

CHAPTER 5

HOW THE LIFE OF MARY SITTS WAS SPARED

The home of the subject of this sketch was in this peaceful Mohawk valley in the little town of Minden, Montgomery County. The protected struggle for independence had drawn pretty much every able-bodied man away from his home leaving women, children, the aged and disabled to carry on the work of the farms and take care of the homes. When the terrible things related in this sketch happened in Mary's home she was only seven years old. She had five or six brothers and sisters -- some older and some younger than herself. Beside the children there were Mary's mother, aunt, and an infirm grandfather in the family. It was harvest time and working the harvest field were her mother and sister. The children and their old grandfather were in the house.

This was the condition of things when the savages fell upon the home. They were armed with bayonets and tomahawks, and it was their hellish custom to torture little children to death by impaling them on their bayonets.

Little Mary escaped from the house with the baby and ran to the field where she hid in a shock of wheat. The women had heard the fiendish yells of the savages and ran into the woods. Mary's escape was noticed, however, and when the butchery was completed at the house, the fiends proceeded to search for her. Poor Mary was unable to still the cries of the babe and this led to her discovery. The babe was torn from Mary's embrace and slaughtered in her presence, but she was spared. God only knows why. It may have been her personal appearance as she was unusually bright and pretty.

She and her grandfather were taken into the forests and at the end of the fourth day's march the old man became completely exhausted, and being unable to proceed farther, he was slaughtered by the savages and his body left lying in the woods to be devoured by wild beasts. Mary was taken into the wilds of western Canada, where she lived with the Indians in the Grand River Valley for eight years. When fifteen years old she was redeemed with a valuable consideration by Major Nelles. This occurred in the year 1787 and there is every reason to believe that Mary Sitts Nelles was the only white woman living in the province at this time between the Niagara and Detroit river settlements.

In 1796 our heroine married George Cunningham, a Scotch-American, and settled on the Grand River at the spot where little Fork is situated. Early in the century, they came into Norfolk and settled in Boston, being among the first settlers in that old settlement. They moved north, in the latter part of the summer, with all their personal belongings loaded on a sled which was drawn by a yoke of oxen. She had four small children at this time, the youngest of whom, George Cunningham, she carried on her back as she trudged on foot behind the sled-load of household effects. The lot known as the Johnson homestead at Boston was purchased by Mr. Cunningham and there they settled. While engaged in a fund raiser at the home of one of the

Corlisoes, Mr. Cunningham met with an accident which terminated his life. Subsequently, Mrs. Cunningham married John Johnson, an Englishman, who came to the settlement a short time prior to Mr. Cunningham's death.

Mr. Johnson was a man of admirable character. He was kind, affectionate, noble and generous; and no one among the old pioneers applied the golden rule in the daily affairs of life more closely than he did. He was a father and true counselor to his wife's fatherless children, purchasing lands for them when they grew up, and manifesting at all times as much interest in their well-being as he would if they had been his own children. In consideration of his kindness and help they signed over to him their rights of the old homestead as the heirs of George Cunningham.

Thus we have the story of Mary Sitts. As before stated, no one knows why the savages spared the life of this little Dutch girl after cruelly slaughtering her brothers and sisters. But when we consider the number and individual character of her descendants, and the part they have played in the development of Norfolk, may we not wisely conclude that He who rules over our destinies stayed the uplifted savage arm when little Mary was taken from that shock of wheat, for wise purposes known only to himself?

To the reflective Latter-Day Saint it is not difficult to conclude that the life of this little seven year old girl was spared by the Indians one hundred and sixty years ago that she might become the mother of numerous descendants and that her living posterity who are now Church members may do the work for their ancestors in the temples of the Lord.



Granny Sitts
Matilda Manns Great Grandmother

Mr. Johnson, Mary's third husband, was fourteen years his wife's senior. He died in 1832 at the age of 75th year. Our heroine Mary Sitts died in 1859, having reached her 88th year. A

complete genealogical record of her children reveals that her son, Reverend Henry Cunningham is the father of Miriam Cunningham who married Oscar Mann in 1860. Information was taken from Pioneer Sketches of Long Point Settlement, located in the Family History Library and from a letter to Theodore Farley from W.C. Van Loon, dated April 29, 1935.

My Mother – **MATILDA MANN FARLEY**

By Eva Farley Clayton

Matilda Mann Farley, the eldest of three children of Oscar Mann and Miriam Cunningham, was born November 30, 1861, in Cottonwood, Salt Lake County, Utah. Her parents were of pioneer stock, living under pioneer conditions. These conditions became even more severe when the mother died, leaving five-year old Matilda, a younger daughter, Nancy, and a one-year old son, Oscar. A year later the father married his wife's cousin, Martha Thayne, and with her raised a large family.

The times and fervent religious belief bred ideals circumscribed by the family circle, and like all other girls of her day, Matilda grew up dreaming of the time when her life would really begin, when she would become the mother of a family. She would be a good mother, fulfilling with courage and skill the purpose for which she felt she had been created. She would welcome all the babies that God saw fit to send no matter how large the number.

At fourteen Matilda was a pretty, fair haired, hazel eyed girl, already adept in the care of children through her responsibilities with her numerous step-brothers and sisters. She could keep a tidy house and manage it on next to nothing. She was strong in her religious faith. By the highest standards of her time, she was obviously ready for marriage, but she must wait until a man of equal standards came along.

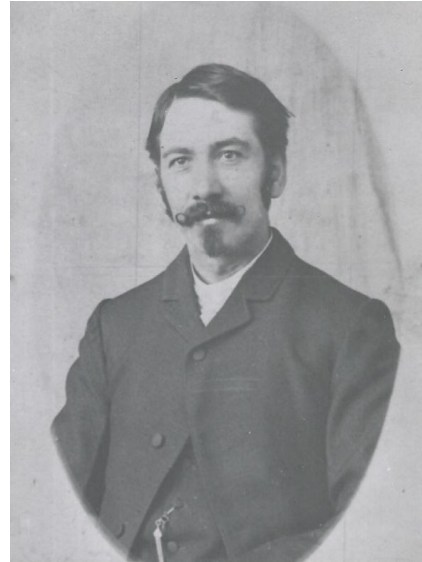
At this time her father joined a company of people who were called by the church to colonize some unsettled land in Arizona. Almost at the beginning Matilda noticed a dark, handsome young man traveling in the same company with friends. She jokingly called him her Indian beau, and he was eagerly willing to take that place. He lost no opportunity to court her, but their wishes for an engagement were curbed as the father felt it was not wise to marry a man whose family one did not know, no matter how good his actions seemed. He counseled them to wait a year, and in that time the young man proved himself a worthy companion for Matilda.

The company settled in a beautiful little Arizona valley called Forest Dale. The government had offered it for homesteading. Theodore Farley, Matilda's young suitor, worked as hard as anyone in clearing fields, helping to build the church house and homes. He was skilled in carpentry, and he also was a good violinist. He furnished the music for the community dances and entertained at parties with his lively tunes on the violin. He too was strong in his religious faith, in fact at this time, word came from his home in Ogden, Utah, that because of his

fine church record he had been allowed his endowments as a reward. There was no longer any question of worthiness so Matilda's father gave his consent to marriage.



Matilda Mann



Theodore Farley

Theodore built a log house, saying that sometime he would build one of brick for Matilda. He couldn't get glass for the windows or lumber for the floors or a door, but bleached muslin took the place of window panes and a quilt substituted for the door. Hard packed dirt made a solid floor. He contrived a bed, a table and two chairs, and the home was ready for his bride. With Matilda's father and another couple, they went by wagon three hundred miles to the St. George Temple in Utah, where they were married.

There is no doubt that the marriage was a good one. However, the new family was not to live in ease or be trouble-free. The first year was such a happy one. The rich soil in Forest Dale produced heavy crops, homes were improved and the grim fight for a livelihood seemed about over. Matilda's happiness was complete now for she was anticipating the birth of her first child. Then the government agent came to reclaim their land and the settlers were to leave immediately, taking nothing with them but their personal belongings. It was found they had settled on part of the Indian reservation, so they had to leave their homes and all improvements for the Indians. No payment was ever made for their property by the government.

Theodore thought this was a good time to visit his family in Ogden and let them meet his young wife. In February, 1880, in a company with a Brother and Sister O. Thayne and a blind mid-wife, they started by wagon for Utah. The stork overtook them on Cedar Ridge, 10 miles south of Beaver, Utah. With 11 or 12 inches of snow on the ground and nothing but a wagon box for her bedroom, the wind whistling over the wagon cover, Matilda gave birth to her first child. The next morning they drove into Beaver and were given shelter by a Brother and Sister Wilkerson. A stranger gave Theodore work for a month and then they continued on to Ogden.

Out of such intimate companionship with death and want grew Matilda's faith that if she did her part the Lord would always provide. Theodore's father recognized Matilda's noble character. In the fall of that year when the couple were preparing to return to Arizona, he paid this tribute to Matilda: "Tilda, Theodore brought the first gray hairs to my head when he went adventuring to Arizona, but I now thank the Lord that he went for if he had not, he would never have met you. You have all our respect and love."

Theodore writes, "In the Fall of 1877 I left home with my uncle, Merrit Staley, and family for Arizona. (Joseph Frisby included) My job was to drive the loose stock. Later I was given a yoke of oxen and wagon to drive. We were three months on the way.

We made a stop at Lott Smith's camp on the Little Colorado river. We met Orson Cluff of Provo, who said he knew of a beautiful valley farther south. We located in this valley, also a number of the Cluff people, also Oscar Mann, Thaynes, and others. Here I helped build the first log house. We had no lumber for flooring, the roof was made of small poles, then earth. Blankets and quilts were used for doors, sheeting for window glass. Here I helped dig the first well, twenty feet deep, made the first casket, which was made from lumber of a wagon box, and helped to lay the Brother away, after digging his grave. Later, I did as much for a Sister Hale, wife of James Hale, who said he was at one time Joseph Smith's body guard.

I built a house for myself, the best one in the valley, then went to Camp Apache, about seventy miles south of Forest Dale, where I bought from the government some lumber and window sash. A ward was organized and I was chosen Secretary of the Y.M.M.I.A., also ward clerk. We were greatly blessed with rain, so that our crops were excellent, plenty of wild game, too. It was in this place that I courted Oscar Mann's daughter Matilda. We were married February 14, 1879 in St. George Temple, (a trip of three hundred miles by team.)"

Eva continues, "Matilda and Theodore returned to Arizona and took up land in Sho Low where they built another log house. This was to be just a temporary home until brick could be obtained to build a bigger and better one. That dream was quickly broken. Geronimo and his band of Indians constantly threatened their safety so they sold what they had and moved to Snowflake.

After living in a wagon box and tent for a year, Theodore purchased another log house on a city lot. To this he built three more rooms including a kitchen and two bedrooms which made it a more comfortable. He also helped built the first stake house in Navajo County, a house for the Relief Society complete with a stage and equipment for dramatic purposes. He himself took many leading parts. He played the violin for most of the dances.

Their first child was named after Theodore, but was called Dick. The second was a girl named after his French mother, Lydia Pearl. The second name was Matilda's choice. Then came another boy, Carroll, called Carl who was born on April 25, 1884. A third boy, Oscar Winthrop, died at the age of one year. Father made the little casket, and mother made his burial clothes.

The pain of this loss was not relieved until another little girl, Adleen, was born on May 22, 1888 to take his place in Matilda's arms.



Theodore "Dick" and Lydia Pearl

Farming did not provide sufficient money to enable all the necessities of a growing family, so Theodore took up carpentry. He also clerked in a mercantile store in Holbrook and later accepted its management. In the meantime, Matilda kept an immaculate house, canned food, sewed, knitted, and braided rags into rugs.

Theodore was employed by A.C.M.I. for eight years. During this time he was chosen to act as one of the Seven Presidents in the Snowflake Stake. He built the Snowflake Co'op Store, which also did wholesale and retail business at Holbrook, twenty-five miles distant on the Little Colorado. He occupied a room in the back of the store and returned to Snowflake each weekend to be with the family.

One evening about ten o'clock, he was awakened by a man coming to his room, at the rear of the store. He asked for some rope, saying his wagon and horses were stalled in the quick sand thirty-five yards from shore. The water was running in the wagon box. He returned with the man. Removing his shoes and coat and he waded into the muddy water. After releasing the horses from the double trees, he carried the occupants of the wagon, George Goddard and George Reynolds, from Salt Lake City, one at a time to shore. It was late the next day before the wagon could be moved.

Matilda and Theodore were able to save enough money to buy another lot, plus brick and lumber to build their dream home in Snowflake. When the church called Theodore on a mission in 1890 without hesitation the bricks and lumber for the new home were sold, and all available money set aside for mission needs. Theodore was gone for thirty-three months.



Carroll (Carl) Farley about 1885

Matilda continued living in her little log house and caring for her five children.

In this hard soil which produced many appropriate weeds and blights, the Farley children took root and flourished. Principles and ideals are an important foundation in life and that is precisely the qualities that Matilda Farley and Granny Sitts shared. Both women married hard working husbands. These Farleys were survivors. They demonstrate that with faith and hard work we too can succeed in the uncertain and ever changing world of our day.