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Biographical Sketch

of

Mary Elizabeth Steele Hansen

by Mary E. Hansen Wooton, daughter

Pioneer Year 1851

George Spratley and Alfred Gorden Company

Born 10 Aug 1851 in Ash Grove, Boone, Nebraska

Married 13 Jul 1845 in Nauvoo, Illinois

Died 14 May, 1932, American Fork, UT

On the day of old St. Valentine, one hundred and fourteen years ago, in the little town of Stourbridge, Worcestershire, England was born a child who would be known in this world as Richard Steele. He was the fourth son in a family of eleven. When but a young man he joined the Latter Day Saint Church, and at the age of 24 he left his homeland to sail for America.

He reached Nauvoo in safety and there spent most of the following 3 years, working part of the time on the Nauvoo Temple. It was during this period that he met and courted Mary Ann Reece, also from England.

She was born on the 22nd of August 1823, in Cheshire, England. She was the only child of William and Francis Beckett Reece. When she was but 2 years old her mother died, making it necessary for her to earn her own living at the very youthful age of nine. When she was 17, she joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and come to America; she earned her passage across the ocean by acting as nurse girl for young children. While working to support herself in America, she learned the art of braiding straw and making hats.

At the age of twenty-two she married Richard Steele, July 13, 1845, in Nauvoo, Illinois, following the courtship during the time Richard was working on the temple.

While they were living in Nauvoo, a son, Thomas Grafton, was born on the 27th of April 1846. At this period, those who remained in Nauvoo were troubled by mobs, so it was decided they should leave. On the 3rd of July 1846 the Steele family said farewell to the city of Nauvoo and commenced their westward journey.

In September of the same year they stopped at Walnut Grove. Richard Steele staked off a claim, fenced off about 12 acres of land, built a house, broke some of the land and planted crops. Moses Becket Steele, the second son, was born here on September 29, 1848.

On the second of June in 1851 he sold his claim in Walnut Grove and left for Salt Lake City. He had one wagon, five oxen, three cows, and a mule. They crossed the Missouri River on the 28th of June, 1851, and camped at Six Mile Grove. On the first of July orders were given for this company to leave (Brother George Spratley and

Brother Alfred Gorden were captains of the companies). They drove 12 miles the first day. The weather was hot, the roads were poor, and some of the cattle nearly gave out. Fifteen miles seems to have been a good day's journey. On and on they traveled, seldom making more than 20 miles a day. It was a long, tiresome trail for those pioneers. They faced new hardships and many things happened; however, none of them were very eventful to my grandparents until one day in August.

After a 10 mile drive over steep roads, the company camped at Ash Grove (known also as Ash Hollow). All were very tired; and, as it was Sunday, they made camp a little earlier in order to rest. That evening, August 10, 1851, at nine o'clock, a little baby girl came to bless them. I think the arrival of this daughter, after having two sons, made them happy. They called her Mary Elizabeth Steele. It was this daughter who, years later, became my mother.

The next day the company drove 15 miles, and on the day following they made 20 miles. On August 13 at 10:00 A.M. a daughter was born to Mr. and Mrs. Wm Player. The company waited until about 12:00 A.M. and then resumed the journey, making 14 miles that day. These babies, with many others, we will leave in their wagon box cradles and go on with the journey.

Grandfather Steel, in his diary says, "Wednesday, October 1, 1851, we drove 12 mile and over the big mountain. On Thursday 2nd we drove over the little mountain, arriving in the city (Salt Lake City) before sundown."

They stayed in Salt Lake City that winter and until after the April Conference in 1852, coming thence to American Fork to make their home.

The first home of the Steele family was in the southeast part of town, the John A. Singleton place. It was not long until the Indians began committing depredations, making it necessary for them to move into the Fort. They tore down their first house and built another on the west corner of the lot – now vacant – formerly owned by Bonneville Lumber Company on First East and First North.

Grandfather bought some land and began farming. The grasshoppers destroyed most of the crops the first year and they lost part of their livestock, so the beginning years were hard ones. Although only a small girl, mother well remembers the coming of the grasshoppers and the heart-sickening way they destroyed the hard-earned crops which were to have provided food for them.

This loss caused a shortage in their supplies and made it necessary to use everything available as food to keep from starving, even though some of these things could not well be termed appetizing. Imagine gathering and peeling thistles, which were to be cooked and used as food, eating pig-weeds for greens, digging and eating segos, and having only coarse corn bread to go with such fare. For breakfast they had to eat coarsely ground, home-prepared mush or go hungry until time for pig-weeds and thistles. To this day, mother has a violent dislike for cooked mush or greens of any kind.

The following children were born after the family reached American Fork: Richard Reece Steel, Feb. 12, 1854; William Henry Steel, August 25, 1856; George Edward Steele, Nov. 8, 1859; and Sarah Ann Steele, April 16, 1863.

Mother learned to work when very young and has always been a hard worker. She used to spin, knit, card wool, sew, make candles and braid straw for hats. Besides doing all these things and keeping house, she used to go out in the fields and work like the boys. Although mother has always given the appearance of being rather a dainty, small, frail looking woman, she has stood 80 years of very hard work exceptionally well.

She attended the town school only about 6 weeks out of the year, her folks being unable to pay for more. Brother Henroid was one of her teachers. She also attended night school for a while. Having lived next to the Old Fort Wall, she often told of climbing and walking along it.

We cannot always stay young and play on the old homestead; we must continue to grow and take life as it comes. At the age of twenty, on August 14, 1871, she was married in the Endowment House in Salt Lake City to Martin Hansen, a neighbor who had

grown up with her brothers and with whom she had kept company for five years. Later, after the completing of the temple, they went through it (Grandmother told Martin he could not have mother until she was twenty, and it is a joke of which the grandchildren like to remind them of, that they waited only four days after her twentieth birthday).

They build a log house about a mile north of town, which is still standing. Father made their furniture, which would probably look crude to us, today. At that time it was a lonely place up by the creek, but they worked together to clear and improve it. Things were very inconvenient in those days. They did not even have lamps but bought wicks which they dipped many times in warm tallow until they were large enough for candles. However, it seems that nothing is too hard for those who are willing to work together and try to make a happy home. They planed trees for fruit and for shade, not thinking alone of trees to bear fruit but also of that which would beautify their home. Father, ever a lover of flowers, shrubs, and trees, planted many. Mother loved them, too, but she has always loved the wild rose best – perhaps because of her birth and early life on the plains, and the roses that were around her early home before other flowers took their place.

On August 19th, 1872 their first child was born. It was a son whom they named Richard Henry. September 15, 1874 another son, Charles Edward, was born. His life here was short, for he died a little over a year later, October 23, 1875. Like Joseph and Sarah of old, they were blessed with many sons. Father, being a farmer, could give them plenty of work to do; and, as there were no girls, mother taught them to work in the house, also. December 20, 1875 a third son was born; to this one they gave the name of Martin Ephraim, after his father and perhaps the Ephraim of old. This son was also to leave them, for he died at the age of 14, August 28, 1889. The following sons were born to them later: William Reece, Nov. 25, 1877; Moses Albert, Dec. 31, 1879; Isaac Walter, Aug. 14, 1882; and George Heber, Oct 1, 1884. At this time they had a change, for a baby girl came to them September 22, 1886. At last a sister for the family of boys! Of course, they gave her her mother's name, that of Mary Elizabeth. She

must have been spoiled, being the only girl among so many boys as well as being the baby of the family for 6 years.

Up to this time they were still living in the original house – a log cabin with pink roses climbing about the door – consisting of one large room a lean-to shanty at the back and one room upstairs. With the growth of the family, the old house became too small, so a new four-roomed adobe house was built. Later 2 more rooms were added.

Their last son, Thomas Grafton, was born in the new home on the 22nd of Feb. 1892. This made nine children in all, seven of whom are still living.

One son, George Heber, filled a mission in the Eastern States. All were married in the Temple of the Lord. Through these marriages there are 36 grandchildren and 22 great grandchildren, making a total of 56 living descendants, 7 having passed away.

In taking care of her family, mother did not have time for idleness or much time for public duties. Father often left her alone to take care of the farm and family while he spent days and weeks working on the railroad, in the canyon, etc. She spent many hours with the sick often being called out of her bed at night to go nursing. A wonderful wife and mother she has been to her family.

After the wards in American Fork were divided mother was called to work as a visiting teacher in the Fourth Ward Relief Society. She joined this organization in 1902 and labored many years as a teacher. She is still a faithful member, always giving when she is able. At the age of 50 she was called to teach in the Fourth Ward Primary. She felt that she was too old to do much good; nevertheless, when called upon to work, she was always willing and ready to do the best she could. On Saturday, Nov. 8, 1902, she was set apart as a monitor, later becoming a teacher, in the first grade (Sister Caroline Adams was president of the Primary at that time and Sisters Mary Mott and Ellen Proctor were counselors). She labored in this organization at least 10 years.

The work of father and mother in beautifying their homestead brought wonderful results. It was a miniature paradise grown out of a lonesome sagebrush covered track. On it could be found nearly

every variety of fruit and vegetable, vine and shrub, flower and tree. The grove of trees planted by father has been the scene of many a festive town celebration, which will be recalled by older members of the community. The beauty of the farm house and its surrounding have called forth the admiration of all who come upon it.

In 1914, between Christmas and New Years, Father being too old to take care of the farm any longer, they left the "Old home," as we love to call it, and moved down town and rented rooms in the old Hannah Wilde place. Father accepted a position as janitor of the Alpine Stake Tabernacle. Later they sold their old home and bought Mrs. Wilde's new home, the place they are now living in. Their present home is surrounded on the outside with lawn and flowers, while on the inside peace, love and happiness reign.

Mother passed her 80th year last August, and they also celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary in August, 1831.

She passed to her reward Saturday evening at nine twenty five (P.M.), May 14th, 1932.