

*A life sketch of*

# Eliza Thornton Homer

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1842 – 1873

(Wife of Russell King Homer)

My mother Eliza Thornton was born January 8, 1842, at Drighlington, Yorkshire, England. She was the daughter of William and Mary Hepworth Thornton. The house in which she and her ancestors were born stands on the outskirts of the city near a small lake. It is called Moorend house and the Thorntons had lived there for more than 300 years. At this writing, 1942, one of our cousins, Charles Thornton is living there. He is an employee of the Post Office in the City of Bradford.



Mother's father, William Thornton, was the son of Jeremiah Thornton and Mary Day. They lived at Moorend house in Drighlington. Her mother, Mary Hepworth Thornton, was the daughter of Richard and Hannah Wilkinson Hepworth, of Overton Yorkshire. Their home was called Lunn Hall.

Mother's parents William Thornton and Mary Hepworth were married in the church at Drighlington and were the parents of eleven children of which mother was the fifth child.

Grandfather was a music teacher and a musician. He led the church choir and also played the lead violin in an orchestra. Besides his music he was a carter. On certain days each week he drove a horse and cart around a regular route delivering parcels much as our parcel postmen do in this country. I remember Grandfather telling me how Mother as a little girl used to be at the street corner to meet him every evening as he returned home.

When mother was eight years of age her parents were converted to the gospel by The Latter-

day Saint missionaries. They decided to leave their home in England and come to the headquarters of the Church in Salt Lake City. This decision naturally effected a great change in their lives. Up to that time they had attended the Church of England, in their city where Grandfather led the choir and Mother and Uncle Charley sang in the choir. Soon after they became members of the new Church, Grandfather was called on to help the missionaries by preaching and singing in the city at street meetings. They would sing hymns until a crowd gathered and then begin preaching. Mother always went with them. Being a pretty little girl with a good singing voice, she proved to be quite an attraction.

When Grandfather resigned from his work with the choir in the Church of England, the congregation was very much concerned. They proposed to raise money through the church and the community to offer him and his family two years on the continent to study music if he would promise to stay and continue his work with the choir. He refused this offer, telling them that he had decided to leave the Old Country and come to America as soon as he could get away. Their relatives and friends were greatly dismayed when they found that no persuasion could change their determination to leave for America.

There were many tales going around about the wild animals, Indians and Mormons in the western United States and the danger of living among them. It was necessary to make the trip across the Atlantic in a sailing vessel, but this fact and all of the other hazards in the unknown country did not daunt them from their purpose. Their friends and relatives began to forsake them.

Grandfather's old parents were living in the home at Moorend. They were heartbroken and promised to give him the home and everything they possessed if he would stay and raise his family in that country. His music students began to fail him and he lost his job as a carter and was obliged to go to work in the coal mines. The family moved into a small apartment and dismissed the maid who had served them for years. Everyone who was able to do anything went to work at any kind of a job he could get. They all worked, saved, and made every sacrifice to get enough money to pay their expenses to Utah.

Grandmother's people were upset in the same way and made great protestations against her coming to Utah. Her brother, Joseph Hepworth, was also converted to the church and decided to come with them, so her parents were more reconciled to her leaving. Within five years after they had joined the Church they had saved enough money to pay passage for the parents and seven children to New York and made ready to leave.

Their eldest daughter Hannah was married and did not come with them. Also their eldest son Richard stayed in England. He was engaged to his childhood sweetheart and had a good job (Bookkeeper for the Farnley Iron Works), and intended to come later, but did not do so.

When they were ready to depart they decided it would be easier to get away quietly without bidding their friends good bye. In the evening Grandmother and the children started to walk three and one half miles to Bradford where they would catch the early morning train for Liverpool. Uncle Richard went along with her to carry the baby. Grandfather went by way of his old parents to tell them good bye. His grandparents (Thomas Thornton and Hanna Newton) were also living but very feeble. When Grandmother and the children arrived at the station about three o'clock in the morning they were greatly surprised to find quite a number of their relatives and friends there to see them off.

Grandfather did not arrive until just as the train was ready to pull out. He had had a most trying experience; that of telling his old parents and grandparents good bye knowing full well that he would not see them again. When he saw his brothers and friends there he was so overcome by grief that he collapsed and could not speak. He got into a seat on the train and managed to wave his hand as the train pulled away.

When I heard him relate this experience I marveled at the will power and determination it must have taken to go through with it.

They took passage on the sailing ship "William Stetson" for New York. Some of their fellow

passengers were a group of Saints and returning Elders also journeying to Utah.

They, together with this group of Saints, were in the steerage of the boat. It was extremely crowded, the food and accommodations were very poor. Nearly everyone in that part of the vessel, including the Thornton family, were seasick with the exception of mother; so it fell to her lot to take care of many who were sick all the way. Her mother and baby sister were especially affected by the sea, and it was very difficult for mother to care for them. They were ten weeks on the sea, during which time they experienced fierce storms. In one storm they were driven backward for two days. They were lost for a time in the fog off the banks of Newfoundland, and barely escaped colliding with an iceberg. The baby continued to be desperately ill.

They were fearful that she would die and have to be buried in the sea. She lived until they were in quarantine on Ellis Island in New York where she died. The quarantine officers took her dead body away, and that was the last our folks ever knew of her.

Upon their arrival in New York, it was necessary for them to set about earning money to bring them the rest of the way to Utah. Grandfather and the boys procured employment from a farmer on Long Island. Here for the first time they experienced general farm work such as the handling of horses, milking cows, planting and caring for crops. They began to save money immediately, and soon decided to send one of the boys, Uncle Charlie, on ahead to prepare the way for them to come to Utah. He traveled to Iowa by train. There he got a job driving oxen for an emigrant train, and in that way made his way to Ogden, Utah where he immediately went to work and got a place ready for his folks to come to.

In the spring of 1860, they were ready to come west. They came to Iowa by train. They there joined up with a wagon train for the rest of the journey to Utah. The rule of this company was that the wagons would haul their food, supplies, and small chattels, but the emigrants must walk. Mother was one of the older children in the family, so in addition to walking all the way herself, she had to assist her father in all of the extraordinary duties that came along; these duties included carrying some of the smaller children a great deal of the way. They walked over

all kinds of country, "roads or no roads," and waded all the streams that it was possible to wade. Her shoes wore out, so she had to wrap her feet in any old rag she could find, and that would often be wet with blood from her sore and bruised feet when she took it off in the evening. One of her duties was that toward evening each day, she would gather buffalo chips in her apron for the evening fire. She did this until the front of her skirt wore completely out and would not hold them. Then she turned it around and used the other side. In addition to all this, she still found time to help the others of the company who were sick, weary, or overburdened for any reason.

The space of this history does not permit full details of this long and arduous journey which would in itself make quite an epic; but it was a heroic undertaking, which they finally successfully completed when they arrived in Salt Lake City. The family located in Sugarhouse. There were two miles of sagebrush lying between them and the center of town. Grandfather Thornton later said concerning his journey, "Through it all, I hoped that the folks in England did not know anything about what we were going through. I tried to tell them that everything was all right and we had all we needed, when the Lord only knew how badly off we really were."

Not long after the family arrived at Sugarhouse, my mother, Eliza, met and married my father, Russell King Homer, who was at that time living in Salt Lake. He built her a home in the Seventh Ward at the corner of Fifth South and First West. The house is still standing and in good condition.

She lived there a few years. While living in Salt Lake City, mother's first three children were born: Marinda, born January 18, 1861; Joshua, born February 5, 1863; Sarah, born April 28, 1865.

When father began pioneering in Cache Valley, he sold mother's home in Salt Lake City and took her to Smithfield where he built her another home and planted a nursery. Father then acquired some land in Box Elder County just south of Brigham City at what is known as "3-Mile Creek," where he built mother another home. Meanwhile, Father had married Mary Anderson.

Soon after mother moved to 3 -Mile Creek, Mary Anderson Homer died, leaving three small daughters— Esther, Delania, and Ginnie, aged 1,3, and 5. Mother took Ginnie and Lanie to live with her. She received them kindly, and in every way made them welcome. I have often heard them say how happy they were with her, and what a kindly, loving mother she was to them. They lived with mother for several years. Delania was of a naturally cheerful and happy disposition, so she was really contented. Ginnie was more nervous and high strung, so father often took her with him as he traveled back and forth between there and mother Homer's place in Salt Lake. In 3-Mile Creek they built an adobe house. They broke up a few acres of land which they fenced and planted to vegetables, sugar cane, and wheat.

Mother experienced the life of the typical western pioneer of this region. There were other settlers in that vicinity. Soon friendships ripened which provided relief from the loneliness and the hardships that were endured. Both men and women got together in most of their endeavors and worked out their problems together. The women had sewing bees, quilting bees, and on other occasions where common effort would provide for companionship and profit to each other, such as drying corn or fruit, or boiling molasses from the sugar cane; these activities carried on in collaboration with each other. The men also made community work out of everything possible— getting logs, building houses and outbuildings, and other activities of that nature. This provided not only pleasant social contact and companionship, but also a protection from the Indians which were present in that area and much feared by everyone. They also had to contend with many different kinds of pests such as crickets and grasshoppers. There were also plenty of snakes, flies, and mosquitoes.

These very hardships, however, seemed to knit the people together, so that there was a feeling of oneness among them; everyone shared each other's joys and sorrows, work, and recreation. Whenever they gathered for any purpose— pleasure, worship, or work—everyone tried to be there, and if they failed, it was a matter of common concern to immediately find out the trouble and see that all were together.

In this pioneer life, it was necessary for everyone to keep busy most of the time. Even the

children always had their numerous duties to perform, one of the main ones being to keep the grasshoppers off the grain. This was done by means of a rag tied to a switch by which they had to be constantly shooing them off the grain as it was ripening. A rag or any kind of cloth was a rather scarce article. The ground was hot and dry; children always went barefoot.

In connection with shooing grasshoppers, one incident will long be remembered by those who were present. Father was trying to keep the children busy shooing 'hoppers when Ginnie fell in the spring. Her sister Lanie in trying to save her grabbed her foot and hung onto it in spite of the fact that it held Ginnie's head down in the water. Her brother Josh ran around to the other side of the spring and caught her hair, both of them pulling on her with all their might in opposite directions until Father came to the rescue.

Upon another such occasion when the children were all hot and tired shooing 'hoppers with every rag that could be found, some of the family came from Salt Lake and brought our brother King. He was a city boy all spick and span in a new linen duster. Promptly all hands gathered around to admire and try on that wonderful duster. Father seeing that all had stopped work and that the grain was covered with 'hoppers shouted, "King take that damn thing off and go to shooing 'hoppers with it." To the dismay of all concerned. King promptly went to shooing 'hoppers with that brand new duster.

Two more of mother's children were born at 3-Mile Creek: Sister Rebecca Homer Costley was born January 11, 1868, and the writer, Rachel Maretta Homer Crockett was born April 15, 1870. Father then moved mother and our family to a place on Bear River called "Packer's Bridge" near where the town of Preston now stands. He had taken up a cattle ranch there and they took up dairying. Father hauled the butter and cheese to Salt Lake to market. It took him two weeks to make the trip. On such trips, he brought back flour and material for clothing and other necessary provisions for the family. Mother's two brothers, Uncles Hyrum and Billy Thornton, were with her a good deal of the time. They worked for father and helped to run this dairy ranch. Uncle Billy was a famous hunter. There was lots of wild game—deer, chickens, and ducks. He kept the family well supplied with such things, and also with plenty of fish.

During the winter time, mother and her family moved to Swan Lake where it was possible to send the older children to school. January 24, 1873, my youngest brother, David Homer, was born. There was not a doctor to be had, so mother was attended only by a mid-wife, and while the baby got along all right, she developed pneumonia and died. It was a real tragedy up in that cold country to leave a small month-old baby and five other motherless children. Her own mother had been buried in Smithfield, so father determined to take her there for burial. The neighbors gave all the help they could. James McGavin, Uncle Billy's lifetime friend, made her a coffin out of a wagon box, the only lumber available there at the time. They used a home-made sled to transport the coffin, which required two teams of horses to pull because, at that time of year, there was no road over the deep and drifted snow. They had a very difficult trip crossing the rivers on ice. It took them a week to get to Smithfield. They drove a bunch of loose horses on ahead to break a trail.

Mother was just 31 years old when she died. Although her life was short, it was full of experiences. Considering the circumstance of her birth in England in the house where her ancestors had lived for generations with no thought of ever leaving there, it is quite different than one might have expected for her. Although after leaving England, she had quite a trying life, she never revealed that she ever felt hard or bitter or had any regrets about it. She kept cheerful and made the best of every circumstance in which she found herself. She had given up her home and country for the Gospel. It was her thought that it was worth every sacrifice. She was a patient wife and a devoted mother. Her nature was kindly and charitable, and she was tolerant of other people's weaknesses to the last degree. She was of a deeply religious nature, the main joy of her life centered around taking part in Church activities. Her principal objective, so far as her children were concerned, was to teach them to love and serve the Lord, which she did faithfully unto the end of her life.

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*This Life Sketch of Eliza Thornton Homer was written by her daughter, Rachel Maretta Homer Crockett.*