

EDNA MARIA MERRILL

(in character)

Hello, May I come in and join this family gathering? Thank you! but I must introduce myself. I am Edna Maria Merrill, your ancestor. I was born on Christmas Day, December 25, 1828 in Cutter, Wayne County, New York, and would like to tell you, my descendants and those of Christina McNeil also, a little of my life for the benefit of you young folks who didn't know me.

I began life in a home with a religious atmosphere. My forefathers fled from France because of their faith, and cast their lot in with the Puritans in England, and for the same reason they left England for America so that they could have freedom to worship God. My family settled in New York state, where I was born, and later we moved to the state of Michigan.

In Michigan I met Warren Ford Reynolds, whose family had also come to America to escape religious persecution. Warren was a fine young man and it seemed that from first sight we were destined for each other. His life in his youth was far from happy. His parents died when he was but a small boy and he moved to Michigan to live with his brother Asa, but he was not contented and decided to leave. He set out on foot to walk to Detroit, some distance away, where he had a friend living. This friend, Mr. Gauge, and his wife, had no children of their own and so they were very happy to have Warren live with them, and that was where I met him. We were married on the 3rd of January, 1846 when I was 18 years old.

Mr. Gauge was very good to us and when we were married he offered us a home, but we had already decided that we wanted to go to Nauvoo, Illinois to be with the Saints, so Mr. Gauge gave us a covered wagon and a yoke of oxen to help us on our journey. We arrived in Nauvoo and were baptized in the Mississippi River by Elder Surryne on April 15, 1846 and so our lot was cast with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We left Nauvoo with a company of Saints which included my father and mother and family, and came to Utah, arriving here September 20, 1848. This was an extremely difficult journey and we endured many hardships and trials but were happy when we finally reached Salt Lake City.

President Brigham Young called us to settle in South Cottonwood where we worked very hard, tilling the ground, planting and gathering in crops, but our home on the Big Cottonwood Creek was a refuge from the hardships we had endured and we loved it. To us were born ten children, and as they grew up they too helped in taking care of the farm and the crops. One year, after we had our crops in and they were doing beautifully, the crickets came in hordes and almost devoured the entire crop. Warren turned the chickens out to see if they would eat the crickets, and they did, but somehow or other I could not bring myself to eat the eggs that the hens laid after that. It was the seagulls that finally saved the crops. The grasshoppers were terrible too and it was a real struggle to get enough of our crops saved to take care of us for the winter.

Converts to the Church were coming to Utah by the thousands and it seemed impossible for the Church to find the means to keep the Perpetual Immigration Fund going, so President Young suggested that the Saints come by handcart and during the summer of 1856, five different groups came to Utah in this manner. The two latter groups, the Willie and Martin companies, started out too late in the season and were caught in the midst of their travels by the storm. Many of them died, and when they reached Wyoming they were so completely exhausted and starving, for their food was all gone too, that all they could do was wait for someone to come to their assistance. When President Young heard of their plight, he immediately sent out twenty-seven young men with supplies, bedding, food and clothing to meet them. Then he called others to prepare food and take to them. Warren, with David Huffaker and William Boyce, were called to be among this group. I cooked some chickens, made rolls, potatoes, cakes and pies and all the food we could get together and these three men left to take it to the starving party. It was no easy task for it was all mountainous country and they had difficulty getting there. They finally reached them in Echo Canyon. It so happened that among the Martin company was Christina McNeil, a young Scotch lass. Later on we took her into our home and she was a great help to me while I was ill and in 1857 Warren built another home and married Christina.

Christina's children and mine grew up together and we spent many wonderful times; also spent many difficult and hard times. We had sorrow, when we lost our baby Edward only a year and a half old; again when Anna Eliza was taken when only four. Then we were called on to part with our lovely Josephine, only sixteen years old, and a girl who was loved by everyone. Lastly: our oldest son, John, died after he had reached maturity and we felt a great loss for he was a wonderful help and companion to his father. We had joys when we saw our other children grow and develop into fine men and women, and now you people gathered here, descendants of ours, we are proud of you and what you have accomplished. Many of you who have gone into the world to preach the Gospel, <sup>and</sup> have continued to build this Church and further the work of the Lord, have given us a feeling of pride and gratitude in your good work. Likewise we want you to be proud of us, for with our sufferings and our struggles, we made it possible for you to enjoy what you now enjoy.

I shall leave you now, but I leave with you my blessings. I should like you to keep up your fine work, your associations with one another, and continue on with your genealogical research work so that when we do all gather on the other side and you are with us, we will be one complete family with none left out.

(Taken from a history written by Josephine Workman as told to her by Isabelle Bird)