

A life sketch of

John Stevenson McMurray

(1865 – 1909)

and

Clara Drucilla Hymas McMurray

(1872 – 1901)

Compiled by Karla Knapp Oswald – great granddaughter of
John Stevenson and Clara Drucilla Hymas McMurray.

John Stevenson McMurray was born March 6, 1865, in Grantsville, Tooele, Utah. His parents were James Hutton and Elizabeth Stevenson McMurray.¹ The family was engaged in farming and raising stock.²

In the spring of 1879, the McMurray family was called by church leaders to help colonize the Bear Lake Valley in Idaho. The family moved from Grantsville and settled in the small town of Liberty, Bear Lake County, Idaho.³

The family was active in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and quickly became a vital part of the Church and community at Liberty. John was baptized and confirmed a member of the Church on September 14, 1873.¹

John's young days were busy with lots of chores and hard work helping his family with their livestock and farming. John also attended school, church meetings and community activities. John learned to play the accordion and loved to read.^{4,5}



John Stevenson
McMurray

The John Hymas family was neighbors to the McMurray family. At a young age John became attracted to their daughter, Clara. John and Clara became best friends.⁴

Clara Drucilla Hymas was born May 8, 1872 at Liberty, Bear Lake, Idaho. She was the daughter of John Atkins and Mary Ann Pitman Hymas.¹



Clara Drucilla
Hymas McMurray

When Clara was six, her mother passed away two weeks after the birth of her baby brother. This was a very difficult challenge for her father and his ten children. When Clara's father married Mary Jane Watkins on October 24, 1878,¹ the family was grateful for a mother figure in their home once again. They grew to love her and eventually welcomed more

brothers and sisters into their family.¹

Clara was baptized and confirmed a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on July 25, 1880.¹

As John and Clara grew older, their friendship deepened and so did their dream of being together forever. John and Clara were married April 9, 1891 in the Logan Temple at Logan, Cache, Utah.¹ The McMurrays moved into their first home, which was at Sharon, Bear Lake, Idaho.⁵

Days after their marriage, Clara said goodbye to John as he left to serve as a missionary for the Church in the British Mission. He and the other British bound missionaries traveled east and boarded the steamship 'Wisconsin', which arrived at Liverpool, England on May 7, 1891. John was given the assignment to be a traveling elder in the Sheffield Conference.⁶ A few months later John became ill and returned from his mission to Liberty.⁵

John and Clara worked hard as they began their lives together. John bought a corner lot from his father and with the help of his older brother built a two-room house for his bride at Liberty, Bear Lake, Idaho.⁵ John continued work on the dry farm and cared for their horses, cattle, and pigs. Clara used her talents to stretch their meager means.⁵

John and Clara became the parents of seven children: They were: Tessa born April 9, 1892 at Sharon, Bear Lake, Idaho⁵ and then Lydia born December 22, 1893; Leone born June 23, 1896 who passed away July 5, 1896; Della born June 7, 1897; twins Ray and Rhea born July 10, 1899; and Arbie born March 26, 1901 - all at Liberty, Bear Lake, Idaho.¹ A third room was added on to their home to help accommodate the growth.⁵

John and Clara's daughter, Lydia, wrote:

"My parents were very poor, but I often heard it said that they were the most loved, congenial, contented couple to be found anywhere. Our home was just three rooms, built upon a hill with no shade and very little grass around it.

We always had a good garden and some raspberry and currant bushes; we seldom tasted any other fruit.

Our house was built of boards about an inch thick and a foot and a half-wide, placed straight up and down on the outside with narrow boards nailed over the cracks. On the inside, the same kinds of boards were nailed crosswise, and a plaster like material called factory was pasted over the cracks. The space between was filled with dirt. The inside was whitewashed with lime and always looked and smelled clean. Steps going up the outside of the house reached a room in the attic, and there was father's workshop and grainary. We had a woven rag carpet on part of the floor and the rest was bare boards. A coal oil lamp, wood burning stove, a bench holding a water bucket and a tin cup, an outside toilet and tin wash tub were all the conveniences we had."⁷

John and Clara's daughter Tessa wrote:



John and Clara McMurray home at Liberty, Bear Lake, Idaho. (Front view)



John and Clara McMurray home at Liberty, Bear Lake, Idaho. (Back view)

“We were poor. How I used to wish we could have a rope swing, but that was a luxury.”

There was never extra, but there was always love in this McMurray home.

John and Clara taught their children hard work ethics and necessary life skills, which would prove to be critically important lessons needed in their near future.

In September 1901, Clara became very ill and was diagnosed with Typhoid Fever.⁵ Typhoid fever is an infectious bacterial fever with an eruption of red spots on the chest and abdomen and severe intestinal irritation.* In Clara’s life time there was no successful cure. Some survived and some did not. Neighbor ladies came to help care for Clara and the youngest children. For three long months Clara was bedridden.⁵

Clara’s daughter Rhea said:

“They starved (her) to death. That is just what they did with typhoid fever. They let them starve to death. And water...they didn’t give them any liquid. They took everything away from them...starve a fever, feed a cold...no wonder they died.”⁸

Lydia remembered that her father tried to attend to Clara’s every need. For the three months she was sick, he did not have his clothes off except for a bath. He stayed night and day with her.⁴ On December 23, 1901, only one day after her daughter Lydia’s eighth birthday, and just one day before Christmas, Clara passed away in her home at Liberty.¹

Lydia wrote:

“I can never forget that Christmas, as her body had to be prepared for burial and kept in the house until time of burial. Sad as it was, old Santa found us and brought gifts for each child. How could a husband and father endure this?

The funeral was held December 26th, and what a day. The worst blizzard one could imagine, so much snow and wind we could hardly find our way to the tiny one room building, which was used for both school and church services. I can never forget when we went home from the funeral to a cold house. In those days we did not have furnace-heated homes, not even coal to burn, just wood fires in the kitchen range. The house was so cold and the wind just moaned as it came down the stovepipe and in the

keyholes. It sounded so sad, we children started to cry and even today I hear the moaning sound when the wind blows. Poor father finally got the fire going and fixed us something to eat, which none of us wanted.”⁷

Tessa remembered:

“That was a sad Christmas, but a good neighbor came as Santa and left money, oranges, apples and candy in stockings on our kitchen table.”⁵

The passing of his childhood sweetheart left John broken hearted. It was a bleak situation for the entire family. John now worked extra hard to earn money for food, clothes and other needs. He tried to manage their home and keep the children cared for and together. The older girls traded school time so they could take care of things at home. John made them a wooden stool so they could reach to do the dishes. They learned to make bread, do the washing, tend the smaller children, and were also expected to do the milking, help with the crops and feed and care for the animals. Clara had just gotten an new ‘Montgomery’ sewing machine. Her oldest daughter, Tessa, taught herself to use the machine and became the family seamstress.^{4, 5, 6}

John loved to read and had a great appreciation for books and learning. In the evenings, John often read to the children.⁴

Lydia remembered that:

“During the week, he would take each one of us and read our Sunday School lessons with us and ask us questions about it. I never ever remember going to Sunday School that he hadn’t read our Sunday School lessons with us. We would bring a book home sometimes—Father would never let us read it until he skimmed through it to see if it was right.”⁴

John and Clara’s granddaughter, Maxine Call Garner, wrote:

“My mother, Lydia, told us that she was grateful her father had taught her to seek and love good books. He told her she would always have a friend and would never be lonely if she kept and read good books. John had made good reading material for his

children. He required that they be very careful with their books. He taught them to glance at and remember the page numbers when their reading was halted rather than dog-ear the page to mark their place.”⁹

Lydia said:

“All was not sorrow and hard work, for we had the best father in the world; loving and kind and always so thoughtful of the needs of each child. He was very studious and studied much.”⁴

It was noted that if John had been given the opportunity to learn and study, he could have been a scholar. Some thought he would have been an excellent teacher.^{4, 8, 6}

Lydia also talked about her father’s horses:

“Father had such beautiful horses. Black horses. Work horses. He always took a lot of pride with his horses and always came home with his share of blue ribbons. He spent a lot of time with his horses.”⁴

Tessa said that she could remember how much he loved his horses and always wanted the best team around. She said that once he paid \$500.00 for a team of horses.⁵

John suffered with rheumatic fever for several years and at times had to use crutches to move around.⁵ Rheumatic fever is a noncontagious acute fever marked by inflammation and pain in the joints.* Lydia remembered when:

“He could only move on crutches. I remember him getting me up out of bed in the night—oh, so many times—and he would lie down on the floor and have me walk up and down his legs. I would get so tired. That seemed to ease them.”⁴

John could never get over his great loss and was never well after Clara died. Occasionally his children would wake up to find their father just coming in the door. He had walked in the dark hours to ‘visit Clara’ at the cemetery, which was a mile or so away, as the crow flies, and across the top of the hill.⁵

Seven years after they had buried their mother, the McMurray children woke one morning and found their world had drastically changed again.

John's daughter Della said:

"I remember, he (John) had just been down with Grandma and Grandpa McMurray to April Conference, and then they had come back. They had just been back a week or two and he seemed to be fine. Then I remember, he was sick and there in bed...I can still remember his face—so white through the whiskers. You know, he hadn't shaved for a couple of days...we were all sitting out there in that other room and he had been through there and said that he was sick and then he went back and got in bed."⁸

The next morning the children slept in and when they awoke they sensed something must be wrong.

Lydia recalled:

"He (John) went to bed this one night. He always came and called us in the morning. This one morning, we slept late and when we woke up, the sun was shining. Well, he let us sleep late this morning, what is the matter? So, we got up and went in his bedroom and he had passed away."⁴

On April 20, 1909, John passed away at his home at Liberty¹ from what was believed to be ongoing heart trouble.⁵ Those who knew him best said he died of a broken heart. John was buried April 24, 1909 in the Liberty Cemetery¹ next to his sweetheart Clara.

With very few earthly possessions, but the lasting love and example of their devoted parents, the McMurray children were sent to live with various family members where they could be taken care of.

Lydia shared memories of her father and wrote:

"Oh, I had just about the best father, I think, that ever lived on the earth. As I think of him now, the patience he had with us. He was wonderful. He was never cross. I only remember getting two spankings in my life, which maybe wasn't enough. But, I can't see now how he ever went through it (loosing Clara)...but he was certainly a kind father."⁴

Lydia also remembered that in the Liberty Ward they would put on plays that her father participated in, often having the lead role. One of the most popular performances being, 'That Rascal, Pat', which John played the main character. It was so popular they presented it several times.⁴

Tessa described her father and said:

"John was a rather small man, weighing 145 pounds. He had auburn hair and blue eyes. He was a farmer. He used to go into the canyon to cut wood logs to heat homes during the winter and to heat stoves for cooking. He also spent evenings solving math problems by the hour – he should have been a math teacher."⁵

Lydia said:

"Well, sometimes he would sing like 'Nellie Gray' and all that type of songs and then one time we coaxed him to play (his accordion). And, he would play the accordion and sob and cry. Oh, he would cry all the time while he played. He couldn't take it any longer... he reached into his pocket and got out his pocket knife and stuck it in that accordion and ripped the whole length of it, so he wouldn't have to play it anymore."⁴

When Clara passed away her oldest child was nine. Due to the young ages of her children they were left with few memories of their mother.

Tessa said of her mother:

"Clara weighed about 115 pounds and was slender and always proud of her 18 inch waist and had long, beautiful hair and blue eyes. Clara did all the sewing for herself and her family. She and a friend used to get together to plan and sew while the children played together. They had to make their own patterns and figured that two heads were better than one."⁵

Lydia remembered that her mother made them dolls from sewing rags. Lydia also said that her mother would draw and paint them pictures. Most of all, Lydia remembered that her mother loved them. Lydia wrote that at the time of her mother's funeral, which was held in the one-room, red school house, there was this spray of beautiful flowers drawn on the blackboard

with the saying, "To know her was to love her."⁴ This statement seems to be a fitting tribute to Clara.

John and Clara were dedicated to their community and worked hard to improve the harsh conditions found at that time in the Bear Lake Valley. They were faithful to their religious beliefs and served when and where they could as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

John and Clara's love and devotion to each other and their family is unmatched. Although their time on earth was short, their efforts to raise a good family became evident as their children grew to adulthood and became respected, honorable individuals. The admirable characters and goodness of John and Clara McMurray, and their children, will inspire and enrich the generations to follow.

Sources:

- 1 Family History Records in the possession of Karla Knapp Oswald. Dates, locations and other vital facts have been compared to and verified with records preserved within the FamilySearch data base maintained by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints available at FamilySearch.org.
- 2 *"Progressive Men of Bannock, Bear Lake, Bingham, Fremont and Oneida Counties,"* pp. 293-294, by A.W. Bowen & Co; Published 1904; Transcribed and submitted by Andrea Stawski Pack.
- 3 *"History of Bear Lake Pioneers,"* authors Dorothy Hardy Matthews, Edith Parker Haddock - Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, Bear Lake County, Idaho – 1968.
- 4 Lydia McMurray Call Childhood Memories – An audio recording of Lydia speaking with Clara M. Gold and Donna R. Call about her childhood memories - June 27, 1961. (The recording is in the possession of Jean Murdock Bethers and was transcribed by Lisa Toner Mackley). A copy of the transcription of this recording is in the possession of Karla Knapp Oswald.

Note: Lydia McMurray Call is a daughter of John Stevenson and Clara Drucilla Hymas McMurray.
- 5 Udy, Tessa McMurray – *"History of Tessa McMurray Udy,"* – written April, 1966. History was preserved by Tessa's daughter, Anne Udy Toner. A copy of the history is in the possession of Karla Knapp Oswald.

Note: Tessa McMurray Udy is a daughter of John Stevenson and Clara Drucilla Hymas McMurray.

- 6 The Latter-Day Saints, 'Millennial Star,' 18 May 1891 (pages 313-314 of document). A copy of the document is in the possession of Karla Knapp Oswald.
- 7 "The Autobiography of Lydia McMurray Call" - a copy of this history is in the possession of Karla Knapp Oswald.
- 8 Della McMurray Murdock and Rhea McMurray Wilde Childhood Memories - An audio recording with Della and Rhea speaking about their childhood memories - June 4, 1981. (The recording is in the possession Jean Murdock Bethers and was transcribed by Lisa Toner Mackley. A copy of the transcription of this recording is in the possession of Karla Knapp Oswald.

Note: Della McMurray Murdock and Rhea McMurray Wilde are daughters of John Stevenson and Clara Drucilla Hymas McMurray.

- 9 "Personal History of Maxine Call Garner". A copy of this history, written by Maxine Garner Call with additions made by her family members, is in the possession of Karla Knapp Oswald.

*Definition found at www.google.com

- July 2015