

JAMES KEARL AND MERLIN EASTHAM KEARL

A Brief History

By
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I have very little information regarding my Father, James' early life, except that he was born in Brockenhurst, Hampshire England, June 12, 1836. His parents were John Kearl and Elizabeth Gates Kearl.

When James was 18 he became a convert, along with an older brother, Alfred, to the Latter Day Saints church, and the two boys left England to come to Utah in 1854. On the sailing vessel Windmir. They settled in Grantsville, Tooele, County where James became acquainted with the Eastham family and the young girl Merlin who was later to become his wife.

In 1861 James went, with some other men, to help bring a company of Saints from the nearest railroad terminal, which was then, I believe, Laramie, Wyoming. During part of 1856 and 1857 he served as night guard in Echo Canyon, under the supervision of Ira Eldredge.

In July of 1869 James was called to help settle the Bear Lake Valley, in the Northeastern part of the state. James and Merlin were married in the Salt Lake City Endowment House, July 12th and in August they arrived in the Bear Lake Valley and made their first home in a little valley about two miles from the Bear Lake, which was called Round Valley.

Merlin was born in Masbro, Yorkshire, England on November 6, 1852. She came to Utah in 1865 with her parents John and Jane Huntington Eastham, and she was not yet 18 when, with her husband, she began pioneering.

When James and Merlin arrived in Round Valley, they found Virgin Meadow grass ready for cutting, so Merlin made shift at housekeeping with a few utensils and an old stove set out in the open. After about a month James had stored enough hay to feed the oxen and cow through the winter. Then he applied himself to building a one room cabin with a dirt floor and mud roof. Here they lived their first winter.

There were only a few white settlers those first few years. Most of them being in the Northern end of the valley where the stake headquarters of the Bear Lake Stake was situated.

The hunting and fishing had made the Bear Lake Valley a fine Summer Camp for different Indian tribes and at first they were very resentful of the whites. Although no serious incident occurred they did tear down some of the first fences built. However, the white settlers treated them kindly and each summer, as years went by, fewer and fewer Indians returned until finally they ceased coming altogether.

In August 1870 the first of the ten children of Merlin and James was born. A daughter named Edith. In the years 1872, 1874, 1876 and 1878 the following children were born, Jeanette, John Henry, George and Robert. When Robert was three years old travelers from Salt Lake City came late one night asking permission to stay. The wife was ill and Merlin took them in, not realizing that the woman's illness could be something contagious. It was diptheria and all the children became ill. Jeanette and Robert died and were buried the same day. There could be no funeral because of the nature of the disease. So, James took the two little ones in homemade caskets and buried them while Merlin stayed with those who were ill.

James then built a log house in Laketown Ward, only a few miles distant, ~~but~~ Merlin was able to attend church more regularly, and had good neighbors.

There were five other children, Willis, Morton, Ethel, Chase and Grace. (I, Grace, am the youngest of the family.)

Mother had yet three very tragic events to face in her life. The death of Edith at the birth of her second child, the sudden death of my Father in 1902, and in 1912 the death of Ethel at the birth of her second child.

Mother had great courage and great ability in many things. She was a fine practical nurse and for many years she attended all the mothers at the births of their children. She nursed the sick, took charge at time of death, perhaps because of her own tragedies, she could give more comfort to those bereaved.

Mother had a wonderful sense of humor which helped her over many bad times. She had a fine alto voice and sang in the choir and in all the programs. She was the first Religion class teacher in the Laketown Ward. Also, one of the first Primary Counselors. She was President of Y.L.M.I.A. for seven years, taught Sunday School for fifteen years, was counselor in the Relief Society for twenty-five years and at the age of 70 became President of the Primary Organization. Some of the above offices she held simultaneously.

She was loved by all who knew her, old and young. When we children were married and moved away she opened her house (Father had built a large house shortly before his death) to the young people of the ward. Here they gathered for candy pulls, show rehearsals, or just to hear Mothers wonderful stories of people and places she had known.

Father was a very industrious man. He had foresight to know the important things to be done and the ability to get them done. He was the perfect pioneering type. He took over the mail contract between Evanston, Wyoming and Soda Springs, Idaho. He built a very large barn to accomodate twelve teams of horses and since there was

Edith's illness - perhaps diptheria - perhaps pneumonia

no amusement building of any sort, he made the loft into a fine place for shows and dancing, laying a good hardwood floor and putting in a stage, and then he never charged for the use of it. It was in use for many years. He got the first threshing machine into the southend of the valley and it is said of him that if there was a bridge to build or a house to move, or someone who needed a little financial help in those first lean years, "James Kearl" was always called on. He was a good untrained surgeon, and for many years while the nearest Doctor was fifty miles distant with no phones and no roads. He set all the broken bones, pulled the teeth and scolded the sick into getting better; and, he never lost a patient.

Father died October 4, 1902. Mother died September 30, 1934. They left a monument of good deeds and scores of people who mourned their passing.