A SKEKTCH OF THE LIFE OF MARY TAYLOR
written by a great granddaughter
Cleo Jones Johnson
and shared with her family, Christmas 2006

They called her Mary – this girl child born on 6 November 1835. She brought a child's laughter into the home of Joseph and Harriet (Sidwell) Taylor, and fulfillment into their lives. Many years later as Mary's own children reminisced through the life of their mother, they recalled she had said there were other babies born to her parents – one a little brother named Thomas – but none had survived longer than five weeks and so Mary grew up as an only child.

Childhood:

She was a delicate child and raised on milk tea. She explained that the English people drank tea. Milk was harder to secure and had to be carried some distance, so it was a custom to dilute the children's milk with tea. Giving up the drinking of tea later in her life proved to be one of Mary's many trials.

She was a bright, sunny child, loved by her grandparents who lived nearby. Mary's growing up years were spent in the small village of her birth, Coton-in-the-Elms, located in Derbyshire. This has been described as one of the most beautiful parts of England, made up of farming land, villages and meadow, with streams and about one-third forest. There were in the close surrounding area at that time probably 360 inhabitants – these people making their living in the mines and potteries, in small trades or farming. Mary remembered the sailors who worked their ships on the River Trent.

Mary's people were much like the other inhabitants of the village. In describing them, she called them a cozy people, meaning that though poor they found peace and contentment in their simple surroundings. Her father, Joseph, was an agricultural laborer, which meant in those days that he worked on one of the large farms of the neighborhood. Few people owned the land they farmed in England; it belonged to the Crown. No church graced the streets of Coton-in-the-Elms, but the villagers were a God-fearing, church-going people, traveling to nearby towns and villages, taking their children to be christened and their dead to be buried. Sometimes it was to Croxall or Lullington or Barton or one of the other surrounding towns.

Conversion:

The first missionaries for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints entered England in 1837, and about 1841-42, when Mary was near six years of age, they found a fruitful field in the small village of Coton-in-the-Elms. The Woodenbox Branch was established. Her father was among the first to accept the Gospel and the names of her grandparents, Thomas and Mary (Shelton) Taylor are found on the early records. Mary was baptized 5 August 1845 when not quite ten years old. Her mother, Harriet, was also baptized during the fall of 1845. In later years, Mary told of being tormented by other children, called names because of her association with this new religion.

Marriage:

She received schooling, learning to read and write well. In England Mary was employed by an uncle who was a tailor and she acquired a knowledge of sewing and dress making. On 12 November 1855, shortly after her 20th birthday, she married a young man named William Upton from the nearby village of Woodhouse. He had been baptized 18 February 1854.

(Research in English Parish Records was done by Dora Rasmussen)

Emigration:

Nearly 17,000 Zion bound emigrants had sailed from Liverpool, England between 1848 and 1855, yet the emigration program of the church could not fill the needs of those wishing to reach the land of Zion. Many were too poor, unable to raise the fare. Brigham Young suggested the possibility of trying a new method, creating handcart companies who could travel light and fast, not needing the greater number of supplies, therefore less expensive. The Taylor family now found their dreams being realized. Mary and her young husband, with her father and mother, made their way to Liverpool which was the port city used by the church for emigration. Among their group were neighbors and relatives, the Horkley family, the Moss family, the Doman family and the Croxall family.

According to the Ship Lists of 1855-6 the Taylor and Upton families booked passage on the vessel "Enoch Train" which according to Church Chronology carried five hundred thirty-four Saints under the direction of James Ferguson. These lists give Joseph's age as 44, a laborer from Coton-in-the-Elms, Derbyshire. Harriet was 49, William Upton, 22 and Mary Upton, age 20. It seems for some reason on April 18, the Taylors and Uptons along with others were transferred from the "Enoch Train" to the "Horizon" which sailed a few weeks later with Edward Martin in charge. Accommodations aboard ship were crude by today's standards. (Dora R. research)

Friday, May 23, 1856, the "Horizon" cast off from Liverpool's Bramleymoore dock. The voyage began when the steam tug hooked its chains onto the sailing vessel and towed it slowly down the River Mersey to the open sea, and ended near six weeks later when they were towed into Boston harbor on July lst. Aboard ship the Saints experienced the discomforts and seasickness of their long voyage. Mary recalled one lady lost her false teeth over the railing. As they recovered they filled their days with singing and rejoicing. The women spent most of their time making tents and clothing, the men in caring for their families and helping to prepare the food they had brought with them. The fare of the handcart people did not cover meals aboard ship and they had to bring their own provisions.

From Boston the emigrants traveled by rail via New York to Iowa City. History records that this rail trip of nearly 1300 miles did not permit many comforts. At least one of the handcart companies made the trip in cattle cars and at least one of the companies slept in a New York warehouse while waiting to continue their journey. In Iowa City the Saints encountered more difficulties. There were no handcarts ready for their trip and the season was growing late.

Handcart Trek:

Much has been written concerning the hardships of the late companies of that year. Suffice it to say that Mary and her family were numbered in the ill-fated Edward Martin Company which left Iowa City July 28 and Florence, Nebraska on August 25. Most of the Martin Company had

been faithful members of the Church for many years. Among them was Brother Samuel Pucell and family, who as early as 1837 had given the first six-pence ever contributed to the Mormon Elders when they began preaching in England. In the writings about this company it was noted that 'able-bodied men were in the minority among the large number of aged and children'.

Fall came early that year with frosty nights and early snows. The tired Saints with their broken-down carts were caught on the plains of Wyoming in the earliest snowfall in the experience of the pioneers and the winter of 1856-57 proved to be an excessively severe one. Mary's father was buried beside the trail on the 8th of October near the vicinity of Fort Laramie, and before the rescue wagons from Salt Lake Valley reached the starved, frozen members of this company a month later, Mary had seen her mother and her young husband share a common grave near what became known as Martin's Hollow near Casper, Wyoming. (Now called Martin's Cove. Their death dates are recorded as November 10, 1856). Mary, alone, unconscious, and with her feet painfully frozen was carried into the Valley on the 30th of November in a stranger's wagon and taken to a stranger's home. She had not one earthly possession. Even the clothes she wore were not sufficient to protect her body. Did she wonder why the Lord spared her life?

Rescue:

When the news of the pitiful plight of these handcart people reached Salt Lake City during the October Conference, President Brigham Young issued a call for those who would assist in their rescue. This was not an easy task. It meant crossing the snow-filled mountains and traveling 300 miles through blizzard and sub-zero weather to reach the Martin Company. One who accepted this challenge was William Bert Simmons. No longer a young man, he was now in his fifty-eighth year. It was in the Simmons wagon that Mary Taylor Upton was placed and upon reaching the valley he took her to his home which was located near North Canyon, later called Bountiful. Here she was carefully tended by William's wife, Amanda Simmons, and by his daughters. She lost neither toe nor finger though it has been told that her legs were turning black. Many in this Company were maimed for life when their frozen limbs were amputated. Mary never forgot the pangs of hunger. Her children said all her life she could scarcely discard a potato peeling, yet she always said she knew the Lord was with the handcart people else all would have perished.

Second Marriage:

On the 15th of March following, William Bert Simmons took his wife, Amanda, and the young widow, Mary Upton, to Salt Lake City and there in President Brigham Young's office she was sealed as his wife. (Note: A search of genealogical records shows Mary has been sealed to all three husbands, the others by proxy.) Life was never easy for Mary, even after the valleys of Zion were reached. She knew the challenges and trials of marriage in polygamy. She also enjoyed its blessings for this gave her a home and the right and privilege to have children and to enjoy the blessings of the Priesthood. On consulting a doctor before leaving England he had advised her against leaving and told her she would probably never have children. Mary's first two sons were born in Bountiful, Joseph Taylor Simmons on 11 February 1858 and George Albert Simmons on 10 October 1859. Then William moved his two families to the mouth of Weber Canyon. He built two log cabins each on a hillside facing one other with the Weber River flowing between. Here at the place later called Uintah, Mary gave birth to two more sons, Alphonzo Bert born 3 July 1861 and Eli Thomas born 10 December 1862 and a daughter, Mary Jane was born on 17 February 1865.

One of the first things William did on this new land was to build a molasses mill. Here the people brought their cane for him to process. He owned a small herd of sheep, a few pigs and chickens. Their means of transportation was a wagon and two mules, Jules and Jim. Jules had pulled the Simmons wagon across the plains, hitched with an oxen.

Mary, in her log home, cooked over the fireplace in an iron kettle. She used her skill as a seamstress to make her little boys' trousers from canvas. Their moccasins were home-made and their feet wrapped with burlap for overshoes when the cold weather came. She made their summer hats from straw and did all she could to help provide for her little family.

Indians:

The Indians were frequent visitors while Mary lived near the mouth of the canyon. One was known as Old Soldier. When Joseph was about five years old, Old Soldier would appear at the door and ask, "You lost papoose? You no need worry. He with Johnny." This was his own son whom Joseph loved to play with and they wrestled together. Once when Old Soldier came to dinner, Mary asked him if he would have a cup of tea with her. One of the boys told him good Mormons did not drink tea, but he accepted. He said he knew a good bishop that drank whisky. But the Indians could also be a bother. They would come at night, tear down the fences, and take chickens and calves. It was hard work to build fences. Stakes were driven and oak brush woven in and out.

Death of William Simmons:

In these difficult circumstances William's health broke and more hard times came. They had very little variety in their eating. Amanda, who had kindly taken young Mary into her home, now passed away. As William's health became worse, Mary's little boys took on more of the responsibilities. The older boys, Joseph and George found their own 'keep' in doing chores for neighbors and sometimes brought a little substance home, which had been given extra. Bert and Eli, only five and three years old, now took the sheep out on the hills and herded them. All day they stayed on the hillside, eating their bread and molasses at noon, and bringing the sheep home at night.

Then came the day when they brought the sheep home and found their father had died. This was 20 August 1866. They were not surprised for they knew he had been very sick. Amanda's married children came to comfort Mary and to help with the simple arrangements for his funeral. The homemade casket was loaded into the old wagon and behind Jules and Jim was taken back to Bountiful for burial. For the second time in less than 10 years Mary became a widow. Again she was in destitute circumstances with so little to eat and wear and this time she had five children depending on her.

Marriage to Joseph Lee Robinson:

While her husband lay ill, Mary had called for the Elders. One who came was Joseph Lee Robinson. In his journal, Grandfather Robinson recorded, "I was asked to administer to her husband, Mr. Simmons, while he was ill. . . . While I stood there, the Lord prompted me that if this man died, I should take over the care of his family. . . . I can honestly say I did plead with the Lord and prayed earnestly that he would heal this man that Mr. Simmons might live and take care of his own family. But the Lord heeded me not." Later, while traveling through Weber Canyon, selling his harvest of fruits and vegetables, Joseph Lee Robinson called upon Mary Simmons. She,

herself, had been earnestly praying to the Lord for His help and His blessings. She was lonely and frightened, having little earthly sustenance, and winter approaching and little children to care for.

They were married on 2 February 1867. Mary became his fifth wife. Later he said that he loved them all so much he was willing to work his fingers to the bone for them. He moved her and her family five and one-half miles up the canyon to Mountain Green in Morgan County where she lived two winters and a summer. Here their son, Lee Sidwell Robinson was born on 16 February 1868. The second son, Samuel Taylor Robinson, records his birth on 16 October 1869 as back near Uintah 'up the canyon across the Weber River.' In the spring of 1871 Mary moved to South Hooper.

She still lived in poor circumstances. When her daughter Harriet Alice was born on 1 October 1871, her home was a small shack on the Weber and Davis County line. At this time it had neither roof nor floor. A canvas was stretched over the rafters to give shelter for her bed. (Description from Harriet's own life history.) George Simmons recalled that he ran for the mid-wife when this little sister was born and he and Joseph had the housework to do. In September 1872 Joseph Lee's fourth wife, Lydia, died and later Mary moved into Lydia's home which was about one-half mile distance. This was a log house with an adobe addition and a small upstairs, the stairs being on the outside. In this home in 1875 Mary's youngest daughter was born on October 4, and she was named for the Prophet's mother, Lucy. Here, too, Mary was to part with her eldest daughter, Mary Ann Simmons, who died 15 May 1878 at the age of thirteen.

Better Times:

As the times improved, instead of cooking over the open fireplace, Mary had a Charter Six stove that Joseph Lee bought for her. Her older boys could help in providing for the family. Bert Simmons became known as the best maker of sorghum molasses in the area. They grew the sugar cane to make their sorghum and this was the only sugar they had for years. The boys made their sleigh runners from maple wood and in the winter hauled the oak brush from the mountain sides for fuel. The first years they had no alfalfa but gathered the wild hay to feed their animals. They would fish up the Jordan River and bring home fine catches. The garden in Hooper had a row of mulberry trees and when the fruit was ripe and Mary missed her little girls she knew just where to find them. Mary's daughters remembered the long winter evenings around the fireplace, their mother at the spinning wheel, telling them stories of Old England, its beautiful countryside, and her love of the gospel. They attended the meetings of the Saints. From Hooper they often traveled the nine miles to Ogden where Mary was a lead soprano in the Ogden Choir. In 1877 Joseph Lee took Mary with him to Salt Lake City to attend the funeral of President Brigham Young, and they traveled by train!

Eli could recall the first train that ever went through Uintah. This was in 1869 not long before the golden spike was driven at Promitory Point. It was a work train laying rails. With the railroad in the valley, Mary's older boys found work hauling ties or cordwood, and then they worked on the Oregon Short Line between Granger, Wyoming and Pocatello, Idaho scraping and 'working the grade'. Thus they became acquainted with the Snake River Valley in Idaho and here in 1884 George Simmons and Amos Robinson , son of Lydia who had died, filed homestead papers. They were among the first settlers of the community known as Willow Creek, now called Ucon, located a few miles north and east of Eagle Rock (Idaho Falls).

As conditions became better, Joseph Lee built a rock house for Mary at Uintah which was quite fine in those days, and probably was the nicest that Mary ever had. Here they spent some of their happiest times. Mary with her patience and long suffering, her kind ways and thoughtfulness, had endeared herself to Joseph Lee's large family. They affectionately called her Aunt Mary. She had many friends and her home was one of hospitality. Her children said she never turned a soul from her door. Her husband called her Mary the Peacemaker. Life, though it still took hard work, now contributed a few comforts as well as necessities. There were good times with friends and neighbors, happy visits with family. Mary could walk to the town of Uintah to Sunday School or on week days to trade her eggs for thread and tea.

In 1884 Joseph Lee took his wife, Laurinda, to the newly dedicated Logan temple where they did work for their dead. Now in the fall of 1885, he took Mary and their daughter Lucy in 'Joseph E.'s good carriage' to attend the conference in Logan, to see the temple and then to visit their sons in Idaho. This was a long trip, taking eight to ten days of travel but they could some times stay overnight with friends along the way. (Joseph E. was son of JLR's first wife, Maria)

Move to Idaho:

The following spring Mary made the decision to leave her home in Utah and move to the Idaho valley. This may have been partly due to her pioneering spirit or her desire to help her children become established, but she was also influenced by the persecution that was being heaped upon the polygamist members of the Church. Many of the brethren were being hunted, fined and imprisoned. By this time three of her husband's wives had passed on. Aunt Rinda (Laurinda) lived in Farmington and with Mary in Idaho, Joseph Lee would have little to fear from the marshals who were continually harassing his friends.

On May 12 in the year 1886, with Joseph Lee, Mary and ten-year-old Lucy again riding in Joseph E.'s carriage, with 14-year-old Harriet driving one of the wagons loaded with furniture and Bert and Samuel driving others, they left Uintah and drove as far as the Hot Springs. Succeeding nights they camped at Deweyville and Malad, then 'drove over the divide, came to Eli's; thanked God our Heavenly Father'. (Joseph Robinson kept a brief account of this trip, noting how far they traveled each day and where they stayed each night. This small notebook has been handed down in the Irene Jenson family.) Eli Simmons was living at this time in Idaho's Marsh Valley. On Sunday they attended church in Oxford. On the 18th they prepared to move on. Eli went with them, driving some of his brother's cattle. They encountered rough roads near Pocatello where coming through Portneuf Canyon, Harriet's wagon crowded the hillside and the wheels passing over a large rock caused a near catastrophe. Sam teased his sister who had always been called Hattie because she wanted to change her name to Alice on coming to this new home. He continually referred to her as Harriet. (Hattie wrote her own life history, noting these experiences.) Mary probably smiled and enjoyed the happy banter of her children on this trip.

Succeeding Years and Death of Joseph Lee Robinson:

Joseph Lee stayed in Idaho through the summer of 1886. Later in the fall he returned to Utah. In the succeeding years he made several of these long trips, notwithstanding he was now nearing 80 years of age. In the many letters he wrote to this family he often spoke of their reunion, but Mary was still living with her sons in the Snake River Valley when her husband passed away on New Year's Day 1893 at a daughter's home in Uintah.

Eventually Bert brought his wife and two small daughters from Hooper. Eli was living in Marsh Valley (but would move to Ucon a few years later.) Lee and Samuel soon joined George and Amos at Willow Creek so Mary's family were nearly all together. The oldest Simmons son, Joseph, established his home in Soda Springs, Idaho.

Joseph Lee's letters were long, newsy and full of good advice. He worried that the older boys, George and Amos had not yet married and counseled them to find good girls and raise a family unto the Lord. He wrote always of the marriages and new babies and the various activities of his growing family in Utah. Often he copied a page or two from his journal telling of spiritual experiences. Sometimes he mentioned that the marshals had been around, taken Brother Clark, Brother Manning or Brother Wadsworth. Once he postponed a trip to Idaho because of the persecution there. Blackfoot was the seat of opposition to the Mormons in Idaho at that time. He affectionately addressed his wife as 'my precious and beloved Mary T. in the North Country' and he never spoke of the Simmons boys in any terms different from his own. They were all his children. (Thirty of these letters written between December 16, 1886 and December 31, 1892 were carefully saved by Mary and then handed down to her posterity through her youngest daughter, Lucy. Only one of Mary's letters survived – the one she had written to Joseph Lee but had not yet mailed when she received word of his death.)

Mary was past 50 years of age when she came to Idaho. She was first a member of the Iona Ward. She was sustained as first counselor to Hannah Coles in the Relief Society organization. To attend the meetings she had to travel some five miles. In the winter this was often over snow-drifts that covered the fences. The boys would drive the team for her. Often it was Samuel who went with his mother, but sometimes Amos Robinson would drive. Amos would return and tell George there was a fine looking girl up to Coles with the most beautiful hair and she sent her love to George. When he went again he told the girl that his brother George had sent his love to her. He kept this up until George took matters into his own hands and escorted his mother to a Relief Society meeting where he became acquainted with Sarah Jane Coles and a year later made her his wife. (One of the stories gathered by Irene Jenson)

Early Accomplishments of Mary's Family in Willow Creek (Ucon) Idaho:

Mary rejoiced in the accomplishments of her family. They were stalwarts in building up the community and in supporting and spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the year 1885 Bert Simmons had sent two wagonloads, about fifty sacks, of Cottonwood, Balm of Gilead and Black Willow tree cuttings from Weber Valley to Amos Robinson at Willow Creek. These trees were all planted to take the bareness from the open country, for shade and for wind brakes. There were no bridges, fences, roads or canals when they came. Mary's sons contributed in building these. Every canal built in those early days was built by hard licks and meager tools, back breaking work with shovels, with horses and hand scrapers, working long 14-hour days. The Farmers Friend canal was completed in 1888. They hauled logs for the first church and helped to build the first schools. They served on the school boards and established businesses in the community. When the first threshing machine came to this area, Mary's sons had a responsible part in it. Amos gave five and a half acres of his land for the cemetery.

Mary lived to see the accomplishment of many of these things. In 1888 when the Willow Creek Ward was organized Alphonzo Bert Simmons became the first bishop. As his second counselor

he chose his brother, George. They served in these positions for twenty-two years. Her son, Lee was one of the first missionaries sent from the Willow Creek Ward, and in the years since many of her grandsons and great grandsons and daughters have served in the mission field, going to many parts of the world. Most of them have remained faithful to the gospel which Mary loved and gave so much of her life for.

Temple Work:

In 1890, accompanied by George, Mary made the long trip back to the Logan temple where the temple work was done for her loved ones who had died on the plains in their struggle to reach the land of Zion. This was one of the happiest moments in her life. Mary lived to see all her children married and to know and enjoy many of her grandchildren. She died March 20, 1899 and is buried in the Ucon cemetery.

Death Notice:

The following item appeared in the Salt Lake "Deseret News": 'DIED: ROBINSON – At Elva, Bingham, Idaho March 20th 1899 of Dropsy, MARY T. ROBINSON, aged 63 years. Deceased was born at Coton-in-the-Elms, near Burton-upon-Trent, Derbyshire, England. Baptized 1845, and emigrated in the handcart company 1856, and suffered all the hardships of that terrible journey, and died as she had lived, a faithful Latter-day Saint, bearing a faithful testimony of the divine mission of the Prophet Joseph Smith. [Millennial Star, please copy]" (Note: Willow Creek was the name of the ward, Ucon the name of the community but the Post Office was called Elva at this time.)

And so ended the mortal life of one called Mary. In her childhood she had joined a strange and despised church. She had braved a mighty ocean in a small sailing vessel, endured one of the greatest tragedies that overtook the members of the Church. She pioneered in two states, and left a heritage of faith and endurance to guide her children and those to come after.

Acknowlegement:

This story could not have been written had it not been for the special interest of two of Mary's granddaughters, Dora Simmons Rasmussen who did research in England and wrote the first histories, and Irene Wayman Jenson, who remembered many of the stories and who treasured the letters, etc. handed down through her mother, Lucy. We owe them our special thanks as we remember a grandmother called Mary.

Joseph Thomas Jones

Joseph Lee Robinson

Harriet Alice Robinson

Cleo Jones

Mary Taylor