

## HISTORY OF MARY LARSEN AHLSTROM

Written by Mary Larsen Ahlstrom and Sarah Nelson

My name is Mary Larsen Ahlstrom. I am now eighty-three years old. I was born in Hjørring, Denmark, August 21, 1836. My parents' names were Christen and Johanna Marie Christiansen Larsen.

Father was a widower with several small children when mother married him. In due time she bore nine of her own, I being the eldest of her brood. As mother was over-burdened with family cares I learned early to shoulder a fair share of responsibility.

I entered school at the age of seven, walking several miles to the village of Vaarsaa, which stood by the sea. The school-master was a stern, dignified man, who tolerated no levity. I was being constantly impressed with the serious aspect of life. Our chief book of learning was the Bible. I learned to read fluently, and having a tenacious memory, I had practically memorized the Bible before my twelfth year. My parents were Lutherans and at the age of fourteen, I was confirmed into that church.

When I was eighteen, my parents were converted to a new religion which was brought to their door by two traveling missionaries, representing the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly called Mormons. The principles of Mormonism were explained with such clarity and power, substantiated by so much Bible evidence that our family soon became converts. My parents and myself were baptized by immersion into the Mormon Church on April 6, 1854.

One of the doctrines of the Mormon belief is the assembling together in the land of Zion, of the people of Israel from the nations of the earth. In order to obey this principle, it was necessary for us to dispose of all our belongings, and travel over sea and land to far-away Utah, in the United States of America. Our friends and kindred did all in their power to dissuade us against, what seemed to them, a foolish credulity.

Despite their pleadings we left our beloved home in October, 1855. The family consisted of Father, Mother, and eight children. The youngest, a babe under two months of age. Our first stop was at Aalborg which had been appointed a temporary gathering place for Mormon Converts. We camped in a large unfurnished stall, where we made our beds on the floor and bought our food in the shops. Unfortunately an epidemic of measles broke out in the crowded camp. Many of the children became severely ill and with the arduous journey just ahead the epidemic became a source of great anxiety. When instructions came for us to proceed to Copenhagen we bundled up the ailing children and took them with us. We had a rough crossing over the North Sea to England and suffered much from sea sickness.

At Liverpool we embarked on an old sailing vessel named the "John J. Boyd", which had formerly been used as a cattle ship. An immigration company had chartered and remodeled it for use in carrying Mormon converts across the Atlantic.

It was the 12th day of December, 1835, when our ship was towed out of the Liverpool harbor, loaded with fresh water and provisions for the long voyage. There were five hundred and twelve Mormon converts aboard when we started but the death-rate was high especially among the children who had been weakened by the measles.

We had bad weather and heavy seas right from the first but on Christmas Eve the ship was struck by a hurricane and for a time it seemed that the old windjammer was doomed to be swallowed up in the sea. The storm raged so furiously that the luggage chests which were tied to posts on the deck broke from their moorings and were hurled about with such force as to endanger life and limbs. All passengers were, therefore ordered into their bunks where we crouched in misery listening to the shrieking of the winds and wishing we were back in our comfortable homes again.

While in mid-ocean fire broke out on the first deck and burned through the floor to the second deck before it was discovered. The smoke became so dense we nearly strangled. Some of the people wanted to jump over-board but Canute Petersen, our leader, said, "Stay on the ship. Keep calm. The fire will be extinguished and the ship will reach New York safely. "

A few nights later we had a collision with another ship that almost knocked a hole in our ship. Our Captain had always been very cruel to the sailor; now he flogged them worse than before, claiming the collision had been due to the crew's negligence.

On February 2nd we saw a ship drifting helplessly before the wind. We steered toward it four days before we were able to reach it and rescue the thirty six sailors who were clinging to the rigging. They were a great help in sailing our ship as most of our own men were too badly disabled to work.

About this time, two of my little brothers died and were buried at sea. That was a severe blow to my mother. She never seemed the same after that.

I can imagine nothing more dreary than was our existence during that voyage on the John J. Boyd. But it came to an end at last and we landed in New York, February 16, 1856, having been sixty-six days in crossing the Atlantic from Liverpool.

We stayed in a place called Castle Garden where immigrants were received and examined, until February 21. Then we took a train for the west, our route being by way of Dunkirk, Cleveland, and Chicago.

The railroads of that time were vastly different from those of today. The engines were small and rattley. In each coach was a stove that burned either wood or coal. The seats were wooden benches. There were no Pullman cars with clean comfortable berths. We took our food and bedding with us on the train and ate and slept as best we could.

One morning we awakened to find our car standing alone in an unsettled stretch of country. The coupler had evidently rattled loose and the rest of the train had gone on, unwittingly

leaving us behind. As the weather was bitter cold, we gathered what fuel was available to build a fire and settled ourselves to wait for an engine to come and pick us up.

The rail-road terminated on the eastern bank of the Mississippi River. We were instructed to tie ropes to the handles of our chests, place our bedding and other belongings on top of them and drag them over the ice to Burlington, Iowa. This we did, the ice creaking at every step. We were ignorant of the fact that we were walking across the great Father of Waters, or that, it being the first day of March we were likely to break through at any moment.

In Burlington we joined a colony of Mormons whose destination also was Salt Lake City. These people had lacked sufficient funds to complete their journey and had halted here in order to earn the necessities to carry them on to Zion. We found ourselves in like circumstances and so set out to look for work. My parents went out in the country, father secured a job in a black-smith shop as that was his trade. Three of my brothers worked in the corn-fields while I became "hired girl" at a farm house receiving a wage of seventy-five cents per week.

About this time my six-year old brother died, this making the third child of my mothers to pass away since we left our home in Denmark. Poor mother! It was almost more than she could bear.

Each Sabbath day the members of the Larsen family would meet and walk together into Burlington to attend religious services. On one of these occasions, the presiding authority asked me for a private interview. I was much surprised when he broached the subject of marriage. He told me that in his opinion, I being twenty years of age I ought to choose me a mate from among the fine young Mormon converts in Burlington. He argued, that a good looking immigrant girl was apt to be led away from her religion and induced to marry someone outside of her faith. I voiced strong objections asserting that I wasn't ready to marry anyone as yet. My hearts desire was to reach the Zion of my dreams and help my parents get established there. I was convinced that nothing would ever turn me from my determination to go to Utah.

I found that my mother was greatly in favor of my following the advice I had received, in fact, that she was the originator of the idea. She gave as her reason, the fear that I might be influenced to forsake the faith for which we all had sacrificed so much. "There are times, she told me her voice trembling when I doubt I will live to reach Utah. The way seems so long and even now I am so tired. It would be a comfort to me if you were married to a good faithful man who would care for you if anything happened to your father or me." When I told her my heart was already bestowed, she burst into tears. "Then the man is Frederick. I have been afraid of this," she told me.

I had known Frederick and cared for him all my life. We had been playmates in childhood and had gone to school together in Vaaraass by the sea. He had been very kind to all of us, when the shadow of sickness and death had hung over us like a pall. More than once in the silent watches of the night I had sobbed out my grief on his shoulder and he had kissed away my tears. My heart yearned toward him, but my parents distrusted his sincerity. Which way did my duty lie?

Subsequent events proved that my parents were right. Convinced of Frederick's unworthiness I agreed to marry the man that had been chosen for me. His name was Peter Ahlstrom. He was a Swedish convert who was willing to heed counsel and take me for his wife. We were married February 21, 1857, and went to live near a nursery where Peter had employment. Frederick apostatized and never did come to Utah. I found Peter to be an exemplary husband; jovial and care-free by disposition; industrious, devoted and striving to be a true Latter-day Saint. Our first child was a daughter born in Burlington, Feb. 12, 1858. She died ten days later. The next year in March 1859 my first son was born. I named him John Michael, giving him the names of my two brothers who had been buried at sea. On the 9th day of May 1859, we finally found ourselves ready after three years of waiting, to resume our journey westward. We went with my father's family and his outfit, there being ten persons of us beside my infant son. We had a covered wagon and four oxen. They were young and not very well broken and would run away at the slightest provocation, scattering our belongings over the prairie.

Leaving Burlington we traveled fifty miles to Fairfield, where we joined another group of Mormons and then continued three hundred miles further to Council Bluffs, Iowa, where we crossed the Missouri River on a ferry boat.

At Florence, Nebraska, a large company was at camp. The wagons were being overhauled and loaded with provisions for the journey of one thousand miles to the Salt Lake Valley. We had to have one hundred pounds of flour for each person, also sugar, bacon, salt, rice, soap and matches and whatever other food stuff we could afford to take as there were no supply stations on the way. The hunters were counted on to furnish the camp with fresh meat. We also had to take with us, bedding, dishes, cooking utensils, wash-boards, tubs, plows, etc. One family took an organ and there were numerous violins and other musical instruments. Our company consisted of seventy covered wagons drawn for the most part by oxen, some by horses and a few by cows. A Captain was assigned to over-see each ten wagons and give the instructions that were needed. In most cases the people walked as the wagons were too heavily loaded to have any room for passengers. Our captain was a man named James Brown who later settled in Ogden.

I walked the entire distance from Florence, Nebraska to Salt Lake City, carrying my baby in my arms except while wading the rivers; then my husband carried the baby while I clung to his arm. Many other women did likewise, who were far less able than myself. Often a woman, heavy with child would trudge along until her hour arrived. Then a place would be cleared in the wagon where she would rest for a few days and then walk as before. In one instance a woman accompanied by her mother slipped out among the sage brush and re-turned later with her baby wrapped in its grandmother's apron.

Each morning the camp was awakened by the bugle call and all camp activities were regulated by schedule. Scouts went ahead to select the camping places and armed horseman rode beside the wagon train each day. Each evening the wagons were halted so as to form a circle and within this enclosure the camp-fires were built. Our fuel usually consisted of dried buffalo chips which were gathered by the women and children as they followed the trail. After the supper was over the travelers would gather for an hour of instruction or recreation. Fiddles would be tuned

and weariness forgotten in the sound of lively music. They danced mostly old-fashioned cotillions, reels or their native folk-dances, accompanying these with singing. The program would be concluded by all the camp singing a sacred hymn, most often the pioneer favorite, "Come, Come Ye Saints, No Toil Nor Labor Fear," then a sincere prayer for protection and soon the camp was in silent slumber, except, for the watchmen and night herders of the cattle. Occasionally sickness would come in the night time and death would snatch away some ones beloved. Then with sober faces and down-cast spirits we would travel on leaving beside the road an unmarked grave.

We encountered many Indian camps and found these natives to be inveterate beggars. They would spread their blankets by the roadside and expect us to share with them everything they saw. "It is cheaper to feed the Indians than to fight them," was Brigham Young's motto so they carried away far more than any of us could afford to give them.

Many times we saw vast herds of buffalo grazing on the prairie and once we witnessed from a distance a buffalo stampede. When we came to the Platte River it had quick-sand bottoms and we had a lot of trouble in fording it. Each wagon required four or five yoke of oxen to get it across. At last we came in sight of Chimney Rock a well known landmark, which in the distance resembled a smoke stack. There were no settlements along the way. Fort Laramie was just a few buildings surrounded by a high wall as a protection from Indian attack. Finally we reached Green River, which was a dangerous stream to cross. It was too deep and swift to wade so we stayed in the wagons. One woman refused to ride as she had determined to walk every step of the way. In attempting to wade she was swept down stream and nearly drowned before she could be rescued.

By this time our food was getting scarce. On August 21, my twenty-third birthday we made our last flour into biscuits and rationed them out, one a meal to each person. When our last bit of food was gone, a woman came to our wagon with a pan of flour. She had heard we were out of food and came to share with us. She said her husband had sufficient flour and would loan us what we needed until we reached Salt Lake.

We reached the foot of the Big Mountain on August 29, but, oh! what a struggle to get up its steep slopes! The women and children had to be on hand with rocks to block the wagon wheels, while the oxen stopped a minute to rest. The road up the mountain was five miles long. We reached the top and came to the spot where Brigham Young first looked out across the Valley of the Great Salt Lake and exclaimed, "This is the place, I have seen it in my dreams." Mother and I exchanged incredulous looks. Did they mean to tell us that this was Zion, this dry forbidding place? Sobs shook mother's frail body and tears suffused her sorrowful brown eyes.

When we arrived at the camping place in Salt Lake City, we were met by great crowds of people who treated us to watermelons and molasses cookies. We witnessed many touching reunions of families and old friends who had been separated for years.

We were advised by President Brigham Young to proceed south about one hundred miles to Sanpete Valley and there establish our homes. We reached Fort Ephraim September 10, 1859 having spent four months in constant travel since leaving Burlington, Iowa. The settlers there had raised good crops. We were able to earn our bread stuff and potatoes by helping in the harvest

fields and Peter got a chance to haul wood on shares to provide us with fuel. But there wasn't a vacant house we could get and no time to build one before the winter set in. We dug us a cellar in the ground roofed it over with willows, straw and earth, added a fireplace and chimney and lo- we had a home. We had to get pitch pine to burn to have a light in the fireplace, as we had neither candles nor coal oil. Our shoes were worn out and we had to get wooden shoes and we were glad that there was a wooden shoemaker in Fort Ephraim so we didn't have to go barefooted. We went to meeting in our wooden shoes. Lots of folks did that in those days; children went barefooted. We got some flour so we had bread and we got a little milk off the neighbors. After a while when they began to thrash we got wheat so I made malt and made beer, so we lived on beer and bread. We also worked and got some potatoes and squash and a little meat after people began to kill their pigs. There were no meat shops in those days. We made molasses of corn stocks and parsnips; that was all the sweets we had. They raised some sugar cane in Provo and made molasses but that didn't reach us. We got through the first winter all right. Next summer we got a cow for the 24 of July. Then we were well off and we built one room of adobes and had a dirt roof on it and a floor of some flat rocks; they were better than a dirt floor. That was in 1860. We also got a city lot where we built our house and had a garden and we had a pig to kill that fall. Peter made adobes all that summer so he got lots of wheat after harvest. But everything cost so much; it was a bushel of wheat for one yard of calico and it was one bushel for factory and so on, but most every-body dressed alike. Then we got one sheep so I sheared the wool for to make stockings and the next year we had a lamb and so I had more wool and carded and spun the wool and had it wove into cloth for me a dress and Peter a shirt. And so we got more sheep and more wool every year so I made more cloth and we got clothes to wear.

Next year the 6th of September 1861, my son, James Ahlstrom was born. We still had the dirt roof and in the month of January in 1862.

In October 1866 the Indians killed seven people from Ephraim. A company went into the mountains to get poles and as they got up to where they left the wagons and had unyoked their oxen the Indians were close on them and fired, and all the men had to run for their life. The Indians caught Soren Jespersen and tortured him; they cut off his hands and feet and scalped him, and cut out his heart; and they killed two other men and then gathered up all the oxen and started them up the canyon and then came down to do more harm. My brother Peter and Henry Green and Neils O. Anderson had run to town and gave the alarm and the guard in town came out to head off the Indians up behind the guard knoll, where William Thorp was shot and Lewis Larsen was wounded; he hid behind a cedar tree and kept pointing his gun at the Indians so they went back and scalped Thorp. Then lots more Indians came from the canyon and got after a carriage that came from Manti; there were two men and an old Doctor woman in the carriage. Captain Whitlock was the teamster and my brother L. C. Larsen was with them. The Indians came up to them and shot through the cover of the carriage and the old woman laid down in the bottom of the carriage and prayed. Captain Whitlock was shot in the back with an arrow. My brother jumped out on the carriage tongue between the horses and was facing the Indian that was riding by the side of them. They knew that one; his name was Yenewood. Uncle Chris, My brother, pointed his pistol at that Indian and their team out ran the Indian pony so Uncle Chris got up and pulled the arrow out from Whitlock's back but the Indian had shot the one horse and it was still running and reached town before it fell dead. Then a lot of other Indians went down south of Ephraim to take the cow herd and on their way they killed three people; a man, his wife,

and a girl. They were running toward town. The father carried his little boy when he was shot and fell. Some of the men from Ephraim ran out after the Indians so they never had time to scalp these people. The man and woman were shot with bullets, but the girl had an arrow shot through her body and was not dead when found, but the little boy was not hurt. He was covered with blood from his parents. This boy is now a man and president of the Jordan Stake near Salt Lake City. His name is William Kuhre. That night the town was in mourning. Lots of the men that went in the Canyon had not come home; they had hid around in the brush away from the Indians and dare not come out until they knew that the Indians had left with all the cattle. The next day lots of men went up to look for them that had been killed and brought them home. It was a terrible sight; all of the dead were taken to the school house and laid out. We might not see them. The people stood in groups and cried. They buried them all in one grave by the school house. They dare not go out to the grave yard for fear there were Indians waiting around to kill more of the people. A week after they took them to the graveyard and buried them side by side.

Now fall was on and winter was coming. Then we would have peace for the winter while the snow was on the mountains, but in the spring of 1867 the Indians were lurking around again. The people were more careful. In the summer the Indians came down Willow Creek Canyon and drove off a band of horses. The guard went after them and overtook them and had a fight with them and scared some of the horses back. There Bishop Pete Peterson's horse was killed from under him. I never heard of anybody else being hurt. Canute Peterson had been sent to Sanpete by president Brigham Young to try and make peace with the Indians, and to be Bishop of Ephraim. We still were afraid and on our guard.

On the 1st of September, 1867 my little boy, William was born and I had to be in the house alone and the children outside. Everybody was out fighting grasshoppers. They came in big clouds and settled down on the grain and bit off the heads of the grain that was not ripe. At that time there were no machines to cut the grain. Some went out with butcher knives and some had cycles to help save the wheat for bread. The summer of 1868 we had a grasshopper war. I went out with my baby and the other three boys to help fight to save the wheat and enough was saved for bread. My fourth son, Willie, a brown eyed baby of two years died Sept. 9, 1869.

That summer lots of men were called to go out in Echo Canyon to work on the railroad, and my husband went, he came home in a few days and had some money, so we got some flour and shoes and cloth to make us some clothing. He went back again to work till winter came on. In 1869 the train came to Ogden. Now we had better times. That fall I got my first stove.

In the summer of 1870, my daughter, Hannah was born on the 14th of June. That summer we built our last house in Ephraim. We moved in it one week before Christmas. We had just got everything fixed nice, our floors were scoured as white as could be. We had no carpets; not many had carpets those days, but I was glad that I had two rooms finished. The boys had one apple each for Xmas and a few sticks of candy in their stockings. That Christmas Eve the ladder slid down off from the porch and I broke my right arm. I could feel the small bone was broke two inches above the wrist. There was no doctor to do anything and a man came in and put splints on it and wrapped some cloth around it. We got a hired girl for a few days but she could not milk the cow so I had to milk her with my left hand.

Now we were doing tolerable well. Peter was working in Uckerman's furniture shop and people came from other places and got furniture and brought fruit and preserves and all kinds of stuff to pay for it so we got along alright. The first money he made in Ephraim was one hundred dollars and he sent it to Sweden to his Uncle Victor Bunderson and then in 1872 his cousin Mary came, and in November that year he went to Salt Lake to the Endowment House and married her. She was eighteen years younger than myself. On the 21st of March my son Delbert was born and in September 1873 Mary's first child, Tilda was born. Then we had two babies in the house. I have often been asked about our experience while living under the same roof and how we got along. I hesitated quite a while before giving my consent for Peter to take a second wife. We had been so poor and were beginning to prosper a little now. I felt sure if he took the responsibility of another family we would never be able to get ahead. However, I believed it to be a correct principle if lived in righteousness to bring great blessings. The other wife's name was also Mary. We each had our own sleeping apartment the remainder of the house being shared in common. We nursed each other in confinement. We both mothered the children and tried to treat each other with fairness and consideration.

In the fall of 1874, fourteen men were called from Ephraim to go down to St. George to work on the Temple. My husband was one of them. He was away nearly all winter and we got along as best we could. Towards spring we had word that he had been hurt and was disabled. He felt very bad because he had to come home. He got a supporter but it didn't help him very much, but he had to try to work anyway.

On April 4th, 1875 my son, Frank was born, and on May 24, the next month, Mary's Linda was born; then there were two more babies in the house and a crippled father. He could hardly work. Then my boys went across the Sampich River and put in some grain and we raised a nice crop that year. The boys went wading across the slough and carried their food every week. The next year 1876 they did the same and they raised a crop, but in the fall after thrashing and hauling the grain to town the boys stayed home.

In February 1877, Ole went across the river and took a sheep herd for the summer. Then I couldn't stand it any longer for them to stay over there alone and no one to do for them, so I told the boys I was going over with them. We had only a small log house where there could be two beds in the one end and I took my stove to cook on and we had some boards for a table and a few stools and a bench. I took some dishes and a wash tub and my cows and a few chickens and the boys dug a cellar and a well, so we got along. We raised a crop this year too, and after we thrashed I went home the last day of October, and on the 15th day of November, 1877, my daughter Sarah was born.

In the spring of 1879 the corner stones of the Temple were laid by President Brigham Young. Peter moved Mary, his second wife to Manti. He worked as a carpenter on the Temple until it was finished and dedicated in May 1889. After that he was custodian of the Temple until his death, which occurred June 12, 1903. In April 1839 I moved to Manti to make my home. I had always desired to be near a Temple where I could do work for my dead kindred. I finally secured a genealogical record from Denmark and have been instrumental in getting Temple work done for all the names I was able to secure.



As my husband's health was not good for several years before his death, I helped him with his job in the Temple. There I got acquainted with many fine people whose friendship has been one of the greatest blessings of my life.

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My mother, Mary Larsen Ahlstrom was a beautiful woman in her prime. She had a perfect figure, black hair and soft brown eyes like those of her own mother. Her character was as fine as her appearance. She was the mother of nine children. She departed this life July 22, 1924, at Knosh, Utah, at the age of 87 years and eleven months. She was survived by four sons, one daughter, forty grandchildren and 26 great grandchildren. Honored and revered they laid her away in the shadow of the Temple at Manti, Utah. Deep be her rest and sweet her sleep.

Submitted by Sarah Ahlstrom Nelson of Rexburg, Idaho