

Mary Ann Grayson Roper



Mary Ann Grayson was born October 26, 1824 in Sheffield, Yorkshire, England, the daughter of John and Hannah Ellis Grayson. She was a trim refined English girl with brown eyes and dark brown hair.

She spent her girlhood days in Sheffield, and it was there that she met Henry Roper, a member of those peculiar people called Mormons. Even though her family objected to her seeing so much of this young Mormon, the friendship continued and ripened into love. When Mary Ann's father and mother objected to their marriage, she joined the Mormon Church on July 28, 1843, and on October 24 of that same year, she and Henry decided they could not be happy without each other, so they ran away and were married.

They continued to live in Sheffield for eleven years. During this time they had six children born to them:

Wilford	born September 7, 1844 and died September 9, 1850
Harry	born October 19, 1846
John	born January 24, 1849 and died March 22, 1849
Fredrick	born February 9, 1850 and died April 28, 1850
Lizzie	born November 1, 1851 and died June 10, 1852
Alvin	born February 17, 1853

Of these six children Harry and Alvin were the only ones who lived to come to America. Many years later Grandmother Roper told the story that Alvin was a twin, but that the other baby was still born, so they had not counted it. They really had had seven children in the eleven years and only two of them lived.

Henry and Mary Ann with Harry and Alvin, after much planning and preparation, left their home and friends in Sheffield on April 2, 1854 and went to Liverpool where on April 4, 1854, they boarded a sailing vessel and began the long journey to join the Saints in Zion.

Everything went quite well until they reached the Gulf of Mexico where they were becalmed for six weeks waiting for the wind to come. They were not prepared for this prolonged time at sea and ran out of fresh water and food. They lived on hard sea biscuits until some one caught a large sea turtle, which weighed 365 pounds, and then they had turtle soup. Even as hungry as Mary Ann was, it was hard for her to eat that soup, for every time she lifted a spoonful to her lips, she saw that quivering mass of flesh as it lay upon the deck. But if she refused to eat it, Alvin and Harry would think it was not good, so she closed her eyes and her thoughts and found that it really tasted delicious.

They were very happy when the winds finally came, enabling them to continue on. They landed in New Orleans on June 4, 1854 after two full months at sea. The Roper family settled in Alton, Illinois where Henry worked for about four years as a blacksmith, helping to make wagons for those who were crossing the plains. In this way, they earned enough money to make it possible for them to cross the plains themselves.

While they were in Alton, Madison County, Illinois, three more children were born to them:

Frank born September 9, 1855 and died December 25, 1855

Laura born May 5, 1857 and died August 16, 1857

Willie born July 21, 1858 and died July 31, 1858

This made eight children they had lost ranging in age from 10 days to six years.

They began their trek across the plains in 1859. What thoughts must have crossed the mind of Mary Ann as they prepared for this journey westward. Was her mind filled with fear and apprehension for she was expecting another baby. She had already buried eight children. What was in store for her and her unborn child? Never the less she had great faith in this new found religion.

They came west with a wagon loaded with stoves so there wasn't much room for anyone to ride. Did Mary Ann and her boys, Harry age thirteen and Alvin age six, walk most of the way? One can only imagine that their bed was made at night "under the stars."

In September of 1859 they stopped to rest for a day, and to do the washing. This was along the Platte River at Red Albany Buttes, Wyoming. It was here that a baby girl was born. They named her Kate Platte. This was September 23, 1859.

The woman who acted as nurse for Mary Ann and the baby, Kate Platte, was a Danish convert who could not speak or understand a word of English. Mary Ann could not speak nor understand any Danish, but they managed to get along very well, and Mary Ann declared she had never had better care.

A bed was made for Mary Ann and the baby on top of the stoves. She must have, "as best she could", cradled the baby in her arms when they came to an extra rough place in the road, and Henry would call back, "Hold tight." She would brace herself and baby so they would not fall off their hard bed. "Who will dare say that angels did not cluster round and guard her, for she had been given another choice spirit it's mortal body that it might work out it's God given destiny." (From Them of the Last Wagon reprinted July 1997 Ensign.) Time showed that this was her first girl to attain adulthood.

It was in the fall of 1859 that they arrived in the Salt Lake Valley. The joy they felt was almost indescribable for Henry's sisters, Hannah Roper Wells, Lydia Roper Osguthorpe, and Mary Ann's sister, Ann Grayson Thompson, all lived there, and they felt that they were truly home at last. Hannah lived in Salt Lake, Lydia lived in Millcreek, and Ann lived on 9th East on the south bank of Little Cottonwood Creek.

For the next three years they lived in Salt Lake City, and enjoyed the association of their loved ones.

It was here that their next daughter was born April 13, 1862. She was named Nellie Grayson. She also lived to marry and raise a family.

Thomas Memmott, a very dear friend of the Roper family who had also come to Zion from Sheffield, England, had been talking a great deal during the past winter months about a new settlement called Deseret. It was located on the lower part of the Sevier River. There was plenty of land and water and all one had to do was go down and build them a new home and begin to farm.

As soon as they could travel after Nellie's birth, they packed their belongings, left their loved ones again and traveled the one hundred and fifty miles to the new settlement of Deseret.

I have often wondered how Mary Ann and Henry felt as they traveled over this large desert valley covered with greasewood, rabbit brush and sage. They must have remembered the lovely green of their native England. What strength and courage this new religion gave these faithful people!

Their first home was a dugout with a willow roof. The willows were covered with river clay, which kept out the sun and helped to keep out the rain, but of course there was not much rain in this desert valley.

Henry had helped with the work on the dam across the Sevier River, which supplied them with water. Just as they were beginning to feel that things were going well and their crops were planted, the dam went out. The crops were ruined, but they made the best of things even though there was not much food except carp and suckers from the river and a few carrots. They were used to hardships and disappointments and were sure that next year things would be different.

The Indians were not too friendly, mostly stealing cattle, and they could not afford to lose what few they had, so they were advised to build a fort. Henry helped with the work on the fort, and Mary Ann cooked the meals for the men. It was completed in eighteen days, and a big celebration was held when it was completed July 24, 1865.

It was never used as protection against the Indians, except they put their cattle in there to keep them safe. Part of the old fort still stands as a monument to these stalwart pioneers.

The river was the worst enemy they had, for it continued to wash out the dam each year until in 1868, they really became discouraged, and moved elsewhere.

The Memmotts went to Scipio and Henry and Mary Ann took their family and what few belongings they had and went east to the mountains to what was called Oak Creek. Two more little boys had joined the family while they lived in Deseret. First born was Charley, born October 1, 1865, and Abel Mosley, born February 22, 1868.

It was during the summer after Abel's birth that the move was made to Oak Creek. Mary Ann carried Abel in her arms as they traveled to their new home.

The settlers of this new community drew lots, then went to Fillmore and paid \$2.50 for each lot, returned and went to work.

Henry's and Mary Ann's new home was among the first in the new settlement. It was a dugout with a dirt roof. When it rained they had to run for the little brass bucket to catch the drips but it was a lovely home anyway.

The family lived here during the rest of that year, and then the next year, 1869, Henry built a northeast room above the ground, Henry used the dirt taken from the dugout to make adobes. Within the next year or two he built a southeast room on. The rooms were smoothed and whitewashed. Cloth was tacked over the rafters and this was made clean and it was also whitewashed. Dainty curtains were hung at the windows. A few treasures as a reminder of their home in England was placed on a mantle. A fire of sweet smelling cedar burned in the fireplace and a store of food was in the little cellar made available by a trap door under the floor. This was their first real home since coming to America. Later on they added a little lean-to on the southwest, which was a bedroom for Charles and Abel.

It was about this time that the neighbors began to find out about Mary Ann's gift for caring for the sick, and soon she was called into homes to help anxious mothers in times of illness. Especially was she needed when a new baby arrived and it was not long until she was helping to bring all of the babies in Oak Creek into the world. Most of this was done without help, except in a few difficult cases when Henry helped or went to Holden to get Olive Stringham who was a midwife. There was not a doctor in all of Millard County at that time.

Mary Ann was quite a superstitious woman as many people were at that time. One superstition that I found showing up in her youngest son was that it was bad luck to put your pointer finger into a jar so that when they used ointment or salve, her family was taught to use the middle finger instead.

Mary Ann was an industrious helpful mother and wife. She helped supplement the family income not only by helping with the sick but by drying fruit. A scaffold was built in the back yard for this purpose and the west slope of the roof of the house was used for drying. The smaller fruits were cut in half and put out in the sun to dry while the larger ones were peeled and cut into pieces so they would dry faster. In the fall they went to Salt Lake City to sell the fruit and to visit with Aunt Hannah and Aunt Lydia. Aunt Ann, The money they received for the dried fruit was used to buy cloth, shoes, tea, sugar and other luxuries.

Mary Ann's sister, Ann Grayson Thompson had died soon after they left Deseret and came to Oak Creek, now known as Oak City. Mary Ann often told of how she knew something had happened to her sister for she saw her standing by her bedside and was worried as she told Henry what she had seen and felt. Sometime later a letter came from Salt Lake telling them of Ann's death.

Mary Ann was afflicted with asthma, and because of this she was unable to do many things she would like to have done. She had to stay at home a great deal because of it, but was an excellent housekeeper. The neighbors were known to remark that they never saw her house untidy or dirty. She was never known to have those awful upsetting times known as house cleaning time. She cleaned as modern homemakers do, a little at a time and often and so kept it always spotless.

She also made the surplus milk into cheese, which helped again to supplement the needs of her growing family. She was a faithful mother and wife, and her four boys and two girls grew to maturity married, made homes and raised fine families of their own.

When Abel, her youngest son, married in December 1894, he brought his young wife Rachel into the family home to live. Rachel and Abel lived in the Roper home all of their married life. Rachel helped care for Mary Ann as her asthma grew steadily worse, and she passed away while Abel was on a mission in her native England among her own people at Sheffield. It was on March 7, 1897.

She was buried in the Oak City Cemetery, and Henry lived with Abel and his family for a number of years, dearly beloved by all of them.

Written by Margaret W. Roper, Lydia Lovell Vawdrey and Ava N. Anderson

Patriarchal blessing given by Patriarch John Albiston, Sheffield, Yorkshire, on the 18 June 1845, upon the head of Mary Ann Roper who was born on the 26 of Oct 1824 at Sheffield, Yorkshire, England.

My Beloved Sister I lay my hands upon thy head in the name of Jesus Christ and by the authority of the holy priesthood pronounce upon thy head the blessings of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

In-as-much as thou hast made choice of the Lord and has given thyself unto him by honoring him in the blessed ordinance of baptism thou art become a new creature in Christ Jesus in the covenant with the faithful Abraham and adopted into the family and kingdom of God thou art a joint heiress with Jesus Christ in all the blessings of his and his father's kingdom, thou hast put him on, continue to walk in him, and thou shalt be finally received so as to sit down on his throne as he as sat down on his father's throne; receive a glorious diadem as a crown of life and wear it as thy due. A union is formed between thee and thy Redeemer that shall never be dissolved in all eternity on condition of thy faithfulness. Thou shalt be enabled to walk before the Lord well pleasing in his sight with increasing light and love of the truth and its teachings shall delight thy soul. The Lord shall bless thee in thy future life in they seed, and seeds seed unto the latest generation. Thou shalt be a witness unto signs and wonders performed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and thy way shall be opened unto Zion and see heavenly visions and the ministry of angels; then, word not legible, thee and with the meek of the earth thou shalt inherit it's rich blessings; have they flocks and herds added unto thee, and sit under thy own vine and fig tree; none daring to make thee afraid. Thou shalt share in the temple worship and have sweet communion with the admiring saints. Thou shalt behold the second advent of Messiah and join His faithful Church in the great millennium. Thou art of the faithful seed of Abraham and I seal these blessings upon thy head, in the name of Jesus Christ even so

AMEN & AMEN

Charles Tenett Scribe

The blessing was transcribed by Ava Nielson Anderson. No punctuation was in the original. Any mistakes in transcribing or punctuation is my error. I think this is easier reading with a few punctuation marks in it.



John Grayson



Hannah Ellis