

Life History of Martha Larson Peterson

On a cold winter day, December 7, 1878, in a little dug-out cut back in a wash on the east bench of the community of Pleasant Grove, Martha Larson was born. Two Danish immigrants from a suburb of Copenhagen – Thomas C. Larson and Marie Hanson Larson were her humble but proud parents.

She joined a family consisting of her parents and elder sisters – Methea and Thora. Five other children – three boys and two girls – soon joined the Larson family. T. Christian and Camilla were born in the dugout, but George W., Martin, and Maud were born in a “new” rock and mud home which became a familiar sight on the east bench of Pleasant Grove. A foster sister Minnie was also a part of this pioneer family.

As was the case in most pioneer families, it was difficult for the Larsons to make a living in the sage brush desert. Every child – both boy and girl – had his share of hard work to do. To Martha and Chris (Christian) was given the job of herding the cows and sheep as they grazed on the ranges and foothills near Battle Creek Canyon.

These two small children could be seen together from early in the morning until late in the evening trailing a stray sheep or cow over a lonely hillside trail. As they worked and played together, a love and closeness came between this brother and sister that grew with the years until Christian died some seventy-odd years later.

Thomas and Marie Larson had a love for education and wanted each of their children to gain as much schooling as possible. Economic conditions, however, made it impossible for Martha to start school as early as some of her associates did. Because she was more mature than most first grade children, she was permitted to skip that grade and she entered school as a second grader. In this grade she also excelled and was given a special promotion.

She graduated from the eighth grade and had one year of high school work in Pleasant Grove schools. After completing all of the schooling that was offered in her home town, her parents afforded her an opportunity to attend Brigham young Academy in Provo. She completed a full year at that school before financial reverses in the family made it necessary that she discontinue her schooling and seek employment.

Her search for a job led her to the booming mining town of Mercur – a thriving community of 12,000 people located some forty miles from her home in the west hills. Here she worked for two years just prior to the disastrous fire of 1902 which leveled almost every one of the close-packed wooden structures which made up the community.

In this community Martha had her first opportunity to see how the “world” lived. She had been protected from sin and vice in the surroundings of the small

Mormon community of her birth. She lived in the community but apart from its intrigue as she furthered her knowledge of people and how they live.

Martha returned to her native community, and in 1905, she married Martin Peterson, a widower with three children – Arthur, Cora, and Harry C., who was less than two years of age. Her husband was also an immigrant from Denmark and had settled in Pleasant Grove largely because of his association and friendship with the Larson family. When she married she dedicated herself to the greatest challenge of womanhood – homemaking.

To Martha and Martin were born six sons during the next eleven years. They were George T., Eugene – who died when less than two years of age, Raymond F., M. Dale, Jesse G., and Dan W. To these boys Martha proved to be both mother and sister = authority and counselor. Her home became the gathering place of most of the young men and their girl friends in the community. In addition to the Peterson children, Scott C. Bensen, an orphan and a close friend of Dan, found refuge from want and the love and friendship of an understanding “mother.” The Blackwell children, who were near neighbors and who were motherless, oft times found counsel and solace in Martha's home.

On a cold winter day when it was best for children not to be outside, Martha's living room became a small basketball court or a large marble ring on which the boys were permitted to play. In the evenings, there were always books to read and plenty of delicious red apples to eat. Musical instruments were always in evidence in the living room which could be quickly converted from a basketball court to a library to a music studio.

To a person with less understanding of boys than Martha had, this home may have seemed a bedlam of confusion. To her it was home – as a home should be – a place for her boys to grow and develop.

To Martha the dream that most young girls have that one need only to marry and then she will “live happily ever after” was only partly fulfilled. She learned how to work in her early childhood from frugal pioneer parents. This knowledge of how to work she has used all of her life. She managed her home and helped run a small fruit orchard for the first twenty years of her married life. During the thirties, the years of the great depression, she worked at the Pleasant Grove Canning Company to help supplement the meager family income. Since 1940 she has worked as society reporter to the Pleasant Grove Review – a weekly local newspaper.

She has know what it is to lose a child. Her second boy, Eugene, was the victim of a tragic drowning accident when less than two years of age. She has sat beside the bed of her children as they have had fevers ranging to 105 degrees from scarlet fever, influenza, and diphtheria. In 1940, she lost her husband, a victim of coronary occlusion.

While suffering many hardships, she has also had her share of happy

moments as she has thrilled in her own accomplishments and those of her children. As young people, Martha's boys all shared in the honors and glories that dome to young folks. They were student leaders in school, they were good musicians, they excelled in dramatics and forensics. Generally they did those things mothers like their boys to do.

Her boys have all made a satisfactory adjustment to life. George, who has always made his home with his mother, has been an employee of the Pleasant Grove Canning Company since its beginning.

Three of her sons are educators. Raymond F. has for several years been principal of the Rees School in Spanish Fork. Jesse G. has been principal of the Peteetneet School in Payson for seven years. Dan W., the youngest son, after several administrative assignments, was named Superintendent of Schools of Alpine School District two years ago.

Harry C. and M. Dale are salesmen. Harry resides in Lehi and M. Dale in Provo, Utah. Scott Bensen, her "adopted" son is now and M.D. And practices in Saint Joseph, Missouri.

After the death of her husband in 1940, Martha continues to manage her small raspberry and currant orchard. That same year she became the society editor for the Pleasant Grove Review. This position she held until the first of February, 1961, until after her eighty-second birthday. In addition to soliciting subscriptions when the Review first moved to Pleasant Grove from American Fork, she has written her news releases and never missed a deadline in twenty years.

During the years she served as reported she has called on her many friends in the community to help them write and report the important happenings in their lives. The stories of socials, parties, births, deaths, and marriages have become more vivid as they have been put into words by Martha. She has written thousands of columns of home-town news for the subscribers to the Review.

Martha has always been an active participant in the activities of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. While a young girl, she started to attend Sunday School and Mutual. She served for ten years as president of the Young Women's Mutual Improvement Association and is still affectionately respected and oft times visited by "her girls." She was a "religious class" teacher. For many years she was a counselor in the Primary Association. She was a class leader and a secretary of the Second Ward Relief Society, and for over thirty years she has been a Relief Society Visiting Teacher.

Martha Larson Peterson started to live her eighty-third year on December 7, 1960. She enters this year full of anticipation and hope. Her health is not as good as it used to be, but her intellect is as keen and her outlook toward life is ever upward.

To help her enjoy her remaining years, in addition to her children, are five lovely daughters-in-law and a son-in-law. In addition, twenty young men and women call her grandmother, and great-grandchildren are fast joining the parade of visitors to her home.