

Hoarding Cookies yet Giving Everything

By Julie Bell

Hoarding cookies and yet giving everything – this is what I know of my 2x great grandpa Andrew Nelson.

An incredibly hard worker, very serious, and yet the nicest person you could ever meet. Someone who “lived” religion. This is what I know of my 2x great grandma Christina Nelson.

I think about Andrew and Christina Nelson often. I have collected snippets of information about them over the years, mostly from family. My husband and I chose “Kirsten” as the middle name for our oldest daughter. I had lived in Norway, heard the name there and liked it. When my grandma Ruth heard her name, she said that her grandma “Christina” was originally “Kerstin” and then the name was anglicized. My grandma Ruth, one of the nicest people I’ve ever met, said that same thing about her grandma Christina. Naming our oldest daughter after such an amazing matriarch was a welcome mischance.

My grandma Ruth was 100% Swedish and yet she hadn’t set foot in Sweden. She didn’t speak a word of English until she started school. The Swedish communities in northern Minnesota and on the other side of the Canadian border in Manitoba and Ontario maintained much of Scandinavian culture. One Christmas Eve, I was in Norway and called my parents. My grandma Ruth was visiting and told a Norwegian joke! The Swedish/Norway rivalry carried on with my grandma who had never been to Scandinavia!

But I digress – this story is about Andrew and Christina. My 2x great grandparents Anders [Andrew] Larsson [Nelson] and Magnil Kerstin (Christina) Ericsson both were both born in Sweden. Andrew left Lima Parish and settled in Minnesota with his family at the age of 18 in 1880. Christine left Malung Parish with her sister-in-law and children and came to Minnesota when she was 27 in 1888. Three years after Christine arrived, she married Andrew and they went on to have seven children between the years of 1893 and 1906.



Christina and Andrew seated in the middle row with their children.

It is difficult to imagine the work of homesteading and establishing a farm, but Andrew and Christina did just that multiple times. To top it off, in 1885, Andrew had felt a calling to be “set apart” for Evangelical service, and he was ordained in the Baptist Church. This involved being away from home often, preaching in northwestern Minnesota, the District of Rainy River, Ontario and a great deal of Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

In 1904, Andrew moved his family of six children from Meeker County, Minnesota to Sprague, Manitoba. Their 7th child arrived after the move. In 1906, they had 4 milch cows, 5 other cows, and 2 sheep.



Sprague, Manitoba, 1907. Christina is the right of the guitar player and Andrew is to her right with the beard.

When Andrew's travels took him to Bergland, Ontario he learned about the offer of free land, so the family uprooted again. There were no roads, so they arrived by boat. It is mind boggling to think about the amount of work it took to start all over yet again with unprepared land and the building of a home and other buildings.

The family's first house in Bergland was a 3-room home with a cellar. In 1923, Andrew built a new home in front of the old home. The new home had 2 rooms on the main floor and 2 rooms upstairs. (As a child, I remember visiting my grandparent's farm north of Bergland and my family always pointed out this old house to us when we made trips into Bergland.)



(The Nelson family home as taken in 1997; photos by Evelyn [Huntley] Hogan

Life in Bergland was hard and the children worked and contributed to make ends meet.

Andrew was known for his love of cookies. His niece Florence Nordstrom remembers her Uncle Andrew coming for tea with a bag of cookies, and not sharing them with anyone!

I can easily forgive him for cookie hoarding. When his daughter (my great grandma Emma) grew up, she had her own family including my grandma Ruth. When Ruth was about 8 years old, they were eating dinner and looked up to see the stove pipe on fire. The family only had time to get out of the house with the shirts on their backs. The following Sunday, Andrew was preaching and passed around the offering plate, (his salary for the week) and just handed it to Emma and her husband Elmer. It was the only time that my grandma saw her dad Elmer cry.

When Christine passed away at the age of 68 in 1929, Andrew continued his travels and preaching and eventually married again. He settled in North Saskatchewan with his second wife Sarah Hodges. She died



in 1939, and Andrew spent his last days with his son back in the Bergland area. He died in 1946 at the age of 83.

So when I think of my 2x great grandparents, I think of the unending hard work, that bag of cookies, lovely Christina who could understand some English but spoke Swedish her whole life. I think about Andrew who was known as a “talker”, who could talk for hours on end whether anyone was in the room. His sermons, mostly in Swedish, would last for two hours.

Mostly I remember the offering plate. My grandma told me the story so many times. I know it was very meaningful to her.

Andrew chopping wood at the age of 80 in 1942.

The grandmother of one of my favorite actors, Mandy Patinkin, said, “As long as one person on Earth remembers you, it’s never over.” I remember you Andrew and Christina.

I’m grateful for the people who have shared so much information, documents and pictures - in particular my 2nd cousin Bonita Couper. Segments of this story were from Bonita’s story about our 2x great grandparents.