MARY ELIZA HANCEY METCALF

Information furnished by her family.

Mary Eliza Hancey was born 1 Feb. 1862. She was the 4th child, the first daughter, born to James Hancey and his first wife Rachel Seamons Hancey. James and Rachel left their native land of England in the spring of 1856 to join the Saints in Utah. They stayed in the New Jersey area for 3 years before joining the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to cross the plains and come to Utah. They arrived in Hyde Park, Utah Sept. 1860, and were among the early settlers of this community. Mary Eliza was their first child born in Hyde Park.

Maggie Irene, a daughter of Mary Eliza, writes the following about the James and Rachel Hancey house: “I remember the home of my Grandparents very vividly as we visited there many times in my childhood. It was a big house with a dirt roof, with 2 large rooms and a frame lean-to on the back with 2 small bedrooms. There was a large fireplace on the west of the kitchen including a built-in oven and the large black pots for cooking. I don’t recall them living any place else in Hyde Park.”

Mary Eliza, being the oldest daughter in a family of 11 children, would have responsibility of caring for babies and helping with the household tasks. However, not only did the early pioneers band together to build the community, but they joined together for social activities—dancing, singing, etc. Hyde Park had a band as early as 1866, so music was a part of most get-togethers. The first school house was built in Hyde Park in 1863, so Mary Eliza probably attended school at some time. She was baptized a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on 11 June 1871 by Robert Daines, and confirmed the same day by Simpson M. Molen. The baptism, no doubt, took place in the canal that ran through the lot where they lived, as that was where most of the baptisms took place in the early days.

On 8 July 1880, Mary Eliza was married to William David Metcalf in the Endowment House in Salt Lake City. The story is told of how William David met Mary Eliza. He and some other men were logging trees up Logan Canyon when he had an accident and cut his foot quite badly. In fact, the axe blade had severed all but his big toe on one foot. The men working with him, cared for him as best they could, then put him on a horse and took him to Hyde Park to Dr. James Hancey. While William David was lying on the table in Dr. Hancey’s home and he was caring for him, William David looked up into the beautiful brown eyes of Dr. Hancey’s oldest daughter, Mary Eliza, who was there giving what assistance she could. William David knew then that she was the one he wanted to marry.

William David and Mary Eliza settled in Hyde Park. He engaged in freighting operations and also in contract work in railroad construction, in which he continued for a period of time. 3 children were born to them while living in Hyde Park, 2 of them lived to maturity. They moved from Hyde Park to Battle Creek, now known as Bear River City, and then to the Metcalf farm in Malad City, Idaho. Here their 3rd child, 7 month old Millie Florence died. In the spring of 1886, William David moved his wife and family to a homestead of 160 acres 8 miles northeast of Idaho Falls, Idaho, later known as Iona.

At this point in time, Idaho was still a territory and included all of present-day Idaho, as well as part of Montana and Wyoming. Southeastern Idaho was then just a veritable waste land of sagebrush and lava rock. Others were homesteading the area of Iona, so the Metcalf family had neighbors and friends. William David had not completed the 2 room log house when they first moved there, so they lived in a covered wagon for sometime. When completed, the log...
house was a small 2 room cabin, with a little shanty lean-to built on the back. In the summertime, this shanty was used as a kitchen, and in the winter time, the older boys used it as a bedroom.

While living in Iona, 7 more children were added to the family. They are the parents of 10 children, 5 daughters and 5 sons. They sustained their large family on the farm they had cleared of sagebrush. Their experiences were varied and rich with their many activities in the new community. The Pioneer life might be described by the description of the painting of the “Homesteader” which hung in the Idaho Falls Temple for several years. “The man is plowing with his team and a hand plow. He has stopped ready to turn across the end. While he stops, one horse nibbles the grass. Off in the rear is the homestead cabin and his wife is coming with a drink. Their smiles of love, unity and appreciation present a perfect picture of happiness.

The fact that Mary Eliza was such a good nurse may have helped the family withstand the rigors of the severely cold Idaho winters. The log house was always open to friends and the many travelers through the area.

William David was always actively involved in the improvement and development of the area and working for the betterment of the community. He was a constable, a deputy sheriff, and helped lead a posse in the hunting of Hugh Whitney and other infamous bandits in the early days of Idaho. While William David was involved in these activities, Mary Eliza was home cooking meals and caring for the children. Life was very difficult on the farm. They had to make all the bread, make the soap, make the clothing, grow a garden, and in between, help with the farm chores. Life wasn’t easy, but she performed well. Mary Eliza was a home loving sweet soul. She had a keen sense of humor which enabled her to contribute to the living and loving of all who knew her.

Mary Eliza served as a nurse for friends and family on many occasions. She even delivered a baby for her daughter-in-law, Alice (Jess’s wife) because the doctor didn’t get there in time. She also helped prepare bodies of deceased friends and neighbors for burial. No doubt, she learned many of these skills working with her father, as he served the Cache Valley area in Utah as doctor as well as undertaker, including building the coffins.

A summer outing for the Metcalf family would be to go by horse and buggy to Heise, or to Black Canyon. The men would go fishing and the girls would pick berries. They would return with enough fish and berries to last them several weeks. The family also loved to go to the circus. William David grew quite a large acreage of sugar beets, and would literally bribe his children into thinning and weeding the beet fields. If they could get the job done in time, then the whole family could go to the circus in Idaho Falls. They would leave home at daybreak, enjoy a picnic lunch on the banks of the mighty Snake River, and be ready for the circus. One time, some elephants from the circus got loose and went for a swim in the river. This caused quite a commotion, and people were treated to an unexpected and unrehearsed bit of entertainment.

Mary Eliza was devoted to her family and helped them whenever needed. Her daughter, Maggie Irene, with her new-born baby girl, came to live with her parents in 1903 after her husband died. She went to work whenever possible, and the baby was cared for by Mary Eliza and her family

In 1917 William David and Mary Eliza rented their farm to their son Jesse. They moved back into their little log house so Jesse and his wife Alice could have a new home. It was probably difficult for Mary Eliza to make this change, but she never complained. She was
always willing to help the family. This was World War I time, and the farmers got good prices for the farm products. Son, Jesse was able pay the $3,000 mortgage on the farm and get his parents out of debt. A few years before William David’s death on 7 Jan. 1918 he filed for squatter’s rights on a parcel of land on Hell Creek, near Bone, Idaho. He built a one room log cabin there, but did not do much more with the land before he suffered a sudden heart attack and died. After his funeral, Mary Eliza took Carl, their youngest son, and lived on the land for 2 or 3 summers to “prove up” on the place. This was a good investment, and it was just a few days before she died in the hospital that Mary Eliza signed the papers selling the Hell Creek Homestead to a family named Haroldsen.

Mary Eliza’s family were thoughtful and tried to make life enjoyable for her after William David died. She lived an additional 8 years, but suffered a stroke and died on 18 March 1926 in the hospital in Idaho Falls.

Following are some comments made by family members regarding Mary Eliza:

The Post Register of Idaho Falls, Idaho, interviewed Ida Metcalf Webb on 27 Nov. 1986. She was the only living child of Mary Eliza and she remembered Thanksgiving Day gatherings of her youth and reported the following: “On Thanksgiving Day, our family ate duck more often than turkey. Our home was on the banks of a canal, and mother kept a flock of ducks, which I often looked after and thought of as pets. It was “foul” Thanksgiving Day for the ducks and woeful for me as 6 or 8 of the pets were sacrificed for the family palates; and their feathers were later stuffed into pillow casings. Despite seeing my friendly duck on the dinner table, I never lost my appetite. Preparations for the Thanksgiving meal began at 6 a.m. and dinner was on the table by 3 p.m. While the women worked in the kitchen, the men did the outside chores.

Accompanying the duck for dinner was a batch of plum pudding, which was called “Aunt Liza’s plum pudding”. It was made in a cloth bag and cooked in a large kettle over an open fire. There was always a little extra for family and friends. When only the skeletons of the ducks remained, and the dishes were washed, the family sat down to a game of rummy. There were always just a little uncomfortable—of course, they had eaten too much.

A daughter-in-law, Alice Freeman Metcalf (Jess’s wife) writes the following about Mary Eliza: “Grandma Metcalf was a patient, good woman and she helped me a lot. After Grandpa died, she ate her main meal with us, and we left the children with her quite often. I will always be grateful to her. She taught me how to make quilts, to make soap, and how to crochet. She came over and peeled potatoes and did other chores as I always had men to cook for, and lots of company, so I had lots of cooking to do.

A granddaughter, Sylvia Smith Baker, writes her memories: “I was with my mother (Maggie Irene) visiting my Grandma Metcalf. As nearly as I can remember, Grandpa was not there, so it must have been after he died. It was about time for her to do the evening chores. The sky got awfully black and it almost seemed to be dark in the little log house where mother and grandmother sat visiting. Soon there was a terrible noise outside like someone pelting the house with rocks. Grandma seemed frightened, but did not go out to see what was wrong. Soon the noise stopped and she opened the door to see a deep layer of huge hailstones covering the ground.

“Another time I remember Grandma Metcalf came to Burley to visit for a few days. Mother asked us girls to empty the old straw out of the straw tick and put in new, fresh straw. This we did, and we filled the tick so full, and it was so high, that when night came and Grandma was ready to go to bed, she had to crawl up on a chair to make herself tall enough to crawl into bed. She was such a tiny woman. I remember standing in the hallway laughing because it was so
funny to see her crawling up into bed from the chair.

“I also remember the big orchard Grandpa and Grandma Metcalf had. I used to love to go out in the summer time and sit under the trees and enjoy the good fruit.”

Another Granddaughter, Marie Bailey Warren, writes:

“I remember the winter I stayed with Grandma and Grandpa Metcalf we were snowed in so long we played a lot of games. I enjoyed it a lot. I’ve tried for years to remember how to play some of those games, but never have. I remember knitting in the evenings. I would get so bored and complain “nothing ever happens around here.” Grandma would say “that’s the difference between the young and the old. The young always wish something would happen, and the old always afraid it would.”

Typed into computer 16 Oct. 2002 by Kathleen Jardine Woolf Idaho Falls, Idaho
Information taken from the book JAMES HANCEY AND HIS FAMILY. Good pictures and a family chart are in all of the histories. Thanks to the many people that did all the hard work on the histories to get them in the book.