ORILLA WOOLF TANNER
1885-1919

Orilla Woolf Tanner was one of those rare individuals who was the kind of teacher loved by everyone, young and old alike. In a tribute to her by her bishop and 9 of her friends after her death, this trait was most mentioned. She radiated love to everyone. This is indicated by a petition to her from one of her early schools. It is signed by 23 children (with 6 different surnames) asking her to return the following year. The petition reads as follows: “Dear Miss Woolfe, (sic) We the undersigned (your little pupils) regret to hear that you intend to resign, and leave us after the summer vacation. We would humble petition you to remain with us if possible, as we all love you, and will be so grieved if you leave us.” The letter was dated 30 April 1907, from Orton, Alberta.

From the time of her birth, her life was one of sharing. She was born in Riverdale, Idaho, 21 Nov. 1885, the 3rd child and 2nd daughter of Homer and Loila Bates Woolf. The family maintained residence in the small community of Riverdale on the Bear River for 10 years. Orilla’s father left for a mission to Virginia in the Southern States Mission in 1887. This left Loila with 3 small children to care for. She managed by taking in the local school teacher as a boarder, milking making butter and all the other things that went with a frontier farm. In this way she cared for her children and kept her husband on a mission.

Cousin Orilla Ashcroft and her husband lived very near, and little Orilla dearly loved to toddle over to their place. Orilla’s mother, being very busy, had to struggle to keep her at home. She discovered that Orilla was very frightened of a feather, so she would place a feather in the door, and Orilla didn’t dare pass it.

In 1894, Homer and Loila decided to migrate to Canada. They left in May and arrived in the latter part of June, after a journey of 6 weeks on the road. Orilla’s older sister, Sarah, just 10 years old, drove a pair of mules on a democrat all the way. 8 years old rode with her most of the way, crossing rivers, rough roads and driving through Indian territory.

Robert Reeder, a man traveling in the company with them, broke his leg and wanted to ride in the democrat with the girls, where it wouldn’t be so rough. The girls made him pay them a dollar before they would have him.

Sarah and Orilla slept in a covered wagon at night. Their father always put a big dog in the wagon with them, knowing the dog would bark if anyone tried to molest them. One night the dog barked furiously. Their father got up and found 2 drunken men out there. He finally had to threaten them with a gun to get rid of them.

Orilla’s father homesteaded about 10 miles south of Cardston, which made it necessary for Orilla to stay with her grandmother and an aunt to get her schooling. She later went to normal school in Calgary and got her teaching certificate. She taught school in Ordon, Cardston, and later in Hill Spring, after she was married.

Orilla was courted by John Sidney Tanner, a returned missionary, who had purchased land on the Belly River at Hill Spring. He would ride a saddle horse 20 miles across the Blood Indian Reservation to see her. In the spring, when the river was in flood, he often had to swim his horse across the river. They were married in the Logan Temple 15 July 1908. They moved a couple of granaries together and made their home in a beautiful setting on the Belly River. They later acquired a lovely 2 story frame house in Hill Spring.
The Tanner home was always the epitome of hospitality; at times, the place seemed more like the town hotel. Orilla always boarded the local school teachers, one of whom was Nathan Eldon Tanner.

Sidney and Orilla had 3 children, one of whom was stillborn. The other 2 were LaVoir Sidney Tanner, born 18 April 1909, and George Woolf Tanner, born 5 April 1919.

A great flu epidemic was in progress in 1919, and with complications of the flu and childbirth, Orilla passed away just 9 days after the second child was born 14 April 1919.

Orilla had held many positions in the Church, both ward and stake. She taught in Primary and in Sunday School. She was a counselor in the Stake YWMIA, and president of the YWMIA at Hill Spring for years.

She was a very capable person and loved by all. She often entertained friends and Church authorities in her home, no matter how humble.

She wrote some poetry, and inspired her friends to do the same. Some of her close friends wrote a little verse when they paid tribute to her. These were given to her sons at her death.

TRIBUTES TO THE MEMORY OF SISTER ORILLA TANNER BY HER FRIENDS

She was an example to us by her devotion to duty in her home, in the gospel, in her school and in the love she had for her children—the boys and girls of our ward. Those knowing the condition under which she performed her duty to her God, to her church and to her country, by complying with the First Great Commandment of the Lord will say with me, “She was an example to the daughters of Zion, and of our Dominion. Her obedience and loyalty to her parents, her husband, the priesthood and all religious and civil authority has brought her to the noble life she had lived, honored, loved and respected by all, and insures her an eternal life in Our Father’s Kingdom.”

Everyone who knew her loved her, for she was a friend to all and ready for every need. Her dominant trait was that of devotion to duty; wherever she was called she gladly responded, for she was a true daughter, wife, mother, and friend. All who knew her were better for associating with her—A truer, nobler, more trusted heart, more loving or more loyal, never beat with a human breast.”

May our Heavenly Father bless her memory to our growth and development.

Bishop F. P. Fisher

I admired Sister Tanner for the smile and pleasant greeting she had for everyone. If she could leave with all of us that one trait. Oh, how much brighter the world would be.

Helena Allred

I think of Sister Orilla Tanner as a true wife and a fond and wise mother and faithful friend.

M. A. Davies

Each day she took a little sadness from the world’s vast store,
    Each day made of joys too scanty sum a little more.
And at eve she could to her conscience say—
    “The world is better that I lived today.”
Mary L. Grow

I am thankful for the opportunity of paying a tribute of appreciation to my friend, our beloved Sister Tanner.

We, and our children, are better for her having lived and taught us for so many years. Her work is her greatest monument.

Ethel Smith

For all that she has been to me
Of love and joy and melody
I will be patient, brave and true
With hope and friendship to renew.

Clara Smith

George W. Tanner, Son

Typed into the computer by Kathleen Jardine Woolf 29 Oct. 2002 Idaho Falls, Idaho
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