wife Karen and their four children in 1871).

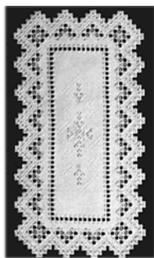
Mac Larsen has traced some of the Isakson story in his book *Happiness is Sharing Your Heritage*. Mac was the grandson of Karen Isakson's older brother, Hans Larsen, and a passionate genealogist and devoted community leader, commemorated in Mauriceville North Church.

Ken Isakson, whose father Christian Joseph (known as Jack) was born to Jacob and Karen in July 1885, also made several pilgrimages to Norway. The first was with his first wife Mavis and Mac Larsen and others in 1975. A more recent visit with Joyce took place in the 1990s.

## Journey to Norway

Many people of Norwegian heritage live in the San Francisco Bay area. Each year in May they hold a Norway Day Festival. In May 2004, just a few days after coming back to California after six months in Mount Bruce, I attended the festivities at Crissy Field in the Presidio. Artists I met that day included Gracie Larsen, lace knitter and founder of the well-known Lace Museum in Sunnyvale, California; fine art photographer Helene Sobol; and Rosemaling (rose painting) expert Marley Wright Smith.

As Gracie Larsen showed me the precious items displayed in her booth, she told me how her passion had started:



*Hardanger embroidery.*



*Bobbins.*

*I happen to have a family that all did needlework. I've got this stuff by osmosis. I have Hardanger embroidery over a hundred years old made by my grandmother Fanny Olsen from Bornholm in Denmark and my great-aunt, Tante Lully.*

*Hardanger is a primitive form of fibre, using a star pattern. It is named after the valley. What I'm interested in is the history of all these things, how they evolve, and get from one country to another.*

*Fanny was adopted when she was young. A very proficient embroiderer, she died when she was 35. She married a Norwegian in the US whose wife had died, leaving him with two children. Fanny became their governess.*

*Tante Lully, my great-aunt, was Norwegian. She asked to go to Venice for her honeymoon so she could learn how to make Venetian needle lace. Later she taught it at the White House in San Francisco.*

*I met my husband Egil at a Sons of Norway dance, in 1947, and got married in 1949. We love to do traditional folk dancing.*

A month later, on 2 June 2004, I flew into Oslo, Norway for a seven-day visit. I wanted to make contact with Norwegian artists and writers and encourage them to do residencies at New Pacific Studio in the newly-restored Isakson-Love Cottage. I also hoped to meet up with relatives of



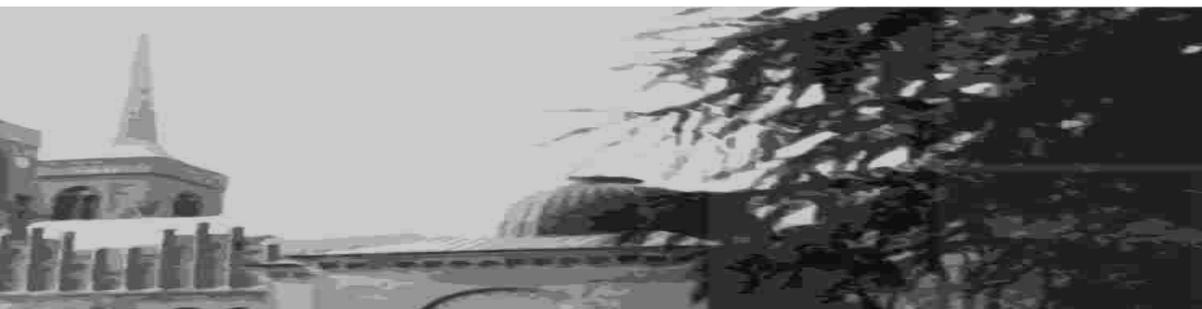
*Gracie Larsen, co-founder of the Lacy Knitters Guild, shows some old lace samples.*



*Fanny Olsen-Thurman (1874-1909).*



*Great-aunt Tante Lully Mork.*





*A traditional costume from Gudbrandsdal, Norway, work by Lillian Sterling, the mother of Gracie Larsen.*



*Schou's barn, Mauriceville West.*



*Jacob and Karen Isakson's tomb, Mauriceville North churchyard.*

the family of Jakob Isakson of Bostad, and to visit the district of Sør-Odal, north of Oslo, starting point of his migration with his future wife Karen Larsen.

That evening, I went for a walk beside the fjord. The sun was setting across the high walls and park-like grounds of the Akershus fortress, which still guards the harbour at the end of the fjord. Its fine old stone walls and towers date back to the 12th century. Soldiers still do a daily watch here, standing like tin soldiers in front of their small wooden sentry boxes, and marching to and fro along the castle walls. Tonight all was calm. A cruise ship slowly threaded its way down the fjord. Its huge size threw the city's buildings out of scale, making them look like a toy town, I noted sadly.

The next day, Thursday, was my only 'free' day for sightseeing. I chose four destinations: the cathedral church, an exhibition on immigration stories at the International Cultural Center in the international district of Grønland, the Botanic Gardens, and the Munch Museum. At the Munch Museum, I discovered that the looping shoreline you see in so many of Munch's paintings is the Oslo shoreline I had walked along the previous evening! From then on, I felt Munch beside me as I roamed through Oslo.

A few days later at a conference I got into conversation with an elegant older woman, Lila Nosowski. Originally from Poland, Lila was married to a Norwegian and had lived in Norway since 1981. "Norway has always been a very poor country until the recent discovery of oil," she said. "It has been a very hard place to make a living, and that has a profound influence on people's character."

'A very hard place to make a living.' That phrase lingered with me. I thought of the arrival of the Norwegians in Norsewood and Mauriceville. They had a hard start, certainly, but the climate was much milder than in Norway, where animals cannot be left outside in the long winters. And they knew how to survive in hard places.



The next day I took a ferry from the harbour wharf out to the museum island of Bygdøy, just fifteen minutes away from the city centre. Purple lilac bushes were in flower along the beach, scenting the air as I made my way to the Maritime Museum past the beaked bronze nose of explorer Roald Amundsen, one of Norway's most famous sons.



*Skarnes railway station.*

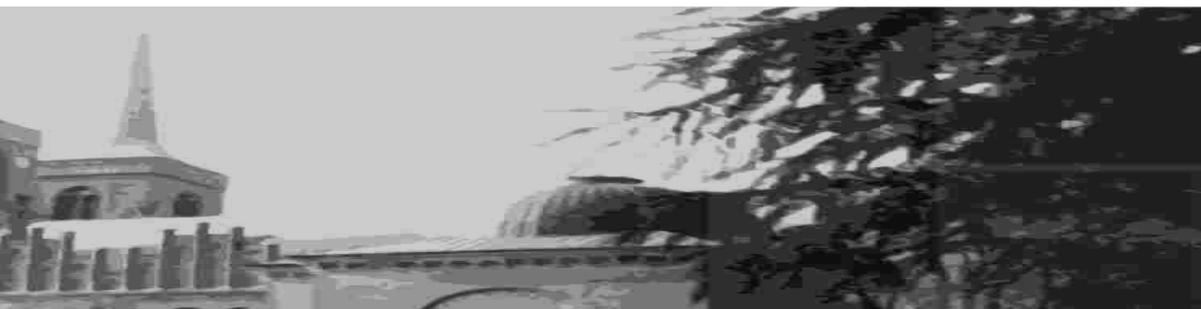
On Saturday evening a distinguished publishing house in Oslo threw a party for conference guests in its headquarters in a magnificent 19th-century mansion. I chatted to Natasha, a reporter for the leading Norwegian newspaper, *Aftenposten*. Natasha was interested in my story of the Isakson migration and the Isakson-Love Cottage, and later wrote an article on it. Jadwiga Kvalsheim, a librarian at the National Library, and Birgit Hatlehol, director of the annual Lillehammer writers' festival, also liked the idea of exchanges between writers from north and south. The next day I made a pilgrimage north to Slåstad and Ullern. This area, just over an hour's drive from Oslo, was the starting point from which the Isakson family began their migration. My host for the day, arranged via Ken, was a charming Viking called Arild Vikerhaugen, an Isakson relative who had entertained Ken on his visits. I learnt that we would be driving up to Skarnes, the original railway station for the district, and then on to Slåstad, where we would be joined by Arild's former history teacher, Hans Marius Trøseid.



*Arild Vikerhaugen and Hans Marius Trøseid beside the storehouse (stabbur) on Hans Marius' farm.*

At Skarnes there were signs of new construction. Most of the people who have moved into new houses around here commute daily to Oslo by bus, Arild said. The charming old railway station looks well preserved, unlike the run-down older stations along the Wairarapa line in New Zealand.

As we drove along the River Glarna to Slåstad, through agricultural land with higher wooded hills on either side, Arild commented wryly:



*The emigrants walked along this road when it was just a track. They probably had no idea how far away New Zealand was. All they knew is that it was even further away than Oslo!*



*Ullern churchyard.*

Soon we were driving up a farm track, past Hans Marius Trøseid's father's farm to his own current farm. I admired a bright red raised storehouse, or stabbur, in front of the old house. Hans Marius came out to meet us, and offered us a tour of his home.

The house is crammed from floor to ceiling with books and works of art. There is also a piano, which Hans Marius loves to play.

The farms in this district, he told me, date back to the 13th century. But then the plague came to Norway, and it took almost three centuries for the population to reach that earlier level once more. So the farms lay fallow for many years. Their main crop is oats. Below his own farm is a huge lake, which is also a source of fish. They are caught in summer, preserved in salt and used as winter supplies.

A group of farmers would have a herd of about 15-20 cows. In summer they would take them up into the hills into new pasture. The farmers' regular diet would consist of potatoes and fish, and they would kill a pig for Christmas.

Slåstad is a shrunken township today. As we drove through, Arild pointed out the old school he attended, and the village shop where he would buy sweets sometimes on the way home from school. Next stop was his old home. I knew that Arild had lost both parents in the past six months, so I walked out into the woods behind the house, and collected a bouquet of ferns, pine cones and lilac. "These are a greeting for your parents, from their old home," I said gently.

"Thank you. We shall take them to the churchyard with my sister Kari," he replied.

Soon we arrived at the spacious home of Kari and her husband Ole Christian. Kari was for many years a health worker, then changed direction



*Tombstone of Lars Hansen, Ullern churchyard.*





and is now working in special education in a local secondary school. Ole Christian is a dairy farmer. In their spare time they are renovating a magnificent

old three-storey barn just behind their home.

We sat round the table enjoying Kari's coffee and a cake made by Arild. Ole Christian's mother was present, sitting silently until an old photograph was produced, showing Ole Christian aged about four, standing beside his beautiful young mother. Her face lit up in a broad smile, as she began to talk and remember.

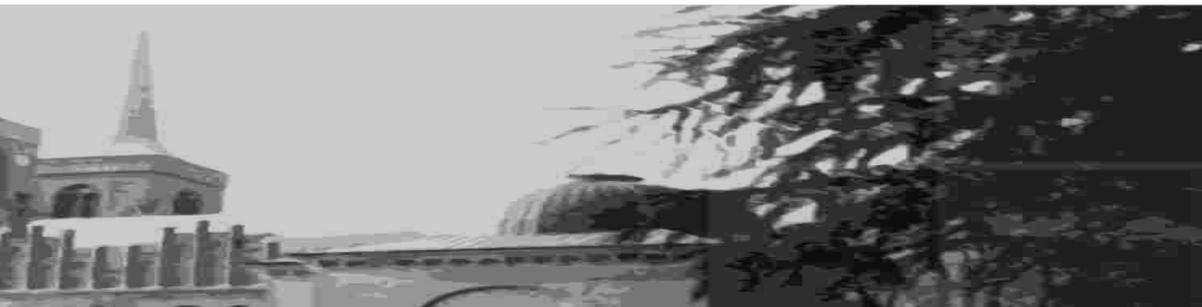
Kari, Arild, Hans Marius and I then drove over to the Slåstad churchyard, to place flowers and pine cones on the graves. On to Ullern church, where we cleared weeds from flowers growing around a memorial stone to Lars Hansen, Karen Isakson's father. Our final stop was at the big red barns of Bostad farm where Jacob Isaksen lived before the family's migration to New Zealand.

Then back we drove to Oslo, waving goodbye to Hans Marius and Kari, and thinking of Ken Isakson and Joyce waiting for news of our visit in distant Masterton.

Ken passed away in 2006, after a long battle with emphysema. In 2007 an Isakson Fellowship was launched at New Pacific Studio on his birthday, April 25th, at the conclusion of the annual ANZAC Day service at the ANZAC Memorial Bridge.



*Goodbye, friends in New Zealand! A farewell wave from Arild, Kari and Hans Marius.*





*Interior showing gallery, Mauriceville North Methodist Church.*



*Akershus fortress in Oslo – two views.*

