

LIFE HISTORY OF MARY CURTIS HOUGHTON MARKHAM

Mary Curtis was born November 15, 1832, in Highland, Oakland County, Michigan. She was the daughter of Jeremiah and Ruth Stratton Curtis. She was the ninth child in a family of eleven children; five boys and six girls. Her brother, Meacham, was fourteen years her senior. Then came Stratton who died when he was eight years old. Following Stratton was William and Jeremiah. Joseph Smith Curtis was her youngest brother. Her oldest sister, Aurelia, was thirteen years old when she and her father were baptized a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, just three after Mary was born. Her sisters, Sally and Ruth, older than she, died in infancy. Eliza was just older than Mary. Then followed Sarah, the youngest, who when grown, married Rodney Brace.

In 1834 Aurelia married Ornon Houghton, son of James and Mary Houghton, who was also a convert to the Church. He and Aurelia moved to Jackson County Missouri, where later Aurelia gave birth to her first child in 1835, whom they named Gezelam Houghton. This boy died in 1836. His death left Aurelia grief stricken and lonely, needing the consolation of friends and parents. The Houghtons visited the Curtis parents and family. They needed the sympathy that only loved ones can give. Her darling baby's death had left them heart broken and a vacancy in their arms and home.

Aurelia persuaded her parents to let them take her little black eyed sister, Mary, home with them to Jackson County, Missouri, for company; their home seemed so empty and quiet.

Little did her mother realize that four-year-old Mary was leaving her parents fireside and care to spend the rest of her life elsewhere. How could they know what the future would be or the frustrations and sorrows their child would endure along life's path.

In the Houghton home Mary was showered with love and care from her sister and her husband Ornon. She fit into their home like their own child. Ere long in 1837, another son was born to Aurelia. They named him Francis, but called him Frank. Though young, Mary commenced to show her personality and abilities as she helped her sister care for the children that blessed the Houghton home.

At this period of time the Saints in Missouri were being harassed, persecuted and driven from their homes by evil and wicked men who vowed to drive the Mormons from the State or else annihilate them entirely. The Saints were in constant danger and trouble, and suffered persecution of all kinds. Even the small children sensed the anxiety and fears ever present among the adults. The persecutions became so severe that, at last, in 1838, when Mary was six years old, the Church leaders advised the Saints to flee from the state of Missouri. Their prophet was jailed but the mob would not relent.

The Houghton's along with other church members, fled into Illinois to escape more mobbing and agitation. These troublesome times were to teach Mary valuable and lasting lessons, for this good family was teaching her to have faith and trust in God, and know that He would show the way. She was also learning the duties

and responsibility of family life. Their influence for good was impressed upon her.

After the escape into Illinois it took time to again organize and build a home. But when peace returned to the Saints, the Houghtons were very happy, helping to build the city that was soon to be the "City of Nauvoo, The Beautiful." They lived among loving and helpful neighbors who found happiness in obeying the counsel of the Prophet, attending their duties and listening to the great principles that the Church was built upon.

Their sick were healed and blessed and every act was with an eye single to the salvation of man. Their worldly goods were few but they lived in peace among good people. Mary was a serious person and matured in mind and spirit during the days that Satan was striving for the minds on Men; but she never faltered. Her faith grew as she learned.

The Saints had but few years of peace in this beautiful city, until rumblings of trouble started again for the Saints of God. The true Saints became more staunch and diligent in their beliefs. Mary's parents, Jeremiah and Ruth Curtis, were among the neighbors and friends of the Houghtons which added moral support as well as happiness for both families.

Apostates joined with the mean element of the region around Nauvoo. They were filled with hate and malice. They continually trumped up false accusations and arrests, especially against the Church leaders. This continued violence, harassment, arrests, and abuse of the Prophet and others grew to alarming proportions.

It was June 27, 1844 when the worst tragedy befell the Church. The Prophet of God, Joseph Smith, and his brother, Hyrum, were murdered in cold blood. They sealed their testimonies with their blood. Mary Curtis, eleven years old was among the shocked and saddened saints who heard of the tragic news, of the crime perpetrated on their beloved Prophet and his brother. She was but a child whose past experience as a Mormon had developed reasoning, maturity and character, that less experienced individuals could not have shown. The Houghton family, along with Mary, were among those who lined each side of the road lamenting and mourning as Brother Samuel Smith and other Church brethren drove the wagon into Nauvoo hauling the two rough wooden boxes holding the slain bodies of their leaders. The wailing and sobbing was so great it could be heard for miles around.

Mary told her children she well remembered too, about the meeting that was held later, when Brigham Young's appearance and voice was as though it were the prophet Joseph, himself. It was at the meeting when Sidney Rigdon claimed himself to be the rightful leader for the Church. This supernatural sign was faith promoting to many Saints as well as to Mary.

During their stay in Nauvoo, the Houghton's home was blessed with three little girls; Louisa Aurelia, born 1840, and Julina Emily, born 1842. What a joy it was to Mary to baby-sit for Aurelia during this time. This sweet association was too soon to end. March 10, 1845, Aurelia gave birth to her third and last little girl, whom they named Nancy Delcena. Because of Aurelia's

serious sickness at the time, Mary could not show much joy over this little new arrival in the family. Sister Aurelia continued to grow weaker and more seriously sick. All the love and kind care were of no avail and death claimed this lovely soul. Her young baby, so tiny and delicate, departed this life shortly after, and followed her saintly mother to the grave in Nauvoo.

This parting of loved ones in death was not so different from many other families in that early troubled period of the Saints, when the Church was in its infant state, among vile and wicked men. But this tragedy was numbing to these bereaved folks. While the lovely Aurelia lay dying she requested her husband Ornon to marry her sister Mary. She knew the worth of this young sincere girl, knew she could and would love and care for her children as their mother had done.

To Mary, a few months past her twelfth birthday, it was terribly shocking to lose her sister who had been like a mother, had guided and guarded her the past eight years. Also it was unbelievable to treat her, that she so young, should think of marrying the man who had treated her as his daughter. Ornon Houghton, grief stricken and lonely, had serious reflections too. He needed time to assuage his sorrow and survey his situation. He was twenty-six years older than this child. How could he marry her?

After four months had lapsed, Ornon on July 11, 1845 took this young, but serious-minded twelve-year old girl to be his wife and the mother of his three small motherless children, his oldest only

eight years old. Sorrow never seemed to leave them. This time little three year old Julina Emily was taken from them and joined her mother in heaven. Relatives and friends helped them and their sympathy carried them through this last ordeal. Had it not been so, they could not have continued to live here in Nauvoo, where things both temporal and spiritual seemed so uncertain and saddening. Three of the family had departed life in the same year.

With two children, Louisa and Frank left, Mary and Ornon tried to see the Lord's hand in their lives and misfortunes.

This same year during the summer of 1845, Mary's parents, and the grandparents of the Houghton children, who had been living near them, announced their intentions of leaving Nauvoo to seek a home elsewhere, for their financial benefit. They wished Mary and family to go with them but she had heard and seen Brigham Young when the mantle of Joseph Smith fell upon him and heard his voice as of Joseph's. So she would not leave the body of the Saints as she had a lasting testimony of the gospel. Church history tells that after the Prophet's death many members were led away by those who thought that to get away from Illinois and persecution, the Saints could help themselves and also help the Church financially. Lyman Wight was one such leader. He was an Apostle in good standing and very staunch in the Church. He was a close friend of the Prophet Joseph as well as a faithful member of the Quorum of the Twelve. His record was outstanding on spiritual experience and he believed in Brigham Young as the leader, but failed to heed the counsel; to stay with the body of the Church. So when he organized

a colony to go to Texas to settle; Jeremiah Curtis and family (Mary's parents) were among the 150 souls who left the body of the Church to seek a better place. They were all faithful Saints at that time. They had no intentions of leaving the Church and its beliefs.

The Houghton's decision to stay in Nauvoo and keep near the body of the Church prevailed over the arguments of the Curtis family. Although Mary's loneliness was bitter, she felt at peace with herself as she bade good by to her parents and loved ones; knowing not, whether she would ever see them again. She never did see her parents again after they started on the long trek in the early spring of 1845 for Texas.

Meanwhile the Houghtons helped in every way they could to finish the great Temple in Nauvoo. They attended their Church duties, following the counsel of their leaders. Ornon was a seventy and faithful to his calling, while he cared for his young family during the intense mobbing and pillaging, even killings by the ruffians and citizens of Illinois. The Church leaders feverishly urged the Saints on to give more of their time and means to finish at least part of the temple so they might receive the Temple Ordinances before having to leave the state. Most of the attention and work at this time was put on the upper story of this great building so the curtains and furniture could be put in and made ready to be dedicated.

The seething rough element near Hancock County kept the Saints in a state of anxiety and alarm. The Saints entered into an

agreement with the State officials to move west in the Spring of 1846, but the restless mobocrats kept terrifying, molesting and burning homes and crops of the outside settlements, until it became clear to the Church leaders that there would be no peace until they got out of reach of these unpredictable wicked non-Mormons and apostates. The leaders of the Church seeing the state breaking their agreement to let them stay in peace until Spring, concluded to finish and dedicated only the rooms for endowments and sealing in the Temple so the living could get their Temple Ordinances.

The endowments for the righteous Saints began December 10, 1845. The leaders worked day and night calling the Saints in, to have these ordinances performed for the worthy. (Records show that Stephen Markham and his wife Hannah Hoogaboom were endowed December 16, 1845 in the Nauvoo Temple. Also his son Warren and Wife, _____ Jones.)

Ornon Houghton and wife Mary Curtis Houghton received their endowments January 29, 1846. It required another session through the Temple to get their Sealing Ordinance. This was just a few days before the doors of the Ordinance Rooms were closed forever, February 8, 1846, so they were not sealed to each other. Mary was just a few months past her thirteenth birthday. It was glorious experience and held sacred by her all her life.

The Saints and leaders were packing and making ready to leave Nauvoo. By the 11th of February, 1846, the Twelve Apostles were crossing the Great Mississippi River into the state of Iowa on their way to the Rocky Mountains. There was a ward or town near

the river in Iowa called Montrose. These people made ready to start west also.

The Houghtons were among the Mormons refugees fleeing from Illinois and the mobs.

This was a very unpleasant situation. The weather was bitter cold, so cold the river froze over hard enough to allow the wagons to cross on the ice.

While crossing the Mississippi River on a flat ferry boat February 8, 1846, this incident occurred. A teamster who had driven on the boat with tow yoke of partly broken steers hitched to his covered wagon had neglected to unhitch them. Someone just for a joke spit tobacco juice in the eye of one of the steers making it almost crazy with pain. In the excited thrashing around of the steers a plank in the bottom of the boat was torn loose and the boat began to sink very quickly. The animals were floundering in the water and some of them were clear outside of the boat. Someone pulled the pin from the wagon tongue and this turned them loose and they swam to shore. This took the weight from the water soaked boat and it rose to the surface again. The people on the shore were frantic and soon got boats and rescued all getting them safely to shore. Only one yoke of oxen was drowned. Why the boat did not go on down was a mystery to them. Some thought it rested on a sheet of ice under the surface of the river. Sheets of ice were floating all around. Twenty-five persons were on board, among them were three women, Mary being one of them and there were also four children. The water came up to their armpits as they sat in the

wagon seat and the mothers raised their babies as high as they could reach to keep them out of the water. The story, when told by two of the women who came to Utah and raised large families, said it was a great miracle that all were not drowned but the hand of the Lord was over them.

After the Saints crossed the River, there were tents for some and a few had no shelter to protect them from the blasting Iowa winds. They had few possessions and a scanty supply of food to sustain the body. This lack of necessities as well as cold weather took its toll of those who were weak or were over exposed. Ornon Houghton was no exception. He became ill and unable to travel. Brigham Young advised him to remain until he became well and stronger, than come with a later company.

On account of Mr. Houghton's health they remained in Montrose, Lee County, Iowa, and while there Mary gave birth to a baby boy, October 10, 1846. This was one month before Mary's fourteenth birthday. They named him Edger Stratton Houghton.

Mr. Houghton's health continually worsened and as he steadily grew weaker he became confined to his bed, from which he never recovered. He left his earthly cares and sorrows when he passed away August 18, 1847 in Lee County, Iowa.

This last tragedy was overwhelming to 15 year old Mary and her three young children. She was destitute, as were most of the people who had fled their comfortable homes in Nauvoo. Her husband's long sickness had diminished what few assets she may have had. Her parents were hundreds of miles away in Texas. She had no

brother and sisters here to give her solace or aid. She was just another hated Mormon striving to leave a persecuted existence and find a haven of peace. Her lot was pathetic among a righteous people and some of her Curtis relatives such as cousins and uncles were also along the route seeking the same goal as herself. She was always thankful for these relatives who befriended her even if their supplies were hardly more than her own. Their sympathy and concern was heartwarming to this young widow and her three children.

After the death of her husband and while still a widow her oldest brother Meacham came from Texas, where all her brothers and sisters lived with their parents, but his only conveyance was a mule to take her and her three children to join the rest of the family. He sold everything he could belonging to her, even a strand of gold beads which had been handed down in the family for a number of generations. These beads were to be handed down to Louisa, for which she never forgave him in all her eighty years of life. Still Mary would not consent to go with him, as she had heard Brigham Young speak and she knew he was chosen by God to lead his people. Her brother went back to Texas very mad at her as was all the rest of her family.

The trials since she had been associated with the Church, had strengthened her character and increased her faith and developed self-control and responsibility which were a great asset to her throughout her life. As the Prophet Joseph Smith had told the Saints, that the buffeting he endured, the experiences and the

challenges had all refined and polished his character like the diamond is made valuable and shining by the buffing and polishing it gets.

How she reached Council Bluffs with the children her husband had left her with, the writer does not know, for it was hundreds of miles from Montrose, Lee County, Iowa, where she had lost her dear husband. But she was in Council Bluffs in the spring of 1850 ready to continue her trip to Utah. Her determination to go West with the Saints was not daunted. Now she was getting closer to the goal of her dreams.

Council Bluffs was the final fitting out place, just on the edge of civilization, before starting on the long tiresome trek across the hot plains. The town was bustling with Saints moving in and others ready to move out toward the West, after first crossing the muddy Missouri River which was about five miles from Council Bluffs to the ferry and then they would be in Nebraska, the Indian territory.

In Council Bluff, Mary began preparing for the long trip over the wild, unknown country. She sold her precious feather bed tick for flour, to a miller from whom she had rented a house. She owned a milk cow and a heifer which gave her a feeling of great security in her pathetic poverty. At last the appointed day arrived for the companies to leave Council Bluffs. In June 1850 they would cross the Muddy Missouri river by ferry and then be in Nebraska on their way to the Great Salt Lake.

Mary was assigned with her three children to Captain Stephen Markham's Company of 100 wagons. Her cousin Moses Curtis and his wives Aurelia J. with their children, bargained to let Mary and her children, Frank age 13, Louisa age 10, and Edgar S. nearly 4, join their wagons and camp. She would use her cow to make half of the team for one wagon which Frank could drive and the cow could also furnish milk for the families, and Mary, then seventeen, could cook for them all, as Moses' wife was not well on the journey.

Mary had several cousins in Markham's Company, who after arriving in Utah settled mostly in Utah County around Payson.

They left Council Bluffs on June 20, 1850 and arrived in Salt Lake Valley October 1, 1850.

The arrival in Salt Lake Valley was like a long dream come true. They had reached their goal and were with the Saints away from the persecutions and could now live in peace. Another crisis awaited this young widow with her children. She had no place to go. She was homeless with no provider for the coming winter. She was poverty stricken in a strange barren land. She trusted in the Lord for help and it came four days after arriving.

Stephen Markham, her pioneer Company Captain, came to her rescue. After seeing her desperate circumstances, he took her to the President's Office (Brigham Young's Office) and was married to her by Heber C. Kimball on October 5, 1850. She was not quite 18 years old. While they were in the President's Office brother Kimball sealed Mary Curtis to her late husband, Ornon Houghton, October 5, 1850.

Markham gave her and her children a home with his family. This large family lived in Salt Lake until late Summer 1851. A baby was born to Mary and Stephen in the late summer of 1851. Then they moved to Bountiful for a few months. His wife Hannah Hoogaboom, lived in Salt Lake and sent the children to school, but Stephen and Mary moved to the Spanish Fork River and located in Palmyra in the late Fall of 1851. There were a few scattered families who started a settlement at Palmyra. They named their first baby Orvil Sanford Markham.

No early pioneers ever lived a life of ease and comfort and the Markham wives and families were just typical pioneers; struggling to stay alive in this barren, sun-parched land. Often they were hungry, and frightened when Indians were seen around. They were lucky to find sego lily bulbs of greens or even thistles to cook and eat, when rations were short. These families worked hard to till the soil, make dams and ditches to wet the thirsty earth, preparatory to planting their precious seeds. At the same time they were trying to build shelters to shut out the cold or heat of the changing seasons.

In 1852 the settlers in Palmyra were reinforced by the arrival of the late 1852 pioneers who swelled the population and added strength to build a fort in Palmyra for protection from Indian attacks. Most of the settlers moved to the fort for a time. Some stayed in their cabins or dugouts.

The Markham home in Palmyra was not a luxurious abode but it was a welcome haven to the homeless that often shared its humble

fireside and scanty fare, until their own conditions improved. It was a dugout with just one large room. Mr Markham was bishop in 1853 and his wives were ever willing to help him father his ward, even if this hospitality did increase the load and responsibility upon their own shoulders.

Mr Markham married several homeless widows who arrived in Utah and gave them and their children a home. Mary being a third wife, became the senior, after Hannah Markham left for California with her sons (Waren Markham and wife, Whiting Markham, and David Markham). Mary assumed the role of manager, as she had been accustomed to since a young girl.

Priscilla Merriman Evens tells of her experience in the Markham home for one year, with Mary Markham as the manager. Priscilla and her husband, Thomas D. Evans, were converts from Wales and came to Utah in the Fall of 1856 in a hand cart company. Priscilla helped her husband, who had but one leg and a heavy stick or peg for a substitute, to pull a hand cart 1330 miles from Iowa City to Salt Lake. She could appreciate the kindness she received when she arrived in Palmyra, and the Markham's home, tired and destitute. They were graciously welcomed and cheered by the three wives.

She describes the Markham home as being a large one-room dug-out, built half under ground, with the roof thatched first with willows and then covered with sod. The floors were dirt and kept hard and smooth by sprinkling and sweeping. There was a large fireplace in one end of the room, with bars, and hooks holding

frying pans and bake ovens, where they did the cooking for the large family. They heated the water for washing at this fireplace too.

There was a long table in one corner. In the other three corners were pole bedsteads fastened to the wall, and these were laced back and forth with rawhide, cut in strips to make a nice spring bed. They covered these with ticks filled with straw raised in Palmyra before the famine, which had been caused by the crickets and drought. The famine was in 1854-5. There were three trundle beds made like shallow boxes with wooden wheels, which rolled under the mother's beds in the day time. Three wives were living in the home at this time and seven children.

Mary was in charge and will always be remembered for her thoughtfulness to these weary travel-worn Saints. Priscilla said this good wife took her own two children, Orville and Lucy from the trundle bed and put them in the foot of her own bed. She always had Don Carlos, the baby, sleeping with her. She then gave the trundle bed to the fatigued travelers. "Oh! how delightful was this restful bed, the first they had slept on since leaving the ship, 'Sam Curling'." Their bed in the trek had been the hard ground with their clothes on for three months. Priscilla's gratitude to Mary was overflowing.

Mrs. Evan gave birth to her first baby, Emma , two months after arriving in Utah. She had no clothes for the new arrival, but Mary stood by her side to give assistance in every way. She gave a square of woolsy cloth for a blanket, she made gowns from

the baby's father's shirt, and sewed a few articles from her own scanty supply. The wardrobe was very meager but it was valued highly.

To add to the already over crowded quarters during this cold winter, Mr. Evans, the husband of Priscilla, who had but one leg, slipped and cut his knee while cutting willows for the fireplace, injuring him severely which necessitated him being confined to the house while his wound was being treated.

Mr. Evans worked for Mr. Markham a year to receive a living for himself and his wife. They built a three room house of Mr. Markham during this time. When Mr. Evans left he was given two acres of land and he soon built a two room house on it. The Markham's three room house was built in Spanish Fork in 1856 and was first occupied by Mary in 1857. It was shared as graciously with the unfortunate as her dug-out home had been.

One of the women whom Markham married was Martha Jane Boyce. She left the Markham home but her son, Stephen whom she bore to Mr. Markham was born in 1854 and was left in Mary's care. He was like a son to Mary. Stephen was 8 months old.

At one time Mr. Markham took three women to the Endowment House to be sealed to him. They were: Lydia Maria MacComber, Mary Hoton (Houghton), and Eliza Jane Sheppherd. This was on November 30, 1867. Mary Hoton was Mary Houghton, who had been sealed seventeen years previous to Ornon Houghton, so she was sealed to Stephen Markham for time only, while the other two women were sealed for eternity. This was a disappointment for Stephen Markham

that she wasn't sealed to him. She bore him thirteen children and was by his side until he died on March 10, 1878, leaving her a widow at forty-six years of age, and expecting his thirteenth child in October of that year.

She told her daughter, Emily, that her husband, Stephen, before he died asked her (Mary) to do what she could to be sealed to him, both she and his children. Mary was the only one who could have had this done. Perhaps because of lack of knowledge in those early days, we find no record of her having her sealing record changed at all.

Many diaries of pioneers speak of living with the Markham family. During the exodus south from Salt Lake in 1858, when Johnson's army passed through, Mr. Lucian Shurtliff tells of taking of his five wives, Mary Shurtliff and her two young boys to live with the Markhams for several months, until the Johnson Army scare was over. Also, John Hayes speaks of living with the Markhams along with his father during the winter of 1854. That was the year of the famine, when the grasshoppers had robbed them of their winter food. John Hayes was just a lad and we all know how hungry growing boys can get. Where did Mary, the managing wife in the Markham home, find food for so many mouths? John never mentioned the hardship but he did remember sitting by the fireplace listening to the interesting stories told by Uncle Steve, as Mr Markham was lovingly called by the youngsters, about the Prophet Joseph Smith and the persecution of the Saints. This incident gives a picture of the loving spirit enjoyed in the Markham home, even though

crowded and in very humble circumstances. One was always welcome to share its modest comforts.

It was during these early years that some Indians called in Stephen Markham, wanting to sell a small Indian girl to him for a steer in his corral. He knew they had stolen the child from another tribe but he told them he had enough papooses. They became angry and declared they would kill the baby, then as they started toward the wood pile, Stephen became alarmed at their cruelty, so he consented to trade them the steer for this dirty, scared, two year old, Indian girl. What difference did it make to just feed one more mouth anyway.

Julie, the Indian child, grew to womanhood, trained in the way of the whites, neat and a very good person. She fit into the Markham family as one of its members. Mary accepted this Indian child and loved her as her own.

Mary C. Markham had fourteen children and reared three step-children: Frank Houghton, Louisa Houghton, and Stephen Markham Jr., beside Julia, the Indian girl. She left a large posterity of good substantial citizens and many leaders in the Church and communities.

Mary was of medium size and dark complexion, and in late years she wore her hair combed straight back, parted in the middle from crown to her forehead, drawn to the back and twisted into a bun at the back of her head. Her shoulders were rounded from her years of toil. She was very industrious up to her death, except for a short sickness, apparently Cancer of the stomach, which kept her to her

bed. She dried apples, apricots and peaches from her own orchards, always with an interest for those who lived in new outlying settlements that could not raise their own fruits. She had seamless sacks of dried apples, peaches, apricots and prunes. She divided this with her daughter, Lucy Dudley and Emily Mckee, who lived in the new settlement of Ashley Valley, now known as Uintah County Utah.

She raised silk worms to add to her sustenance as she had several young children or unmarried ones and her young baby to support.

Ten years after Stephen Markham passed away of Tuberculosis, consumption as it was known at the time, their youngest child, Caroline, passed away of the same disease.

Mary never saw her parents again after she bade them good-bye that sad summer day, 1845, when they started from Nauvoo to Texas with Lyman Wight as their leader. The writer has no knowledge of her brothers and sisters ever coming to Utah, but the writer has a picture of her brother, Joseph, the youngest.

After sixty-eight eventful and marvelous years she passed away on Spanish Fork at her home, October 6, 1900. She was buried in the Spanish Fork Cemetery. Her many friends praised her Christ-like virtues, her generosity, and courage. It is believed her death was caused by cancer of the stomach.

She left a large posterity who will ever revere her memory.