

Metta Marie Nielson

AUNT MARY

Sister Metta Marie Nielson was born Oct. 8th at Aalborg, Jutland, Denmark. When very young Aunt Mary (as she will be known hereafter in this sketch) developed a great interest in literature, and many times called forth the approval of the priest of the district in which she resided for the interest she manifested in the research of good books. Nature had endowed this Danish maiden with high ambitions and desires, and also made her a quick observer of everything with which she came in contact, and when but a girl Aunt Mary learned to weave cloths, carpets and coverlets in the most difficult designs and patterns unaided by the skilled master and teachers of such work. At the tender age of eleven years Aunt Mary went into domestic service, following the occupation commonly known as servant girls in these days. So trustworthy and competent did she prove herself to be, that she was retained in one position for eleven years, at the end of which time she became the wife of Peter Madsen (1833). A son and daughter were born to them during the first four years of their married life, but the little girl was called to the Beautiful Beyond at the age of three years. Thus the fond parents learned the trial of separation from loved ones. The boy was living when Aunt Mary left Denmark, but he too was wafted to the spirit world in 1886.

Aunt Mary heard the gospel and joined the Latter Day Saint Church in 1853, migrating to America in the year of 1856 during the month of April. Arriving in New York, husband and wife immediately began preparation for their departure across the plains to join that God-fearing band of pilgrims journeying to Zion. They left New York by rail for Iowa where it was necessary to await the arrival of handcarts before beginning the exodus westward. It was August before they finally commenced the journey with the Willies Handcart Company. The journey should have started in July.

Aunt Mary's account of that pilgrimage could not but make the staunchest hearts to quail were the same adventure to be undertaken today. Through toil and privation these world renowned pioneers wended their way over the mountains and valleys, looking forward only to the prospect of peace and rest when they should arrive at the central home of the saint in Salt Lake City.

Upon arriving at Fort Bridger, Wyoming, Aunt Mary paid her last tribute of love to her devoted husband, who is buried with fourteen other saints in one grave. More and more of their numbers were left each day under mounds at the road side. In rehearsing these heart-breaking scenes of their life during this period, Aunt Mary said that every morning they who were able to move about would go the rounds, looking into the sleeping quarters and counting the number of those who slept to awake no more in this life.

And now noble Aunt Mary, bereft of babies and husband, continued that ever memorable journey, enduring unnumbered hardships, not even food sufficient to prevent suffering from hunger, for they were now rationed to one small cup of flour levelled off with a crooked stick, the bent part in the cup, for each day's sustenance, and now even the salt was gone, making it even harder to choke the flour porridge down. Fate seemed to try them at every turn. Not only had the storms come exceedingly early that year but the Indians had stampeded what cattle they had. It took three precious weeks to recover and round these up, making their provisions doubly low. Matters became worse and worse until they were stripping the rawhide thongs from their hand carts and chewing them to keep body and soul together. Finally when these were exhausted they ate the ends of their fingers leaving them bleeding and raw.

President Young hearing of their plight asked for Volunteers at October Conference to take provisions and wagons and meet the starving company.

But the hope and joy that the courageous half-depleted company felt when help was seen was soon shattered when the men who had been sent to minister aid whipped the sick and frozen pioneers with rawhide whips to make them stumble on toward Zion.

The tired group was not allowed to rest long in Salt Lake. Aunt Mary with many of her handcart companions resumed her travels after but four days in Salt Lake. With Bishop Lewis' Company, she came southward reaching the valley of Little Salt Lake the last of November, 1856, with snow deep on the ground. She had been traveling between seven and eight months in the journey from her native land. Although fatigued from her strenuous effort, with her old ambition she took her position at the loom, turning out hundreds of yards of good serviceable linseys, jeans, shawls, bedspreads, and carpets to say nothing of the fine thread with which to sew them, thus maintaining herself and helping others.

On the 16th of August, Aunt Mary became the wife of Herman D. Bayles. To brother Bayles and his family she gave her whole hearted effort. She wove cloth with which the children were clothed, the coverlets for the beds, while linsey for bed sheets and wollen shawls for all the female members of the family. She pieced quilts and assisted in the quilting of them. Always busy, she was able to make more cloth and carpeting, etc., than was used in the family. This was sold for money or produce which was turned into the family fund.

Industrious, uncomplaining, utterly unselfish was Aunt Mary. Moreover, she took pride in the whole family quite remarkable when one considers that none of the children belonged to her.

Her untiring devotion and her intelligent progression in the gospel truths resulted in her being privileged in 1890 to receive her second appointments in the St. George Temple.

During the fall of 1897, this dear lod lady was stricken with paralysis which rendered her practically an invalid, yet for many years she continued to serve the other members of the family by darning, patching, knitting, etc. Until her eyesight failed her she continued to gain great satisfaction from reading the Deseret News and the scriptures.

At the wonderful age of 93 she passed away, beloved by all who knew her.

Written by Mary E. Orton
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