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"Proud to be an American" is not just a cliché

In 1870, the family of Lars Mikkelsen and Bodil Jensdatter made a decision that would change their lives forever. Lars had always farmed for rich land owners in Holbaek County, Denmark. Although farming was in his blood, he wanted a better life for his wife and their four remaining children. At the urging of Lars and Bodil, their oldest son, Christian, immigrated to the United States in 1869 to keep from being conscripted into the King's army. Christian was so impressed with his new homeland; he wrote to his parents and urged them to come as soon as they could. On Apr. 5, 1870, Lars, Bodil and their children, Christina, Knud and Mary sailed out of Copenhagen, Denmark on their way to meet Christian in Chicago, IL.

By June 27, 1870, the family was living in Agency Twp., Osage Co., Kansas. Lars was so proud of the fact that he actually owned his farm. At the age of 50, he had finally obtained his life-long dream. America had provided him with an opportunity to support his family in a way that he had never known. Lars made the decision that he truly wanted to be an American. From that time forward, he began learning the English language and forbid his family from speaking Danish. It was important to him that his entire family left their Danish ways behind and assimilated into the American way. Except for the family bible, which was printed in Danish, the only books remaining in the house were English. It wasn't too long until he had mastered the English language and had become naturalized.

As his children grew older and started having families of their own, grandchildren would ask Lars about Denmark. They wanted to know about the old country and to learn a few Danish words. Lars would talk about where he grew up but he refused to speak the Danish language. He told them he was an American now and how proud he was to live in a country that had so much to offer. Lars taught them that a person had to work hard for what they wanted, nothing was free. America had all you needed as long as you were willing to work for it

I've learned a lot about my ancestors over the years and Lars is one of my favorites. He is my 3rd great-grandfather and I treasure the stories I have about him. His son, Knud, is my connection. I had always been proud to be an American but until I heard the story of Lars, I don't think I really knew just how proud a person could be of their country. Imagine if more people, native-born or immigrant, were like Lars. Anything could be possible. I would like to be a part of that America.