

Mary Leicht Oxborrow

Mary Leicht Oxborrow was born at West Bromage, Staffordshire, England, October 17, 1852. Her parents were natives of Germany who moved to England before 1850. Her father was a musician and band teacher. While living in Germany he was conductor of the Kaiser's band. Her mother also was a talented musician. She had a beautiful voice and was an artist on the harp. In England, the Leicht family had a music store. Mary's father and mother often appeared before the King and Queen, her mother singing to her father's accompaniment on the violin.

Mary was left an orphan early in life. At ten months her mother died. When she was five years old her father made plans to come to America, hoping to establish a music store. After the pianos and other musical instruments were in readiness to sail, the ship's officers would not let her father come on board because of illness. So they were compelled to remain in England; and not long afterward her father died.

With her stepmother's family, she set sail for America May 3, 1864. She was 11 years old and remembered the trip vividly in later years. She often told about it and sang this little ditty: "Oh, Captain, Captain, stop this ship. I want to get off and walk. I feel so flippity floppity flip, I never shall reach New Yak."

The voyage across the ocean took five weeks and four days, but the really difficult part of their journey was the trek across the plains to Utah. Mary walked the entire distance with an ox team company. She said the little girls wore front aprons in which they gathered buffalo chips. This was to make sure to have something to burn when night fell. By the time they reached water in which to bathe, her heavy black hair was alive with body lice. She tried to find smooth black mud for make-believe soap for washing her hair.

(As I, Helen Carter Gardner, copy this history, I recall Grandma Oxborrow telling me and my mother that she traveled across the plains in the same company as my Grandfather Aaron Nelson and his son, William Nelson. She said that after their night meal, Aaron and his son William would play their stringed instruments and she would join with them in playing her concertina.)

This family remained only a short time in Salt Lake City before heading for St. George, Utah, a city which had only been started three years previous to their arrival.

Mary at once began to earn her livelihood by hiring out to large families for such work as washing, ironing, tending babies, cooking, washing

dishes, sewing carpet rags and making patchwork quilts. With no evenings or afternoons off, she received top wages of \$2.50 a week.

She sang in the church choir and had few dates with the younger set. She was persuaded to enter into a plural marriage with Joseph Oxborrow June 21, 1870. She was not yet seventeen years old, and Joseph was fifty-two. She was well acquainted with Jenette, Joseph's first wife, and they always got along well together. This was such a serious undertaking for such a young girl; but like many young women of that day, Mary accepted polygamy. She faithfully maintained the vows she had made, in spite of the disparity in their years and in spite of the problems that arose with plural marriage.

Aunt Jenette, my grandfather's first wife, was childless. She died in 1885. Mary, my grandmother, had eleven children. Four of them died when they were very young. Grandfather Joseph died in 1895; and from that time on Mary was employed by Dr. Fredrick Clift. She had worked with him since 1891 at various times. Mary was always skillful in the sickroom and for this reason she was chosen by the L.D.S. Church to go to Nevada as a doctor for those who were colonizing the Tom Plane Ranch, which later became Lund.

The earliest colonizers came in 1898, but Grandmother Mary did not arrive until January 1900. She was active as a counselor and a teacher in her church. With her skill in and training in midwifery and nursing, she was in constant demand in all cases of sickness. The nearest doctor lived thirty-five miles away, which in horse and buggy days was a great distance.

In 1908 she was sent by the L.D.S. Church to Salt Lake City to study under the supervision of Romania B. Pratt. At this time Mary did not complete the work for her certificate for medical practice, for she was called to New Jersey to her brother Christian's bedside. While working on the Battleship Utah, he had fallen a great distance injuring his spine. She spent two years in New Jersey with her brother.

When she returned to Nevada, Mary was again in constant demand. Her early mornings were often spent with local people, who with cuts, carbuncles, dislocated bones, kidney infection or burns, kept one appointment after another. Often, instead of sitting through the night at the patient's home, she brought special cases, such as little Robert O'Donnell, who was kicked in the face by a horse, to her home. She assisted in bringing 237 babies into the world. Two of them were great grandchildren. She never lost a mother, but two babies were born dead.

Mary made use of many natural herbs and she was always known by the druggists in Ely as one of their very good customers. They knew her recipes for salve, canker medicine and hand lotions contained healing ingredients. Many times they would ask for her recipes, but Mary was

reluctant about letting go of her formulas. Everyone knew the good healing qualities of Grandma's salve; therefore, it was called simply "Grandma's Salve".

She received very little remuneration for her services as a doctor; for years, room and board for school teachers from Eastern States served as a primary source of income. Her rooms were always ready for travelers, church workers, politicians and school representatives. Her life was full of interest and activity. She was able to transmit directly and indirectly a great love of life and for people. In her presence, one had a feeling of well-being and happiness.

Her cleanliness could never be overestimated. She ironed her dish towels. Not one grandchild dared touch her beds which were equipped with feather mattresses, covered with spotless white spreads, and not one grandchild wanted to do anything which would displease her. She was just like that.

Mary was a small package of energy and vitality. She rarely walked, but always seemed to run. She had great pride in wearing shoes too small for her feet and was a little bowlegged from the effects. She wore at least 4 petticoats, always one of them was her money pocket petticoat. She would shy up to the counters in the stores and carefully lift each skirt until she came to the one which had her small coin purse. She did not consider this unladylike behavior.

There are many things to be told about Mary. During the early days of Lund, she was a weaver of carpets in her spare time.

She was an excellent singer and played the concertina. She was the star of the show at the pageant staged in Ely in 1927.

She remained in excellent health and lived in her own home until her death on January 10, 1935. She was affectionately spoken of by all who knew her as "Grandma".

Mary Leicht Oxborrow, a widow for forty years, was never left alone at night. Always one of her grandchildren, sometimes two of them, stayed at night. It was a privilege to stay for breakfast, and these times left lasting memories with each one.

Written and submitted by:

Effie O. Reid

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