

LIFE HISTORY OF MARY PORTER HELLER

Mary Porter Heller, a pioneer of 1863, was born in Ossiun Livingstone, Co. New York on June 18, 1838. Her parents, Abram and Marcia Bisbee Porter were Americans, the father being the first child born in Livingstone Co. New York and the mother being born in Mass. For generations back both families were American.

Mary was the fifth child of seven. Her childhood and girlhood were spent in or near the place of her birth. As a child she always loved to go to school so that at an early age of seventeen we find her teaching school in her home town. For three and one half years she taught in or near her home during the summer terms and then during the winter term attending school at the Gainsville Seminary.

When she was twenty years of age she went on a visit to Michigan where many of her father's relations lived. While there she was offered a school. She accepted it and so for four years she stayed in Michigan where she taught school for three and one half terms and attended school one term, as she always did when opportunity presented itself. It was, in fact, always a source of regret to her that opportunity for higher study did not come her way.

This visit to Michigan has been of great value to her in later years compiling genealogy work of her people for temple work, for those relative were not members of the Church of L.D.S. as she and her family were.

From Michigan she returned home where she taught school for one year and then prepared to go with her parents to Utah. They were able to go as far as Florence, Nebraska by train but from thereon the journey had to be made in the way so well known to travelers of that time; by wagon. They remained in Florence seven weeks getting all necessary preparation made for so long a journey.

On her journey across the plains, Mrs. Heller says that it was not trial nor hardship to her but she looks back upon it with pleasure.

They came with an independent company, Augustus Canfield in command, and so were able to take three months for the trip instead of two as the usual custom. This enabled them to stop and rest whenever they or their animals felt so inclined, and since the saints had been traveling the plains for about fifteen years the way was well marked and known to their commander.

Mary paid her way across the plains by cooking for the occupants of the wagon in which she rode. She also paid later for the freight on a melodeon which she treasured highly and desired to take with her to her new home. This melodeon is still preserved in the family as a precious relic.

While in Florence she had met and learned to love a young girl named Nellie Jennings, who was on her way to Utah to her fiance, Bartlett Trip. This friend left for Utah first but almost as soon as Mary Porter reached Utah her friend came to see her and happy indeed was the meeting. Mr. Trip who was a school teacher was going to open a school with his new wife as assistant and they wanted Mary to teach the Primary grade. She readily consented to this and so the school was opened in the Fourteenth Ward Assembly Hall. In Mary's room alone

there were ninety pupils, and scores had to be turned away from school for lack of room. Mrs. Heller counts many of the most successful and useful citizens of our state among those whom she assisted along the laborious road of learning to read and write. She taught the winter and summer terms in this school and then feeling tired of teaching decided to keep boarders with her parents the following year.

Of this time she remembers that butter was one dollar a pound, flour ten dollars a sack and other things in proportion.

One of the people who came to board with them was a young man named, Thomas Benninger Heller, whom she married in March 1865. Mr. and Mrs. Heller lived in Salt Lake until 1868 during which time two children were born to them. They then moved to Ogden and Mrs. Heller again took up her profession as teacher, teaching two summer terms in the log school house standing at what is now 34th Street and Washington Ave.

In the spring of '79 they moved to Preston, Idaho. Mrs. Heller's ability and love for teaching was soon known and before long she was teaching the first school ever held in Preston. Later she taught a summer and a winter term in a school for older children.

Mrs. Heller's activity in church work has been principally in the Relief Society. She was present in Salt Lake at the organization of the 14th Ward Relief Society where she acted as teacher until she moved to Ogden. She was present in Ogden when the Relief Society was reorganized with Mary West as president. In this she acted as teacher until Ogden was divided into wards. She was then secretary of the First Ward Relief Society until she moved to Preston. In Preston she acted as Relief Society secretary for seven years. When she returned to Ogden she was a teacher in the Fifth Ward until she was made Secretary, which position she filled for nine years. So that in all, her activity in Relief Society covers a period of about fifty years.

She was also a member of the Child Culture Club for seven years and is now a member of the Daughters of the Pioneers, Company G.

Mrs. Heller has had six children, five of whom are living, twenty grandchildren and four great grandchildren. She says that she has always been blessed with good health. Certainly at the time of this writing she is enjoying a continuation of that blessing, for although eighty-one years of age she is able to attend to her own household duties, take long walks, make daily visits to the homes of her children, attend lectures, socials and meetings and take part on their programs. In activity of mind and body she is the envy of many women twenty years her junior, and as one is reminded of the words of the poet Browning;

"Grow old along with me,
The best is yet to be -
The last of life for which
the first was made."