

Mary Jane Walker Pack

By Annie Pack Roberts

Digitized March 28, 2009. The original is in the possession of Gary H. Evans, great grandson of Mary Jane Walker and John Pack.

Mary Jane Walker (Pack), only daughter of James and Jane Shepherd Walker, was born at St. Heliers, chief city of Jersey Island, England, April 3, 1835. The father, James Walker, was a native of Cornwall, England, where he was born in 1789. The mother, Jane Shepherd, was born February 23, 1808, at Tavistock, Devonshire, England. Family tradition has it that the couple was married in England and later moved to St. Heliers. There was also a son, Frederick James, whose birthplace, however, is not known.

Jersey, the largest of the Channel Islands, is situated nearly 100 miles south of England and only fifteen miles from the west coast of France and belongs to Great Britain. St. Heliers, the seaport town in which the Walker family lived, lies at the south end of the island, where the inhabitants, for the most part, make a livelihood by sailing the seas or otherwise engaging in the substantial maritime trade for which the place was noted.

James Walker himself, was a seafaring man, being captain of an English merchant ship which plied its way from one foreign port to the other, and in those days of slow navigation, kept him absent from home, sometimes for years at a time. A short time before the child Jane was born, he left on a voyage to China, and she was five years old when he returned. During one of these brief visits home in 1842, he died after a short illness, and thereafter the little girl had few memories of her father save those of a big, kindly man who had visited them once in a while bringing with him gifts and precious things from far off countries.

After the death of her husband, the widowed mother and her children continued to reside in St. Heliers. The pension from the English government granted the family of James Walker for his years of faithful service on the high seas, was augmented by an income from other sources, and, in an atmosphere of peace and comfort, the two children thrived and grew. The mother, a strict, fastidious English woman, whose devotion to her children overshadowed every impulse of her life, gave herself over exclusively to rearing and educating them in the way she deemed best for their future happiness. The boy, always musically inclined, was given the best teachers obtainable, and the girl was sent to a young ladies' finishing school, where, among other things which her fond mother deemed necessary to her daughter's education, she was taught a smattering of the French language, taught to sew fine ruffles of lace, to putting dainty stitches into linens and household things, and, above all, to deport herself always in a ladylike, genteel manner. All these things the girl learned well, but the sterner more practical lessons of life, which she was to stand so much in need of through years of bitter experience later on, she was taught nothing at all.

Previous to all this, however, there had come about, a religious upheaval in the city of St. Heliers, which was to change completely the quiet routine in the lives of the little Walker family. Mormon elders had come from America, preaching a new gospel which many on Jersey Island had eagerly accepted, among them being Mrs. Walker and her children. This was in 1847 when Jane was twelve years old. From this time on life seemed to take on a fuller, better meaning for them all.

Mrs. Walker, always a devout church member in the only faith she had previously known, gave herself heart and soul to this new religion, doing everything her power to assist the elders in their

work, not only by attendance at all their meetings and by generous contributions, but by entertaining and caring for them in her own home.

Thus it was in 1850, the Walker family first met and became acquainted with Elder John Pack, the man whom the girl Jane was later to marry. Elder Pack had previously been sent on a mission to preach the gospel in France, but upon the French government becoming hostile to all Mormon elders, he had come across the channel to St. Heliers, where he was joined by Elders John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff and with them did extensive preaching in the island where they were enthusiastically received by the people. At a Church conference that same year, Elder Pack was appointed Mission President of St. Heliers and contiguous parts of France, and as a natural result he, with other elders, often made their headquarters at the home of the Walker family.

At this time Jane Walker was a slip of a girl, barely seventeen years of age. Sixty years later, when asked what her impression of John Pack had been upon first becoming acquainted with him, she had stoutly denied having had even the remotest idea of ever marrying him. She said she thought of him only as a "black eyed, black whiskered man, and very unattractive." Besides, she was already engaged to be married herself, to an estimable young man of her acquaintance of whom she was very fond. The young man was also a member of the Mormon Church and of unquestionable character. This being the case, it is a matter of conjecture as to whose influence if any it was, which later induced the girl to change all her plans and begin preparations for immediate emigration to America and Utah. All she ever disclosed concerning the matter, was that she and the young man counseled to give each other up, which they accordingly did without question or hesitancy, it being a well known fact that in those days the advice or counsel of the elders was received by their converts almost as a mandate from heaven, and they rarely thought of disobeying.

Consequently, on the morning of January 10, 1852, the young woman, Jane Walker, embarked at Liverpool on the sailing vessel Kennebec, bound for New Orleans, U.S.A.. The girl went well equipped into the new country, her mother having packed her trunks with a generous supply of needful things; also many beautiful things the father had brought from the Orient years before silk shawls, jewelry, trinkets, and such like which neither of them could foresee would all be swallowed up by the experiences of pioneer life later on.

Sailing on the ship Kennebec were nineteen other persons from St. Heliers, including Elder John Pack who was then returning home from a three years mission from France and the Channel Islands. Several young women among the group were about Jane's age. The entire company of emigrating Saints numbered 333 and were under the supervision of John S. Higbee.

Of the Walker family Jane went alone. It was planned that her mother and possibly her brother Fred could follow later, but this latter was not to be as the young man, a short time afterwards, grew dissatisfied and left the Church, consequently he never came to America and Jane never saw him again. And so Mrs. Walker tearfully bade her beloved daughter goodbye, consigning her to the care of the elders, her supreme faith in the gospel exemplified by the sacrifice she was making.

We shall not attempt to describe the sea voyage. It was long and tiresome, the vessel being becalmed in mid ocean for over two weeks with not a breath of air to impel it forward. After two months at sea the vessel, on March 11, 1852, finally sailed into the harbor at New Orleans and later was convoyed by river boats to St. Louis and thence by smaller craft to Council Bluffs, from which place, after a long delay, the overland journey to Utah began. It was not until May 1852, that the order to move forward was finally given. The company had been organized into divisions of fifty, Jane still being under the charge of Elder Higbee. John Pack was also a member of the same division. As the long train of sixty six wagons slowly started on its strenuous journey westward, a

feeling of glad exhilaration surged over the girl, bringing the realization that at last she was on her way to the valley of the mountains, the land of her dreams.

The first night out, however, found her bewildered and confused. She had never cooked over a campfire before nor eaten a meal out of doors. The preparation of the food over an open fire, the serving of the meal on the ground, in fact, the inconvenience of the entire camp was very distasteful if not repellent to her. Reared as she had been in a home of comparative luxury, sheltered always from everything unpleasant or tawdry, the sordid makeshifts of the camp to which she was obliged to submit, shocked her sense of fastidiousness. But as days passed she grew to accept these discomforts with better grace, even trying to help the other women a little in her inexperienced way. The country, too, through which they were traveling, she at first found interesting because of its novelty, but the novelty soon wore off and as the long, tiresome days stretched into weeks it all grew very monotonous. It was so unlike anything Jane had anticipated, and now and then she found herself wondering, half guiltily, if her coming to this strange land could have been a grave mistake on her part after all.

The wagon in which she had been told to ride and in which her precious belongings were packed, was heavily loaded, hence she adopted the practice of walking, especially when the road was rough and steep. Sunburned, footsore, her delicate skin blistered, her clothing soiled and disarrayed, she would scarcely have been recognized as the same trim, neat girl who had left the shores of St. Heliers so short a time before. And as the wagon train daily wended its way farther and farther across the plains, the scenery each mile grew more wild and forbidding, the vegetation scanty and sparse. Finally the region became totally uninhabited, save for an occasional frontiersman and bands of wandering Indians.

On one occasion Jane and a girl companion had walked a considerable distance ahead of the wagons when, much to her dismay and consternation, they saw four or five mounted Indians galloping over the hills towards them. With cries of terror they turned and ran back towards the wagon train, but the distance was such that the savages readily overtook them. Then greatly to both girl's relief, the Indians seemed amused at their fear and derisively shouting something unintelligible to them, were soon out of sight. It was Jane's first experience with Indians and needless to say she was very careful thereafter not to venture far enough from her friends to permit a repetition.

The rest of the journey to the Salt Lake Valley, we shall pass over. The route followed by this company was closely identical to that blazed by the original pioneer company a few years previous, with the exception that they now entered the valley by way of Parleys Canyon rather than over the original route through Emigration Canyon which had been abandoned since 1850 in favor of the former. The journey of very close to 1,000 miles had been made in seventy two days, an average of twelve miles a day. There were over 300 souls in the company, and a great shout of rejoicing went up from them as they at last halted their wagons on the benchlands above the city and looked over the valley lying below.

Perhaps the greatest shock to her faith which Jane Walker was ever to experience came to her that day as her gaze rested, for the first time, on the Great Salt Lake Valley the Land of Promise, as it had been described to her. Unlike the great man, whose prophetic words, "This is the Place" have come down to us through the years, this girl asked herself disappointedly, could this be Zion, the place she had dreamed about and had come so far to make her home? She had arrived at a time of year when the entire country was shimmering under the glare of a hot August sun and there was scarcely a vestige of green visible anywhere, even the surrounding hills being burnt and brown. The only thing pleasing to the eye were the fields of yellow grain waving in the breeze, ripened and ready

for the sickle and the flail. Rude log houses dotted the expanse of country here and there, with now and then a slightly more pretentious one built of adobe. Compared with the beautiful city sights the girl had been accustomed to all her life, it was a desolate spectacle indeed. Then, after the first rush of homesick discouragement, the innate faith and courage of the girl asserted itself and as the wagon train moved on into the city streets, she pushed her sunbonnet back from her face, thrilled and happy. She had reached the valley of the Saints, the zion of latter days.

We can only speculate as to what happened in the weeks. It was customary in those days for the residents of the city to meet the emigrant trains and invite the newcomers to their homes until they could become permanently settled elsewhere, and this also was Jane's experience. She was invited to the home of a family by the name of Dunbar who proved to be kindness itself, doing everything they could to make her comfortable and happy during her brief stay with them.

At the end of four weeks after her arrival in the valley, a momentous experience awaited her marriage. Somewhere along the road on the plains, or perhaps it was even before she left St. Heliers, we do not know, she had given her promise to Elder John Pack to become his plural wife as soon as they should reach Salt Lake City, and the inevitableness of that promise now confronted her.

At this time the girl was only a few months over seventeen years of age and he was forty three and already the husband of three wives, the first of whom had a son a year older even than Jane herself. How little we can comprehend the sacrifice and devotion to the gospel this undertaking entailed upon her. It was no easy matter to thrust from her mind the teachings of her entire life concerning marriage and accept, without question, this strange new doctrine of plurality of which, in her heart, she knew so very little. But so complete was her conversion to the gospel that she bowed her head in submission to whatever its doctrine demanded of her. And let it be said to her redounding credit that throughout all the succeeding years of her life, she remained loyal to the principle of plural marriage, loyal to the man she married, and loyal to his families.

And so it was that on the 15th of September, 1852, Jane Walker and John Pack went to President Brigham Young's office and were married for time and eternity, President Heber C. Kimball officiating. At this time the Church had no place in which endowments were given, therefore, it was not until February 1857 that the two were sealed to each other in the Endowment House, Salt Lake City, by President Young.

After her marriage, Jane went at once to live in the Pack home in the seventeenth ward, not far from Temple Square. Since his entrance into the valley with the first pioneers in 1847, Elder Pack had been away from home on foreign missions a great deal of the time, but in the meantime had managed to erect a comfortable adobe structure with a long wide living room which was used as dining. it was in the living room that the activities of the family were carried on; the spinning, weaving, sewing and all the things necessary for the upkeep of so large a household. This house was always designated as the "Big House" probably because it was so much larger and better than any built elsewhere for the benefit of the womenfolk and their children.

Julia, the first wife, always lived permanently in the "Big House". The other wives were often moved here and there, out on the farm and elsewhere, but Julia remained in the house in Salt Lake City, there being a tacit understanding among other members of the family that it was her right to do so. She was one of the most severely honorable women who ever embraced the gospel and by right of her priority always stood as John Pack's first wife with rights and privileges none of the others ever had and which none of them ever thought of infringing upon.

At the time of Jane's advent among them, there were living in this same house Julia, with her six children, Nancy, the rather delicate second wife with two children, and Ruth, the sturdy buxom wife of Dutch descent, also with two little ones. These women had all married John Pack several years before in Nauvoo, Illinois; were all of American birth and training; they had already been in Utah for four years, and therefore were quite accustomed to the hardships and privations of pioneer life. A few days previous Julia and Ruth had just returned from several hard days work out on the farm in Bountiful, or Sessions Settlement, as it was then called, where, with the help of Julia's older sons, they had assisted in harvesting the crops which they themselves had planted earlier in the season. And when Jane, standing a newcomer before them, looked into their tanned, sunburned faces and saw their roughened, toil worn fingers, she was abashed and, half unconsciously, tried to hide her own soft white hands behind her back, so incompetent and out of place she seemed.

But it must be said to the credit of John Pack's wives that they received the young newcomer quite graciously into their mist and were very patient with her later on, especially the good natured Ruth, in teaching her the ways of the new country. But this took time and, although she tried hard to do as the others did, her pillow of nights was often wet with tears of bitter discouragement and homesickness. There was so much to learn and the never ending household tasks so back breaking hard to accomplish. But she was an apt pupil and in time she too learned to stand all day at the spinning wheel, twirling the long rolls of wool into strands of yarn, or to weave the heavy woollen cloth from which the boys' and men's clothing was made. She learned to make soap in a huge iron kettle out under the trees and to make tallow candles in molds. All these things and many more she learned skillfully and well until Ward, Julia's eldest son, could no longer tease her about her "softlady hands" as he good naturedly had done when first she came among them. As she became better acquainted with members of the family she found, too, many things to make her more content and happy, and best of all there was Lucy, Julia's eldest daughter, a girl about her own age, who soon became a sweet companion to her, and into whose love affairs and romantic girl troubles she entered wholeheartedly. For instance, there was the time when she was prepared to assist the girl to elope with a young frontiersman, an outsider from the church, with whom Lucy thought herself very much in love, and who was heartily disapproved of by her parents. Happily, the mother discovered the intended elopement in time to prevent it, and Jane was soundly reproved for her part in the affair and, thereafter, was very careful to keep out of all such entanglement. Shortly afterwards Lucy, more or less coerced by her parents, became the plural wife of William Kimball, son of Heber C. Kimball, but this marriage proved very unhappy for the girl and she finally came back with her little daughter, Julia, to make her home again with her parents.

The year following Jane's marriage, her eldest daughter, Geneva was born and it was about this time also that Nancy, the second wife, sickened and died. Julia took the two little motherless children she had left and from then on, cared for them as if they were her own. In fact, she always spoke of them as being her children and they in turn loved her as they would have loved their own mother had she lived.

About the year 1855 or 1856 Jane was made intensely happy by her mother's arrival from England, the dear mother she had missed so sorely. Her happiness was soon marred, however, by the knowledge that the sordid makeshifts, the crowded confusion and privation which she found in the "big house" was unbearable to her mother and, although she made every effort to hide her feelings, it was soon apparent to everyone that she was very unhappy. Of nights Jane could hear her toss and moan in the only bed they had to give her a hard uncomfortable one in the attic and the daughter grieved and mourned because there was nothing she could do about it. Finally, to get away from it all, as Jane ever afterwards believed, her mother married a widower by the name of Andrew

Tayseem, a gruff, unkindly man of whom even Jane herself was always very much afraid. The marriage was a sort of business proposition, he needing a housekeeper, and she in need of a home. The little cottage which Mrs. Walker was henceforth to call her home was situated about a block east of where the Union Pacific Depot now stands, and she scrubbed and scoured it until under her hands it became fragrant and beautiful. This little cottage, blessed by her mother's presence, was henceforth to be a veritable sanctuary to the so often tired and, who escaping from the turmoil of the "big house" would scurry across the intervening blocks for a few blessed words with the dear mother, a cup of fresh hot tea always awaiting her, then back again to the duties among her sister wives before she could have been missed. This brief reprieve from work and worry, she often averred afterwards, were the sweetest moments of her whole life and helped her to bear the burden of existence which otherwise would have been unbearable.

And so the years passed. Sometimes Jane and Ruth lived together in the rude little log house on the farm in Sessions Settlement, or Bountiful. This farm John Pack had located in 1849, shortly before his departure for the French mission. During his absence most of the land had been cleared and a small log house built upon it, the work being largely done by Hugh and Julia, assisted by the elder sons of the family. The house was of the rudest type imaginable, containing but two small rooms, the floor and the roof being of dirt, the latter leaking badly with every downpour of rain. Here the two women lived for months at a time, cooked the meals for the men in the fields, spun yarn or corded wool for winter use and took care of their five or six children in the meantime. And, strange as it may seem, even in this poor makeshift of a habitation, these two women were light hearted and happy. They were both young and had learned to love each other like sisters. Neighboring families in the valley were no better off than they and they visited back and forth among them with no thought of worry or care for the future. Crops in the fields were bounteous, their children had plenty to eat and, all in all, it seemed to them that God was very good to them.

Sometimes they took their turns with the other wives and went to Kamas, a distance of about fifty miles from Salt Lake, there up in the hills, John Pack owned a great tract of land which he had stocked with cattle and fine horses. Here also the womenfolk in the summer time made butter and cheese for the Salt Lake market, these products bringing a good price because of their superior quality. Summers spent in this fashion had many pleasant features as the country here was beautiful and with so many hands to help with the work in the dairy, it was never over strenuous. It was a pleasant change for the women from the crowded, pent up conditions in the city.

With the summer's work completed, there was always, later on, a return to Session's Settlement or to the "big house" in the city, where the winter activities were again taken up arduous tasks of spinning and weaving, sewing and mending and all the things necessary for the sustenance and support of this ever growing pioneer family. The sound of the heavy loom or the shirring of the spinning wheel was rarely silent, and the long table in the dining living room had to be filled with food, but it ever so poor or scant, at regular intervals for the family's consumption. Family trouble and discord there may have been at times, as how could it be otherwise in a family of several wives and many children all living under one roof, as did that of John Pack for many years? But usually the women worked together in peace and harmony, deep in their hearts having an abiding affection for each other which lasted all the years of their lives. This was especially true of Julia, the first wife, and Jane. From the very first there seemed to spring up a bond of deep friendship between the two, a true living tie that remained with them always, no matter what came.

In the year 1864 or thereabouts, John Pack, by this time grown well to do in lands and cattle and other interests, gave each of his wives a permanent home of her own to live in. Henceforth, the "big house" in the city was Julia's in very deed; a comfortable house for Ruth and her children was

built on the ranch in Kamas; the little log house down in the field on the farm in West Bountiful was replaced by a substantial adobe house for Jane. And so at last each of these tired, good women finally came into her own, was free to live her own separate life in the peace she so richly deserved.

From this period on, Jane's life was tranquility and serene. The only real sorrow that ever came to her was in the death of her beloved mother in 1866. No mother was ever loved more devotedly or mourned more deeply than was hers. But time is a kindly healer of sorrow, and the passing years brought peace and resignation. Among her life long friends were several members of President Brigham Young's family and also of President Heber C. Kimball. But closer home and nearer to her heart, perhaps, were the dear friends with whom she was associated in West Bountiful; Martha Fackerell, Jane Muir, Mare Ure, Annie Mann, Hannan Eldredge, Ann Jackson, Susan Grant and many others. It is doubtful if ever again there will be another such band of women so unselfishly true to each other as lived in West Bountiful at that time. They had all suffered the hardships and tribulations of pioneer life together, and their friendship for each other had grown to be a part of their very souls. With these women Jane worked for many years in the Relief Society, first as a teacher, then Counselor and afterwards as President of the organization. She worked faithfully and well until the burden of the work was finally shifted to younger and stronger shoulders. For over ten years she served with Sister Maggie Grant in the Ward Primary Association, and in every way possible tried to do her duty in the community in which she lived.

Jane Walker Pack was a devout Latter day Saint with an implicit, childlike faith in the Gospel and its authorities. Her admonition to her children, when found guilty of any misdemeanor, be it ever so trifling, was always, "What would the Bishop think of you if he knew?"

She was the mother of eleven children, eight of whom were born in the house down in the field on the farm and here they all grew to manhood and womanhood and, one by one, married and went to homes of their own. If the old walls could speak they would tell of long years of peace and harmony and of the deep desire of their mother to live their religion sincerely and to teach their children to do the same. Into this house disgrace or tragedy never came. Quarreling or fault finding found no place. Hardships and privations were often present but they were never permitted to dampen the spirits of those who lived there. The only death that ever occurred within its walls was that of the woman who had made it a home indeed for her children, a place befitting her life of genuineness and truth.

In her seventy third year, on April 5, 1908, she died as she had lived, peacefully, reverently, with goodwill towards all and a supreme faith in God's goodness abiding with her to the end. Her husband, John Pack, died in Salt Lake City, April 3, 1885.