

SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF ELIZA COLLINS HUNSAKER

Eliza Collins was the daughter of Allen Collins, a Welshman, and Mary Broady, Scotch. She was born March 5, 1817 near Louisville, Spencer County, Kentucky.

Eliza was 13 years of age when she met Abraham Hunsaker for the first time, a man whom she married two years later. On the occasion of their first meeting, Eliza was at her home spinning flax on the little wheel. Abraham thought her the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. The attraction between those two young people seemed to be mutual, for they became engaged to be married before he left the neighborhood; the event to take place in two years or more from that time.

During the ensuing period, Abraham and Eliza met only occasionally. Indeed the young girl sometimes wondered if her lover had ceased to care for her, so long it was between his visits. But, about the time the two years had elapsed, this young couple had obtained consent of the parents on both sides and was married on Thursday, January 3, 1833. Eliza was then fifteen years and ten months of age, her husband being a little over twenty years old.

They lived with father Hunsaker on a farm near Quincy, Illinois for the first two months of their married life, while their own little cabin was being built, and as soon as it was finished, they commenced housekeeping for themselves.

The first little babe that came to brighten their home was born October 22, 1833. This little son, whom they called Jacob, was permitted to remain with them only eight weeks. He was buried in the Dunkard graveyard, the Dunkard Church being the one to which they belonged. Two years later, December 3, 1835, a little daughter was born. She was given the name Mary, after her Grandmother Mary Broady.

Eliza and her husband sold the place and moved to a little farm on Pigeon Creek, near Payson. Here they raised lots of grain, also hogs and cattle. They were very happy and prosperous in their home.

While they were living on this farm, the saints were driven out of Missouri and forced to leave their homes. Some of them were in very destitute circumstances. This little family of Hunsakers, being very sympathetic and very generous, opened their doors to any who were in need. Consequently, a family by the name of McBride was taken into their home and was made very welcome.

This was the first opportunity Abraham and Eliza had of hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. They were greatly impressed with the teachings of this new church, and made use of every opportunity to learn all they could about it. After studying the principles and doctrines, they were very anxious to join this church, but for a time did not do so because of the prejudice of Abraham's people. They belonged to the Dunkard Society, and seriously objected to his allying himself with so unpopular a sect as the Mormon Church. However, on November 15, 1840, Eliza and Abraham were baptized in Pigeon Creek by Elder David Evans. A meeting was held at their home at which they were confirmed members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

They now had a desire to live near the Prophet Joseph Smith, so they might have the privilege of receiving his counsel and also attending the meetings with Saints. Consequently, they sold the

farm on Pigeon Creek and moved to a place on the Mississippi River about three miles below Nauvoo.

The climate here was not very healthy because it was located on the river lowlands and marshes, and for a time there was considerable sickness in this little family. First, the eldest daughter Mary was taken seriously ill, and for a time her life was almost despaired of, but with the tender care of her mother and the faith and prayers of the Elders, she was finally restored to health.

Then Lewis, the eldest son, was the next to be stricken with the disease. Previous to this, he had been an exceptionally bright and healthy lad, but now it seemed that no power on earth could bring life and health back to this sufferer. How tenderly the mother nursed him. How she prayed to God to spare his life. Time and again she and the father fasted and prayed for their son's recovery. It seemed that the mother just could not give him up. He was finally taken to Nauvoo Temple and was there baptized for his health in the font, and finally because of the faith and prayers of the parents and the saints, the boy Lewis' life was spared, but he never entirely recovered from the effect of this illness.

Abraham and Eliza Hunsaker felt it was a great privilege to entertain the servants of God, and could not do too much to make them comfortable. Brother Heber C. Kimball and wife and other prominent church leaders were frequent visitors at their home.

About twenty families of the saints, who desired to make homes in this locality, bought lots on parts of the Hunsaker farm, and built houses. In this community they held meetings and also schools that the children might be educated and taught the principles of the Gospel.

June 27, 1844 was a never-to-be forgotten day of sorrow and sadness, not alone to Abraham and Eliza, but to all the other saints, for the Prophet Joseph and his brother Hyrum were shot and killed in the Carthage Jail and Brother John Taylor seriously wounded.

After these sad events, the persecution of the Mormon people by their enemies became greater than they could endure. Homes were burned, property destroyed, even their lives were hardly safe. So they decided to leave all their worldly possessions and seek a new home where they might be allowed the privilege of living their religion. Brother and Sister Hunsaker prepared to go with the rest of the Saints.

They were a little better off than most of their neighbors. They owned a little flour mill, for which they had traded part of their farm. Here at this mill, the husband worked almost day and night grinding corn and wheat and making flour for the brethren and also for his own family.

During the winter of 1845 and 1846, all the saints were busy preparing for the journey that they were about to make. Even the children were busy doing all they could to assist in the preparations. Eliza's children parched quantities of corn, which was afterwards taken to the mill and ground up. This parched corn could be eaten without cooking during their travels on stormy days or when they could not stop and make fires to cook their food.

The mill was finally traded for oxen and cows, which would be of assistance to the family on their journey. They left their home in February 1846, crossed the Mississippi on the ice, not knowing where they were going or what the future would bring to them, but placing their lives and the future

in God's hands. Abraham and Eliza took their cattle and a few head of sheep with them, delighted that they might have wool to make their clothing. The mother had her spinning wheel and was equipped to make the yarn and knit the stockings or weave the cloth and make the clothing as their needs required. The oldest daughter Mary was placed on a pony to drive her father's stock.

When they reached Kaneshville, or Council Bluffs, on the Missouri River, the call came to this band of homeless emigrants, that five hundred men volunteer to go to the Mexican War. Eliza's husband was one of the first to respond to this call. After he had taken time to reflect, he said he had done a very unwise thing in thus offering his services. He knew he would have to leave his wife and six little children homeless, with nothing but a covered wagon to shelter them and with little or no provisions for even the barest necessities of life. He knew not how long his services would be required, nor when, if ever he might return to them.

These conditions worried him so much that he wrote to Eliza's people telling them of his family's condition, and of what he had done, asking them if they would look after his wife and children until he returned. Her people, who were in very comfortable circumstances, wrote to Eliza begging her to come to them, promising that neither she nor her children should ever want for anything if she would but give up her husband and her religion and return to them. They criticized her husband severely for responding to the call for volunteers and for thus leaving his family. They were also very bitter in their criticism of the Mormon Church.

Their proposal was not even considered by Eliza. Her husband and her religion were the dearest things on earth to her, and not for any earthly pleasure or comfort would she forsake them. She knew well the hardships, the trials, and the suffering that awaited her, but her faith and her trust was in God. Her brother, who lived in Council Bluffs repeatedly offered to take her and her children to his home, telling her that she would never see Abraham again, but nothing tempted her or shook her faith.

She had the assurance that her Heavenly Father was caring for her and that he would bring her husband safely back, so she waited at Council Bluffs for his return.

Friends built her and her children a log cabin at Honey Creek, where her husband found them after his release from the Mormon Battalion in the fall of 1847. In 1848, the family again took up their journey westward. Now, however, they knew what their destination would be, as other pioneers had preceded them and had begun the settlement of Utah. Also, Abraham, on his return from the Mexican War, had come by way of Utah.

The family traveled with the Cunningham Company, suffered many hardships, as did all the other saints who crossed the plains with the early pioneers. Eliza's husband was a very generous man, almost too much so for the convenience and comfort of his own family. He could never see anyone in want or suffering without sharing his own scanty substance with that person. As a result of his generosity, he divided his goods with others who too wanted to immigrate to Utah, until he and his family were themselves very poorly equipped for the journey, having as a team to pull their wagon one ox and one cow.

Arriving in Utah, they settled at West Jordan, later moved to Sandy. While living there they accumulated a considerable herd of cattle, horses and sheep. Abraham Hunsaker pastured at the southwest end of Utah Lake. Besides pasturing his own stock here, he took care of stock for many

of the neighbors. He and Eliza's older boys spent most of their time in this region looking after their herds. A cabin was built, and Sister Harriet and her little ones lived there, making things as homelike as possible for the boys.

The Indians were very troublesome, often stealing some of the cattle and horses that were in their care. But, in 1856, the trouble between the Indians and the white people had come to such a condition that the Indians not only drove away the stock, but also killed a man whenever opportunity presented itself. These were very trying times to Sister Hunsaker, knowing the danger that threatened her husband and sons in the care of their stock.

On February 23, 1856, Father Hunsaker realized that it was unsafe to leave his family in the region of Utah Lake any longer, and went to bring them home. There being no horses at camp to make the return trip, Lewis was sent to get a horse, which the father had seen on the road two miles back. The rest of the boys and he busied themselves on other preparations for their departure. As Lewis had not returned and night was very near, they hitched the tired horse that was left with an ox, the boys had driven in, to the wagon. They started, thinking they would find Lewis on the road or that he would follow them when he found that they were gone. However, Lewis was not found and that was the last that was ever seen of the boy.

The father was obliged to return to the waiting mother with the news that her boy Lewis had fallen victim to the treacherous Indians. The grief of this poor woman can better be imagined than told, not to know ever the fate of her son, always hoping to hear some word from him. The anxiety and the suspense was almost more than this poor stricken mother could endure, but as in all her sorrows and trials of the past, she put her trust in God.

Later, the Hunsakers were called to go into Carson Valley, Nevada and settle there. Consequently, Abraham sold his possessions in Utah, except his stock, which he took with him. The family stopped for a visit in Salt Lake City, and here parted with their two eldest daughters, Mary and Elizabeth. Mary was married, her husband was on a mission, and had been gone for almost four years, and Elizabeth was to be married soon. This made the mother very sad and despondent. She had so recently lost the boy Lewis, and now to be obliged to go into an unknown land leaving her two eldest daughters behind her, this poor mother felt that life was indeed a struggle.

The journey was a very difficult one. The boys drove the cattle, horses, and sheep. The road was very rough, passing through points of location later known as Point Lookout, Flying Stream Springs, and Curlew Valley. Water was very scarce and many of the animals died on the way.

July 17, 1856, the family located on one of the best farms in Carson Valley, the spot where Carson City now stands. The father and sons began soon after their arrival to harvest the crops. There was an abundance of hay, barley, and potatoes, but very little wheat. The crows were very numerous, being especially destructive in the wheat field. The smaller Hunsaker boys, among them Isaac and Israel, were given the job of driving the crows from the wheat field.

The new home was located on the road between California and Great Salt Lake and Missouri. Consequently, there were many travelers passing their door. Many of them stopped to buy provisions. The women milked cows and made butter and sold all they had to spare. They raised chickens and much garden stuff and there was always ready market for their produce.

While the family was in this manner prospering, a command was received from President Brigham Young to dispose of their property and start for home within two weeks. The United States Army had been authorized to wage war against the Mormon people, and two thousand soldiers were coming to destroy the saints.

The Hunsaker family, obedient to every command of those in authority, sold or gave away what they could not take with them, and started on the return trip to Utah. About four days before they reached Brigham City, on what was called Deep Creek, Curlew Valley, a baby girl was born October 29, 1857 to Eliza, and they gave this little daughter the name of her mother, Eliza, that being the twelfth child born to this noble woman.

Brother Lorenzo Snow, also Brother Brigham Young, made the request that the Hunsaker family locate in Brigham City, which they were glad to do. Eliza's first home here being an adobe house, one block east of Main Street, which later became the Fourth Ward.

In 1858, the family moved south to Payson with the other saints and endured their share of the hardships incident to that memorable event.

In the year 1860, the family moved to Honeyville, where Eliza spent the remainder of her life in a quiet way. She was a woman of sterling character, honest and virtuous, hospitable and of a pleasant disposition, but very independent, always willing to sacrifice and endure for the gospel's sake and for those she loved. She was the mother of twelve children, eight boys and four girls.

In appearance, Eliza Collins had a fair complexion, black eyes and dark wavy hair. She was a little above medium height, and in her later years rather stout of figure. She was not a public woman and not a great talker.

When asked to bear her testimony at one time, she said, "When my husband accepted the gospel and was baptized, I too was ready, and when the principle of plural marriage was made known to us, I believed it to be sent by God, and consented to my husband taking four other wives and have never regretted it."

Eliza Collins Hunsaker was honored and respected by her husband and her numerous family. She had no education, and it was her greatest pleasure to have her children or her grandchildren read to her from the Bible. She was a thrifty housewife; her fingers were never idle for they were to knit right up to her last illness.

She died October 13, 1888, being 71 years of age. A son-in-law, when he read the letter bearing the news of her death, remarked through big falling tears, "There was one of God's noblest women."