

MARY ANN ECKERSLEY RIGBY

I am Mary Anne Eckersley Rigby, the sixth wife of William F. Rigby. The world knows very little else of me, as I had only one sweet little daughter, Emma, and then died in childbirth with our son Uri when I was 24. I left behind no pictures, nor diary, nor letters.

If it weren't for the gospel emphasis on family and genealogy I would have faded into oblivion with the majority of this earth. As it is, through our dear little Emma, William and I have a wonderful posterity of more than 400. These are good people, who for the most part have shown great love and respect to their forbears for the efforts we made to give them life and a gospel heritage. They have mostly been successful in the secular world but, more importantly, have made and honored their covenants with the Lord, with dozens serving missions and faithfully carrying out almost the entire spectrum of church callings.

I love each one and look forward to the day they can greet William and ^{Age} ~~me~~ on our side of the veil.

I was born into a loving Latter-Day Saint family in Little Heaton, Lancashire County, England on March 14, 1850. My parents were Joseph and Alice Eckersly. I was my mother's sixth child and fourth daughter of her ten children. She had previously been married to John Haslam, who fathered my sister Sarah, and brothers William and Henry. He died and Mother married Father, by whom she had Emma and Sophia before I came along. Following me were Martha, Elizabeth, Alice, and our baby brother George, who died when he was only two.

We were from the poor and struggling working class in an English mill town in the industrial revolution times. Mother, Father, Sarah, William and Henry accepted the message of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ; and were all baptized on May 24, 1847, just ten years after the gospel was brought to England, and two months before the pioneers arrived in the Salt Lake Valley.

We were a loving family who worshipped and worked together. We were taught to be honest and honorable people, and even though we were always poor and struggling, our clothes were clean and well-mended.

Work--- I never knew a time all of us were not working. From earliest childhood to the end of life, we had duties in the home as soon as we could walk. While a widow, Mother had supported herself and three children by weaving. She continued to weave all her life and the children helped always. We children worked in the silk mills when possible, and hired out to neighbors.

While under ten I had an interesting experience working for some wealthy townspeople. While cleaning their house I found several pennies. I immediately took them to the Mistress. What else would a Haslam or Eckersly girl do with precious belongings? Mother was so pleased that her lessons had been accepted when the Mistress told her she had hidden the money where I would find it to test my honesty. I was glad that I had done right. Honesty, industry, integrity, loyalty, support for one another, and faithfulness in the gospel were our way of life.

An example of our a tightly knit, close family bond was shown when our oldest brother, William, left home at 17 in 1854 for Zion, and worked for 9 long years to save money for the rest of us to come to America. Henry joined him in 1861 and both saved every possible penny for us.

I'll never forget the excitement as we gathered our few earthly possessions and set sail for Zion on the last day of April 1863. For the first time in our lives we had a lot of free time on the four long shipboard weeks to New York. We had to walk a long way from the dock to the train station and we were all heavily burdened. That walk was the extent of New York sightseeing. We were packed in like cattle in the train and it was a miserable two week trip, but exciting in many ways for a 13 year old. America was so big. After 3 more days on a Missouri river steamboat we joined the Murdock

company at Florence, Nebraska for our two and a half month walk across the plains. How grateful we were to enter the Valley on August 29th 1863.

I suppose the most exciting day of my life was the first week in September when William arrived in Salt Lake City with a big wagon and all ten of us crowded in for the trip to our new home in Wellsville.

We made a one room home by building two log walls between two other log houses in the Wellsville Fort wall, and had a willow roof and dirt floor. Our home was humble and crowded, but it was ours and William and Henry were with us again.

In the spring we built a one room log house on Main street of the new town of Wellsville. Mama lived there the rest of my life.

The Eckersly home was a busy and happy one. Did you ever wonder where nine to eleven people slept in a one room cabin? Lots of activities and work went on there, as Father built a loom for Mama and she earned an important part of our living. As we girls grew older and married we always came home to have our babies there, too. Mother was an excellent nurse and midwife.

We had music in our home. We all sang a lot and William and Henry played stringed instruments. They played for parties and dances and the dramatic presentations that were held during the winter season in Wellsville. They frequently gave us sisters free tickets to these fun community events.

I was a happy teenager growing up in Wellsville with a loving family and the gospel. We were often hungry and lacking in many comforts, but we were proud to be building Zion and improving our circumstances through our hard efforts. There were many difficult times, but we were survivors.

I was a bit on the quiet side, but I had lots of energy and moved quickly. I liked to get things done and kept at tasks till they were done.

Since I'm being objective I might as well tell you I was a small, pert, brown-eyed girl, and attractive, as were all the Haslam and Eckersly sisters.

From our first arrival in Wellsville we had become acquainted with William and Mary Clark Rigby, also converts from England.

William was to have quite a relationship with our family, as he married four of us sisters - Sarah, Sophia, Elizabeth, and I, and our cousin, Ann Yates.

Sarah was first in 64, ten months after our arrival. Then Sophia in 65 and Ann in 67.

William asked for me in 1871 when I was 21. I was proud and happy to be his wife, although he was 17 years older and I could imagine he wouldn't spend much time with me as he was such a busy, prominent man with homes in Newton and a ranch three miles west, plus three other wives and twelve children. He had been the Bishop in Clarkston for three years but in 1869 he helped establish Newton (or the New Town) where the snow melted much earlier in the spring. He was Bishop there too.

In November of '71, just four months after William's first wife, Mary Clark had died leaving seven children, we were married.

I was happy to move into the two room rock house on the ranch with my dear sister Sophia. It was quite lonely there, but she had three little children and between them and running the ranch we were very busy. I was soon pregnant and in August of '72, as carefully as they could, Williams' older sons took me home to mother in Wellsville for my "confinement". Oh, that was a long day's journey in that bumpy wagon.

I had my beautiful little Emma. She was such a joy to me. The following 17 months were the richest of my life. Sophia had Martha the next September (1873) and I was expecting Uri by then. So we kept very busy and happy with our four and then five small children. William and the older boys helped us on the ranch. However because of the deep Cache Valley snow and difficult roads, we were isolated much of the time that last winter.

In mid March William and the older boys were in the mountains getting lumber when I unexpectedly started into labor. Sophia and I were alone, with no help. It was soon clear we had to

head for Newton on our own. Those three miles from the ranch to Newton with our five babies and me in labor -- over terrible roads on a bitter winter day was a difficult experience.

As much as I longed for the comfort and help of my loving mother, --- we could see I could never make the all day trip to Wellsville before the birth. I was frightened, I was in great pain. My little Uri was finally born but had only brief moments on this earth. Sarah, Sophia and Ann did all they could for me. I was so grateful to have their love, and concern, but they couldn't save me. I kissed my darling, bright-eyed 17-month old Emma good-bye. That was the hardest. I died 10 days after my 24th birthday.

Uri and I were buried in the same casket in the Newton cemetery on another bitter March day.

We joined Mary Clark, who had died in childbirth not quite three years earlier and Anns' two infant sons Thomas and Edwin.

Reader: So, that is the story of Mary Ann Eckersly Rigby, an English girl from a humble home, who crossed the ocean, walked the plains as a 13 year old and spent the rest of her life in Cache Valley. A pioneer mother, true to the faith. In the ways of the world she was obscure, even faceless. Yet this day her posterity salutes her as a heroine, and generations yet unborn will rise up and call her blessed.

Dee V. Jacobs
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