

Personal History of Merlin Kearn.

MOTHER - As I Remember Her. By Grace Lamborn

The first recollections I have of Mother as Mother was of the cold winter evenings as we sat around the stove in the kitchen listening to her stories of her childhood days in England, her trip across the plains, and her growing up days in Grantville. These were like fairy stories to us and we never tired of hearing them. I remember she often held Chase on her lap. He was older than I but he was subject to bad attacks of croup and needed a little extra care.

It was at these times and in subsequent years that I learned of Mothers early life.

Grandfather Eastham, a railroad engineer, was transferred from Lancashire (where most of the Eastham ancestors were born, lived, and died) to Derbyshire and then to Yorkshire. Here Mother was born in a little village called Masborough, or Masbro, across the river Don from Rotherham where grandfather worked.

A daughter of John and Jane Huntington Eastham, and here she spent the first 6 years of her life. The big event of each day, weather permitting, was the trip across the bridge over the Don carrying the noon lunch to her father. She told of the little tobacco shop built on the bridge, which had once been a church and which recently has been restored as a church, a picture of which is in this family book.

Mother went to school and to dancing school in Masbro and all the children were sent to church. Grandmother had been converted and baptized into the Mormon Church in 1839, but she felt that the children should go to any church rather than none.

When Merlin was six years old her father recieved an offer to run the first engine on the newly built railroad in the West Indies, however he would have to sign to stay 4 years. Salary would be higher and he promised Grandmother if she would consent to let him go, when he returned he would bring her and the family to Zion. This had been Grandmother dream since the day she was baptized into the church.

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So it was decided that John should go, after moving the family to Leeds, Yorkshire, where there was a branch of the church and where they lived for the time John was away.

Jane opened her home to the missionaries and among those who stayed at her home was Joseph F. Smith. He was there the entire time of his mission and to the day of Grandmother's death she was "Mother Eastham" to him.

When John returned from the Indies, he kept his word and began preparations for the journey to Zion. The family sailed on April 29, 1865 on the sailing vessel, "Belle Wood", arriving, after an uneventful voyage, one month to the day from the date of embarkation.

They disembarked at Castle Gardens, New York. After a few days of rest they travelled by rail and boat to a little place called Wyoming on the banks of the Missouri River. It was a gathering place for the people to prepare for their westward journey. The two oldest girls of the Easthams had emigrated with their husbands a year previously and settled in Grantsville, Utah. They had written their parents that there was need of a Gen'l Mose store in Grantsville, so John bought goods and fitted up three wagons for the journey across the plains, the third and strange part of their journey. Everything was so different from anything they had ever known, although Mother said to the children that it was a great adventure. They were blessed with health, especially grandmother, who had always been frail, and who hadn't one sick moment on the whole trip.

They never saw an indian the whole time they were on the plains. However, when they were making camp some distance from Fort Laramie, soldiers came out to invite them to camp within the Fort walls as a Danish Camp had been attacked by the indians the previous night.

On Nov. 8, 1865 they arrived in Salt Lake City. The girls, Emma and Louise, with their husband were in from Grantsville to meet them and take them back to Grantsville where John and Jane would live for the remainder of their lives.

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They built a small store which they kept until Grandmother died. They also built a nice little home in 1866 and I have had the privilege of going in it several times although it has been sold out of the family. It is much as it was when John and Jane left it - a monument to their industry and foresight.

The life for Mother Merlin and her sisters was simple but interesting. They attended school. The meeting house and dance hall were lighted by candles and each autumn a dance was given. Everyone attended and paid their way with candles. Mother said they would dance all night with intermission for supper.

There were some natural hot springs not too far away where the children used to go swimming. The springs are still there but the children of that time have all gone on.

When Mother was 17 she met my Father, James Kearl, who, a convert to the church, had come to Utah from Hampshire, England. He came with an older brother, Alfred, in 1854.

Merlin and James were married in the endowment house in Salt Lake City on 12 July 1869. They were called by Pres. Brigham Young to help settle the Southern end of the Bear Lake Valley.

They arrived in August 1869 and settled in Round Valley, where land was for the taking, and since there was much meadow grass ready to cut and store for the winter feed for the livestock, Father immediately went to work on these first important things. For six weeks they lived out of doors and Mother cooked over a campfire. Then Father built a one room log cabin where they spent their first winter.

They had taken with them a good supply of staple groceries, with fish in abundance and a cow giving milk, they lived very well. There were a few settlers in Laketown, about three miles distant, where they attended meeting on Sunday, when the weather and roads permitted.

I often wonder how it must have seemed to a young girl, not yet out of her teens, to have a baby without benefit of Doctor, among comparative strangers, so far from her loved ones. But this

was only a repetition of the courage and fortitude of thousands of women in those early days of pioneering.

The winter of '70 and '71 brought many hardships. The drain had frozen. There had been neither time nor means to add much to the cabin. When storms were loud and violent the mud roof leaked, the chinking fell from the logs and had to be replaced.

I remember a story Mother told about two bulls fighting near the cabin. Hitting it with such force she thought it would give way. She reached through the broken chinking with her scissors and prodded them until they moved away. I can imagine her wrath for her house was her castle, poor as it was.

Winter passed and with coming of spring hopes of good crops motivated them to work harder. Father planted and worked to improve the house. The baby Merlin Edith was healthy and strong. Mother kept busy cooking, mending and one day she found a wild gooseberry bush. She picked enough to fill a jar and had no sugar to put in them but it was a pleasure to see them sitting on the shelf.

Mother had five children before she had a sewing machine and as she never sewed very well, nor liked to, it must have been a task.

Ugden was the nearest source of supply of most things they needed. Roads were few and bad. Mode of travel by oxen and wagon or horse back. Mail arrived only when someone arrived in the valley from Salt Lake City, thus Mother seldom heard from her folks and this, I think was her hardest trial.

The Eastham girls had been very close to each other, always full of fun and humor. They were good singers and had much music in their home. Mother was the first one to leave Grantsville. I think how grandmother must have worried not knowing how things were for months at a time.

The Bear Lake Valley with its hunting and fishing had been, for centuries probably, a gathering place for various Indian tribes. They came in the summer and made camp all around the

lake. They were antagonistic when the whites began settling. Who could blame them? They tore down the first fences which were built. Pres. Young advised the settlers to be kind and tolerant and share food so no serious incident would occur. His advice was right. As the years went by fewer Indians came, until when I was a little girl, if a few Indians passed through our town we children flocked to stand open mouthed and wide eyed to watch them. Of course by this time some of them were on reservations.

The summer of 1872 was cold and again the wheat froze. Merlin had not been too well. She was expecting her second child and on the 29 of October Jeannette was born.

The winter of 1872 and '73 was a hard winter. The wheat could only be used to feed the stock. People were living, for the most part, on fish and milk. Some of them became ill. They were virtually snowed in. No fruit. A meager supply of vegetables. Father had provided a barrel of melons which he bought every year in the fall. This was used for sweetening.

It was finally decided that a few of the men would try to go through the hills on snowshoes to Logan and bring back what food they could carry on their backs. They managed very well indeed but when they were half way home a terrible blizzard came up which lasted several days. They were afraid they would get lost if they attempted to travel, so they made camp. Their food ran out and they made a soup with snow water to a stiff dough, wrapped it around sticks and baked it over the fire.

They arrived home safely but with very little food. Mother would always laugh when she spoke of this.

She had a wonderful sense of humor. She would always see the funny side of things. In fact people had to make light of bad situations, situations which might have defeated a less courageous group.

At the north end of the valley was a little settlement called Meadowville. There were more people, Indians, Mexicans, Kiandais and others and they had a ward. They had schools and entertainments to which they invited the folks from round a valley. There was a Personal History of Merlin kept by some person. Page 5.

problem, a wide creek ran from the big spring on the west side of the valley, and wound its way several miles through the meadows and finally into Bear Lake. The problem was, no bridge. So the folks from Round Valley would go to the south side of the creek and the folks from Meadowville met them with team and wagon to transport them the mile or so to Meadowville. They removed their shoes and stockings and waded the creek, the men carrying the children.

Mother said they had wonderful times and I am sure they did, and there would have been a feeling of brotherhood among them which encouraged them and helped them over the rough times.

I mentioned the Kimballs. J. Golden Kimball lived in Meadowville at that time and was a friend of Mother and Father. He wrote some books and told about James and Merlin Kearl. In fact he wrote at some length in one of his books about Mother Merlin whom he considered a "queen among women".

The years have a way of rushing by and now it was Autumn of the fifth year since Merlin had left her parents and sisters and home in Grantsville to help carve out a new life in new surroundings. Living conditions were improving and also a mail route had been established between Evanston, Wyoming, north to Soda Springs, Idaho, so she heard from her people quite regularly and they must have been happy to hear from her and know all was well.

On September 17th 1874, John Henry, named for father John Eastham, was born. They welcomed a son. Mother was kept busy, cooking, washing, and sewing, done by hand. She knit all the socks, stockings and mittens. This she did for all of us, until the youngest was quite grown. She could knit without benefit of light and the clicking of her steel needles kept time to the flow of her stories or songs, some of which I'm sure she invented as she went along.

Very definite changes were taking place in the valley. More settlers were coming in, most of them settling in Laketown. More

fences were being built. Fewer Indians were returning to their summer camp by the lake.

The people worked early and late, plowing, planting, harvesting and in winter they worked in the timber getting out logs for building. This brought up the problem of a saw mill which could be convenient to all the settlers. Father built such a mill. I don't know exactly what year, it is still in use in this 1969 year.

I never heard Mother complain of those early days and I am sure there were times of discouragement. She spoke, rather, as though they were grand adventures. She was well and young, the children were healthy and a source of great joy to her, and as each day brought it plans and work, so each day brought its pleasure. Mother lived by the proverb that "Women made the best of what was theirs. Small and plain as their lot may be, a merry heart could make it a never ending feast."

Father was gradually acquiring land and stock and becoming fairly prosperous. The seasons were short and early frosts still damaged grain and gardens. No fruit was being raised here as yet, then President John Taylor came through the Bear Lake Valley and he blessed the land that the earth should produce and the climate become more mild. From that day on the crops were better, the gardens rarely touched by frost. Fruit trees and berries were planted and successfully raised.

The first meeting house in Laketown was a log room with a dirt roof and dirt floor. Brother Oldfield was Presiding Elder and then in 1887 Laketown became a ward and Ira Nebeker was set apart as Bishop, which office he held for many years. Soon after he became bishop a new meeting house was built with a board floor and a shingled roof. The Bear Lake Stake had been organized with head quarters at Paris, Idaho, at the northern corner of the valley with Charles C. Rich as president.

Comparatively speaking there were quite a number of people at the north end of the Bear Lake Valley. A brass band was organized with Josiah Eardley as Band Master and Pres. Rich sent them to the Personal History of Merlin Kearl by Grace Lamborn. Page 7.

various settlements to play for the people. Also a group of singers visited the settlements and how the folks looked forward to these occasions which they enjoyed very much.

Viola Pratt Gillette, a noted singer of that time, came to visit with friends in Meadowville and she sang for the people in Laketown. One of the songs she sang was President McKinleys favorite and one she had sung for him. "Just as I am, without one plea."

Mother enjoyed these times so much. A lover of music, she had a beautiful alto voice and in later years was to become quite an asset to the Laketown Ward Choir. She sang with Maggie Satterwaite Gordon in all of the socials and entertainments of that day.

Father had acquired land on Otter Creek, a stream flowing from the hills a few miles north of Randolph and about 18 miles from Round Valley, and some time after George was born, I am not sure of the year, he built a house and moved the family to "Otter Creek". The nearest neighbor was about two miles away and Randolph, now the county seat, 4 miles. Here they picked up and posted mail and could buy necessities since Randolph boasted a store of sorts.

Otter Creek area was and is a peaceful sort of place. Winters were long but the first green grass was a welcome sight in the spring. The children could run in safety and the low hills were covered with Butter Cups, Bluebells, and Indian Paintbrush. Here in Otter Creek Mothers third son was born and here terrible tragedy came to the family.

Mothers house was small but as I have known in later years she never had a house so small she couldn't take in a weary traveler and since their house was on the Highway people often stopped for a meal or rest and to feed their horses, or perhaps just to visit. One night quite late a man came to the door and said his wife was sick, could they stay for the night. Mother took them in and did what she could to make the poor suffering woman comfortable. The next day they were able to go on and to

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Mother it was just another of the every day events. She never thought of any contagious disease, but shortly one by one they became ill. No doctor, no telephone. Father brought help and they did all they knew to do. On May 6, 1882, little Robert passed away and on May 14 Jeannette. They learned by that time that the whole territory was reeking with the dread disease diptheria. Father made little caskets and took the children to the Laketown Cemetary for burial. Because of the nature of the disease there could be no funeral and because the rest of the children were ill Mother couldn't even go to the burial.

The family lived on Otter Creek for eight years. They were in Randolph one or two winters so the children could attend school.

During all these years Mother never saw her folks. She couldn't make such a long trip with her little one and grandmother poor health kep her from traveling. They could hear from each other quite regularly and now looked forward to meeting again.

Willis was 3 months old when diptheria took the lives of Jeanette and Robert. He was the only one of the family to escape it. I might mention here that many children succumbed to this dread disease during the year of 1882 and from one end of the territory to the other, but because of lack of frequent communication, no one was warned in time to avoid or escape it.

During the summer of 1882 Father moved the family to Laketown where Mother lived the rest of her life. She was now able to attend church regularly and what was more important the children have the children in church and school.

Mother began her long and active church service. She was an officer in every womans organization, teacher in Religion Class and Sunday School. The first Religion Class which was started at the time. Wilford Woodruff was president of the church. A teachers Certificate had to be issued to each teacher. She was very proud of hers. She was councilor in the Primary to Sister Harriet Robinson, an office she held for a number of years.