

History of Nancy Bean Decker
Utah Pioneer of 1848
Prepared by her granddaughter, Myrtle Decker Janson

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Nancy Bean Decker was born Dec. 14, 1826 in Pike Co., Missouri, a daughter of James and Elizabeth Lewis Bean who later helped settle Provo, Utah. Very different from her sandy-complexioned, mild-mannered English father, Nancy was a forceful character with a determined disposition inherited from the Lewis's of France. Her indomitable will made her a born leader. Her alert mind and abundant energy stood her in good stead for the many vicissitudes of her life.

Because her mother became an invalid, Nancy, at an early age, assumed a woman's responsibility in managing the household duties as well as some of the farm labor on her father's large estate.

Her jet black wavy hair and beautiful gray eyes, regular features and firm-set mouth, together with an attractive personality placed her among the belles of the countryside. A favorite form of recreation in her day was the old-time spelling bee. And how she could spell! No one spelled her down. She mastered words. Years later children of her own recalled that their mother drilled them daily at spelling giving them words eight and ten letters long when they were only six years of age. Nancy remembered that her first teacher was an educated Cherokee Indian by the name of Climer.

When she was eleven years old her family was converted to Mormonism by John D. Lee. A little later a very competent and winning young man, Thomas J. Williams became her teacher. Nancy must have found him especially winning for they were married in 1841 and a year later were blessed with a baby daughter whom they named Mary Elizabeth. Then came trouble from the anti-Mormon mobs who pillaged the countryside. They burned the homestead of James Bean and drove off his stock. In 1843 when the Mormons were forced to flee to Nauvoo for their lives, Nancy was confronted with a heartbreaking decision. Her husband refused to join the church. He and his father demanded that she ~~sign~~ either leave the Mormon faith or leave

her name and baby. Although she was but a girl of seventeen the church of her choice had become very dear to Nancy. She planned to take her tiny daughter and flee but before she could slip away her father-in-law snatched the child from her arms and drove her alone from his home. Nancy went to Nauvoo and on to the Rocky Mountains with the Saints but all her life long she sorrowed for the baby daughter whom she was never to see again.

Nancy was present in Nauvoo when Brigham Young was called to lead the church following the death of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Brigham Young wanted no unmarried women in the colony, and accordingly arranged for her marriage to John D. Lee as a second wife. Later a daughter, Cornelia Lee, was born to them. But Nancy and John D. Lee were totally incompatible in a polygamous marriage, so Brigham Young released her along with a number of other polygamous wives upon their arrival in Salt Lake in 1848.

Nancy took her little daughter Cornelia and earned their own way for a time. But following this the following year she was married to A Zachariah B. Decker in Mill Creek. They were among the first colonizers to Parowan, her husband being one of the original scouting party.

Nancy was the mother of thirteen children. Her family was taught to work as hard as she did. Up at four in the summer, five in the winter, she set things humming, each to his allotted task. No sleepy heads lay abed after Nancy was up.

Besides the tremendous work she did at home, spinning, weaving "linsey-woolsey" sewing all the clothing for her large family, making butter and cheese, curing pork, cooking, gardening, making quilts, rugs and carpets, --- she became the town midwife, being "set apart" by Brigham Young for this great mission. She worked with a doctor for a number of years at times she became the only medical aid available. Her iron constitution stood her in good stead. Some of her favorite remedies were penny royal and peppermint tea, No. 6 tea, camphor, and turpentine.

She was most devoted to her religion and believed in it devoutly. Nancy spent her last days doing simple household duties, tending the flowers in her garden,

reading the scriptures of the gospel for which she had made so many sacri-

She died on March 3, 1903 at the age of 76 and lies buried in the Parowan
cemetery.