

SURVIVORS



Marjorie Wagers Thatcher

Grand Lake Area Historical Society has reprinted the family history written by Marjorie Wagers Thatcher in two parts.

Part I tells the story of her mother's family that includes the Spurgeons, Mitchells and Yargers. These families settled in Grand Lake and Marjorie's great-grandmother was Louisa Adams who operated the Grandview Hotel and also managed the Kauffman House for a time.

Part II tells the story of Marjorie's father's family that includes the Hyatts, Lows, Rosebrooks and Wagers. This history includes a story of the family on the Oregon Trail, the Chisholm Trail cattle drives, and their eventual settling in Colorado and Grand County before moving on to Utah.

We hope you will enjoy this family history and relate it to your own family history in the settling of the American West.

PREFACE

What I write today is an unabashed celebration of this country and of my forebears, all of whom have grown with it and whose pictures you see in these pages. Throughout my lifetime as a student and teacher of American literature I have been intrigued by the WHY of the distinctive nature and performance of Americans. The qualities of independence, brashness, vitality, daring, and ingenuity have set Americans apart from the rest of the world and have been responsible, no doubt, for the unrivaled position the United States has attained in the world.

In his Letters from an American Farmer Jean de Crevecoeur wrote, "What then is an American, this New Man?" The French were continually surprised by the condition of equality between citizens of different rank. "For English visitors as well as French it was hard to understand a people who had no tradition of feudality, no loyalty of peasant to the lord who protected him, or of tenant to landlord." "The very meaning of 'farmer'...has in America another meaning. Whereas in England it signified a tenant paying heavy rent to some lord and occupying an inferior rank, here in Pennsylvania a farmer was a land owner equal to any man in the state." (Furnas, The Americans, page 240.) As late as 1941 my dear old English father-in-law, Fred Thatcher, was amazed that a common working man was allowed to sit in the lobby of the Hotel Utah as freely as any dignitary.

My conclusions are that Americans are different because, first, they are descendants of people who would not submit to living under conditions as they were. Second, there was land to be had where the only criterion was the strength of will and the physical prowess to take it. And third, these were survivors, people who could and did survive the hardships that faced those willing to brave the unknown hazards rather than submit to the domination of tyrants.

Of such have been the two or three dozen men and women who have been my direct ancestors. They have not been famous, nor rich, nor brilliant, nor highly cultured. They have been restless, vigorous, proud to a fault, sometimes arrogant, contrary. They have been joyous, God-fearing, determined, ingenious, healthy, and strong. I shall make every effort to record the details as exactly as possible, avoiding any attempt at romanticizing or fictionalizing. At times I shall quote from reliable sources to suggest the background or surroundings in which events took place. The reader may assume that comparable circumstances held true for our ancestors.

Some statement about the moral and ethical life of these people is appropriate. Apparently all of them professed some form of Protestant faith. Early Spurgeons were Baptists and Congregationalists. Likely the Yargers were Lutherans; Lows and Rosebrooks were Methodists. Certainly the Mitchells were Scotch Presbyterians. Although there was little commitment to organized religion in Middle Park, there was a high level of Christian brotherhood. Isolated as the area was from the world, the people were dependent for their very lives on the integrity and courage and goodwill of their neighbors. Honesty was taken for granted. A man's word was as good as his bond. Growing up in that culture, I knew no violence, no vulgarity, no lawlessness. As children we were expected to say, "Yes, Sir", or "No, Ma'am", to adults, and obedience was unquestioned.

Finally, my dear children, we must give thanks to our God, for we have been greatly blessed to be descendants of these hardy folk. We have been inheritors of a great variety of genetic factors, not all for the good, but when adversity comes, as come it will, remember you are descendants of survivors and carry on.

With love,
Marjorie Wagers Thatcher

SURVIVORS

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MIDDLE PARK, THE GATHERING PLACE

Middle Park is one of three great mountain parks in northern Colorado. Approximately 50 miles wide east to west and north to south, its southeast entrance lies only 40 miles from Denver. It is a complex geographical area ranging from 7,000 to 13,500 feet in elevation and completely surrounded by towering mountain peaks. Precipitation is locally heavy for this part of the west, but severe drought is common. Bitter cold and deep snows are the rule in winter. A rise or fall of 50 degrees F is by no means infrequent. (Black, Island in the Sky, page 15.)

It is a breathtakingly beautiful area. Every authority is agreed that Middle Park in its primeval state was a hunter's paradise. One of the first to describe the area, Thomas Jefferson Farnham, who first saw it in 1839, wrote, "Extensive meadows running up the valleys of the streams, woodlands skirting the mountain bases...over which the antelope, black and white-tailed deer, the jack rabbit, the bighorn sheep, the grizzly and black bears, and the buffalo and elk range – a splendid park indeed; not old, but as new as the first breath of creation." (Black, Island in the Sky, page 22)

Three primary concerns motivated activity into Middle Park in the 1880s, transportation into and across it, tourism as in hunting, fishing and recreation, and mining.

Apparently the first of our progenitors in America landed about the time of the Revolutionary War at one of the major harbors on the East Coast, and rather quickly made their way to the frontiers across the Appalachian Mountains, many through the Cumberland Gap in southern Pennsylvania to the Virginias, North and South Carolina, Kentucky, or the Ohio Valley. From here they traveled to Illinois, Missouri, Texas, Kansas, and all arrived within a period of 10 or 20 years in Middle Park, just as it was being discovered in the 1870's and 80's.

SPURGEON FAMILY

There is little doubt that the origins of the Spurgeon family were among the hardy Norsemen who came to Britain and settled first in Norfolk. They were quiet, industrious people, many of whom became ministers of various protestant faiths over a period of 300 years.

James Spurgeon and brother William were tried for thievery in 1718 and transported to America (Maryland), serving as indentured servants for seven years to pay for their passage.

James purchased land and was a “planter”. He and his wife, Susannah, had ten children. He died in 1784 in Pennsylvania.

John Spurgeon, James’ son, became a landowner in 1753 at the age of 19. He later sold the land and with wife Mary moved to West Virginia.

The Spurgeons served in the colonial French and Indian Wars and the Revolutionary War.

John Spurgeon and his first wife, Mary had at least five children. His wife Mary died and he eventually married Mary Green when John was about 67 years old. This lady was famous as the central figure in an incident in which her first husband and a son were killed and she and two daughters were kidnapped by Indians. The daughters were rescued and she escaped in a dramatic flight which has been featured in a book called Follow the River by Alexander Thom.

John’s son, James Spurgeon, was born about 1756 in Frederick County, Maryland. In 1784 General George Washington and his nephew Bushrod Washington visited James and lodged with the Spurgeon family overnight. In his diary, Washington wrote “From Spurgeon’s to one Lemon is reckoned; 9 miles and the way is not bad, but from Lemon to the entrance

of the Yohiogany Glades is intolerable...” (Dickey, page 27)
The purpose of this visit across the Allegheny Tablelands concerned Washington’s vision to manage a feasible passage between the Potomac and the Ohio Rivers for a canal system or easy portage between these two rivers as a passage to the Western Territories.

The Spurgeons, James and John and a number of other pioneers had crossed the Allegheny Mountains from the east as early as 1767. In 1785, when he was about 30, James Spurgeon bought 400 acres of land. James and his wife Elizabeth had nine children.

Jonathan Spurgeon was born in 1787 in West Virginia. Jonathan and his first wife, Ruth had three children. Ruth died and Elizabeth Catherine Schmill’s husband died and Jonathan and Catherine were married. They had a big family. Jonathan died in 1853.

John Spurgeon was born in 1812 to Jonathan and Ruth Spurgeon. John and his wife Phoebe had seven daughters and three sons. Times were hard and there was exciting news of land to be had in Kansas, so John left West Virginia in about 1874 and moved his family to Kansas, including Louisa and her little daughter Fanny. There they settled on a farm at Hedville northwest of Salina. At one time John served as justice of the peace. Life was very hard in Kansas with drought, grasshoppers, and the unfamiliar grassland country. John died in Salina County Infirmary in 1908 at the age of 96.

LOUISA SPURGEON ADAMS

Little Louisa (she was never more than four feet nine inches tall) was born February 16, 1840, the second of ten children born to John and Phebe Spurgeon on Bear Fork of Cove Creek in Doddridge County, West Virginia. Doddridge County lies in a lush area in the West Virginia hills on the high Allegheny Plateau west of the Appalachian divide. Well-watered, it is part of the blue grass country that extends southwestward down into Kentucky. The town of West Union nearby is split by Middle Island Creek which tumbles down the hills toward the Ohio River and by a branch line of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad.

Louisa was a bright, lively child with blue eyes and brown curly hair. We can imagine that life was primitive but fun for Louisa growing up in a large family in the backwoods of West Virginia. No doubt she learned to work and to study in a family known for its leadership roles. A vivid memory from her childhood was of a trip by ox team and wagon with her parents to see the first railroad train on the tracks which were built on the tow path of the James River and the Kanawa Canal connecting the Ohio River with the eastern seaboard, the Chesapeake and Ohio line.

When she was 18, Louisa fell in love with a German boy, Francis Spray (Sprae), Jr. He had come with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Francis J. Spray, from Oldenburg in northern Germany when he was ten years old. In 1856, Francis, then 21, applied for and received U.S. Citizenship. The young couple was married September 25, 1858, in Doddridge County by A. Barnett. On March 2, 1861, their baby daughter was born and named for her father and paternal grandfather, Francis J. She was always called Fanny.

During the spring of 1861 lines were being drawn by the states leading up to the Civil War. On June 3, the Union's General McClellan met and defeated Confederate troops at

Phillipi, only 30 miles from West Union. The State of Virginia had joined the Confederacy, but people west of the mountains sided strongly with the Union.

On June 17, 1861, West Virginia seceded from Confederate Virginia and Doddridge County found itself in the middle of the conflict. President Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers and the people responded with enthusiasm. Louisa's young husband signed up with the 6th Virginia Volunteer Infantry and went off to war.

Francis suffered severe hardships and exposure during the fighting. He developed tuberculosis and died August 28, 1864. A picture certificate in memory of Francis Spray of the 6th Regiment, Company M, West Virginia Volunteers of the Union Army, states that he died at Clarksburg, West Virginia, August 28, 1864. The inscription reads, "A brave and galian soldier and a true patriot." The picture shows a large gravestone with the above printed on it. (Gemmill, personal letter.)

John Spurgeon provided for his large family by farming and hunting. After the Civil War, times were hard in the mountains. The Homestead Act of 1862 promised that a person who was head of a family or a widow could file on a claim of 160 acres and after living on it and improving it for five years could receive a deed to the land. Inspired by intriguing stories that had come back of rich opportunities in the West, John and Phebe decided to move to Kansas. The young widow, Louisa, and her little daughter, Fanny, went with them.

They traveled by covered wagon drawn by oxen. "In preparation the wagon was tightly packed with all the provisions needed to sustain them on the long journey; possessions that could not be packed were probably sold. Wedged into the wagon were household utensils such as skilletts and kettles, pewter dishware, lanterns, churns, cookstoves, and linens; and farming implements – axes, hoes, saws, and the family plow. Guns and

ammunition were brought along, for hunting and for protection. Finally, the travelers painstakingly packed supplies of food and water, including such staples as flour, sugar, salt, bacon, beans, yeast, and vinegar.” (Stratton, Pioneer Women, page 41.)

Mulberry Creek

After a journey of many long weeks over a thousand miles the Spurgeon family settled on Mulberry Creek near Hedville about ten miles west of Salina, Kansas. We can imagine their reaction to the flat, dry Kansas prairie after leaving their beautiful mountain home. Joanna L. Stratton in her book Pioneer Women gives us details of the lives of the pioneers in Kansas in the later 1800s as told by hundreds of first-hand accounts. Their little home of logs or of sod had only the most rudimentary furnishings. Although a good supply of water was often lacking in Kansas, the Spurgeons were fortunate to settle near a stream.

“The heavy work of transforming the virgin prairies into cultivated farm fields began as soon as the family was settled. Invariably handicapped by poor farming tools and unsophisticated agricultural methods, the homesteaders worked relentlessly to produce enough food and any added income to sustain their families throughout each long year. Turning the tough prairie sod was the most formidable task of all. To cut through the hard ground a heavy iron breaking plow was indispensable.” (Stratton, page 55)

Gathering the family’s fuel supply was a heavy chore. Trees grew only along the streams. They scoured the prairie for anything that would burn, dried twigs, tufts of twisted grass, old corncobs, woody sunflower stalks. By far the most popular source of fuel, however, were the abundant chunks of dried dung left by grazing herds of cattle and buffalo. In dry weather the Spurgeons roamed the grass lands in search of these cow and buffalo chips. Stored in old gunnysacks, the chips were stacked in a dry corner of the cabin to be burned throughout the long winter months.

They carried water from the stream for all household uses. A water bucket by the kitchen door held a dipper to be used in

common by all the family. This custom persisted in the West until water was piped into the homes perhaps as late as 1935.

An outhouse or “privy” set at some distance from the house covered a deep hole for human waste. Sporting one or two seats, it was later camouflaged with bushes. A sense of modesty was maintained with regards to it. One never wishes to meet a member of the opposite sex on the path.

Washing clothes was done on the washboard, an essential item in any household. The settlers made soap from wood ashes and fat. Early cooking was done at a fireplace with cast iron pots or a dutch oven. As soon as they were able, they purchased a heavy cast iron cook stove with an oven and possibly a reservoir for heating water.

The soil was rich and produced lavishly as soon as the sod was broken and sufficient water was available. The family quickly planted garden vegetables and grain, particularly corn. Chickens, turkeys, pigs, and cattle provided meat for the table, supplemented by a plentiful supply of game – buffalo, deer, antelope, wild turkey and prairie chicken. There were also wild gooseberries, wild grapes, crab apples, hazel nuts and hickory nuts.

Women’s Work

“Along with the regular farming and cooking chores, the housewife and her daughters devoted much of their time to sewing. Since ready-made clothes were generally unavailable, virtually all the family’s clothing was sewn by hand. Hours were spent stitching new skirts and trousers, darning socks, knitting sweaters and embroidering the household linens... In the dusty fields and open trails, there was little need or use for elegant fabrics or fashionable frills. Instead, clothing was simple, designed for practicality and economy. Women got through the year with only a few drab dresses of faded gingham or calico, a

sunbonnet and a plain muslin apron or two. Likewise, men wore simple uniforms of denim overalls, dark cotton work shirts, and old dusty caps...Faced with scarcity of cloth, the frontier family often produced its own yarns and wools...The family trunks were stripped of old dresses, suits, and shawls for usable scraps of fabric. Blankets, sheets, and linens often provided material for new shirts, skirts, and trousers. Even heavy grain sacks proved useful...For the cold winter months, animal skins were carefully preserved by the settlers to be fashioned into heavy leather coats, hats, and shoes...In addition to sewing the family clothing, the housewife devoted a good deal of her spare time to making the household blankets, linens and coverlets...Best of all were the beautiful handmade quilts pieced together with odd bits of calico, muslin and other fabrics.” (Stratton, page 69)

The skills gained at that time served Louisa throughout her long lifetime. She became famous for her beautiful pieced quilts and braided rugs. In my sister’s cedar chest today lies a quilt Louisa made of a thousand tiny bits of calico carefully pieced together and quilted by hand. The museum at Grand Lake holds many of her braided rugs and quilts.

Certainly Louisa was kept busy working with her mother, cooking, washing, canning and drying foodstuffs, tending chickens and sheep, shearing, carding, and spinning wool, making soap, hoeing, planting, and cultivating the garden. In 1874, she met and married Alexander Adams, a widower whose wife, Agnes Ross Adams, had died in 1869.

He had been living in Salina for 21 years. Louisa and Alex worked his farm at Hedville near Salina. In 1875, a little girl was born to them and named Jessie Love. One has to consider with what love this little new one was accepted into the family. Louisa’s daughter Fanny at this time was 14 years old.

In 1874 came the great grasshopper plague. “In the beginning 1874 seemed to have the makings of a very good year...The

farmers began their farming with high hopes, some breaking the sod for corn, others plowing what had been broken the year before, sowing spring wheat, corn and cane, and with plenty of rain everyone was encouraged. The neighbors would meet at some little one-room house and put in the day visiting and eating buffalo meat boiled, and corn bread and dried ‘apple sass’ that some relative back east had sent, and the men talking about the bumper crop they were going to have that year...But their anticipation turned to despair as million upon millions of grasshoppers blanketed the sky...Alighting to a depth of four inches or more, the grasshoppers covered every inch of ground, every plant and shrub. Tree limbs snapped under their weight, corn stalks bent to the ground, potato vines were mashed flat. Quickly and cleanly, these voracious pests devoured everything in their paths. No living plant could escape. Whole fields of wheat, corn, and vegetables disappeared; trees and shrubs were completely denuded. Even turnips, tobacco, and tansy vanished.”

“Within hours, no part of the countryside was left unscathed. For the beleaguered settlers, the devastation continued long after the grasshoppers had moved on. To their dismay, everything reeked with the taste and odor of the insects. The water in the ponds, streams and open wells turned brown with their excrement and became totally unfit for drinking...Bloated from consuming the locusts, the barnyard chickens, turnkeys, and hogs themselves tasted so strongly of grasshoppers that they were completely inedible...’In those days, there were no aristocrats on Spring Creek’, wrote one settler, ‘We made the most of our circumstances and of one another’.” (Stratton, page 106)

Indian Threat

In addition to the grasshopper scourge and the hardships of the primitive life style, the Indians were still a threat in Kansas. “Up until this time the vast Kansas prairies had been the undisputed territory of several nomadic tribes... White pioneers, eager to migrate westward, had resented the government policy which excluded them from the Great Plains area. By 1854, new land treaties were signed with the Indians to provide for the legal white settlement of the Kansas and Nebraska territories. But sporadic outbursts of trouble kept the settlers on edge. As late as the fall of 1878, a band of more than 200 Northern Cheyenne swept northward across the state, murdering homesteaders, plundering property, and spreading terror.

Actually, we know little of the movements of the Spurgeons during the 70s. In an incident reported in the book, Lincoln, That County in Kansas, Dorothy Terrance Homan writes that in February, 1872, in Lincoln County, John Spurgeon, Justice of the Peace, officiated in a trial of a man charged with killing his neighbor. We know that Louisa and Alex were married in Lincoln County adjacent to Saline County in 1874.

Most women move in and out of our story like ghostly wraiths. Phebe Spurgeon is one of these. Nineteen years after Louisa’s birth in West Virginia, Phebe reported the birth of a son, James to John and Phebe Spurgeon. We know the couple were parents of ten children. When they went to Kansas about 1870 it is likely that John and Phebe would have taken one or more of the younger children with them. James would have been ten to twelve years old. We do know that in her old age Louisa’s nephew’s wife, Geneva or Jeanie Braithwaite, lived with Louisa and took care of her.

Certainly during those trying years in Kansas, Louisa longed for the mountains of her girlhood. The dreary plains, the drought, the grasshoppers, the Indians, all combined to persuade

her and Alex to look for greener pastures. In the summer of 1880, they made plans to trail drive their herd of 500 cattle to the mountains of Colorado.

Understandably these people who had spent all their lives at elevations of not more than 2000 feet above sea level had no concept of the severity of winter in the Colorado Rockies. But in August of 1880 they started the 350 mile drive. Indomitable little Louisa walked every step of the way with the herders as they trailed the cattle across the plains of western Kansas and eastern Colorado, through Denver, and into the mountains. They were headed for Middle Park which promised abundant grass and land for the taking. “There were too few herders and not enough to make the work light. There was one rig and team of horses driven by a young boy carrying the chuck boxes and bedrolls which they unrolled on the ground at night, come hail, wind, snow, or high water. Crossing Kansas and eastern Colorado prairies was the hardest. It was unbearably hot and dry but grazing was plentiful for the cattle. Crossing the mountains was something else. It was rough and very hard going for so many flat-land cattle.” (Pauley, Day Before Yesterday, page 314)

Past the mountain town of Empire, the trail climbed abruptly toward Berthoud Pass where a rough wagon road crossed at 11,349 feet above sea level. It was now the middle of September. Clouds rolled in and the snow began to fall. The hardy little group pressed on hoping to drive the cattle down into the valleys of Middle Park. But the drifts blown by the bitter winds in those strange and treacherous canyons piled up ahead of them. They were forced to take shelter to save their own lives. The cattle scattered, stumbled on, or sank down in the heavy snows and died. As a child I remember hearing the story that ended with the line, “You can still find the bones of those cattle scattered across Lefty Selak’s pasture”. All but about 100 of the cattle were lost.

Before this time there had been explorers, hunters, and trappers in Middle Park, but few settlers. Gold had been discovered at Cherry Creek near Denver in 1858, but not until the late 1870s was there interest in prospecting in Middle Park. The news was out that gold had been found in North Park at the mines known as Teller, Gaskill, Pearl, Lulu, and Dutch Town. There was a great fever of activity in mining when Louisa and Alex arrived, but little gold had been taken out. A sensational murder had taken place on July 4, 1883, in a political battle over the location of the county seat, Grand Lake or Hot Sulphur Springs. Six men lost their lives before it was over. By 1885, it was clear that the mines were not going to pay off, the prospectors left, and the farmers settled down to farming and stock raising. In an attempt to compensate for the economic loss, an early settler, Joseph Wescott, platted Grand Lake City on the edge of the cold, deep, natural lake on June 26, 1888. The county seat moved back to Hot Sulphur Springs without protest.

The Grandview Hotel

When they arrived in 1880, Alex and Louisa took up a small farm in the fertile valley south of Grand Lake that is now covered by Lake Granby. In 1888, they bought the Garrison house, a sturdy log building near the outlet on the west side of Grand Lake commanding a beautiful view of the Continental Divide. They enlarged the building, raised it to two stories, and refurnished it. They renamed it the Grandview House. Mary Lyons Cairns wrote, "Long after the hotel ceased to exist, guests recalled the sweet, wholesome cleanliness of it and the excellent food that was always provided."

It is probably that Louisa left her two daughters in Salina at this time, perhaps with her parents, John and Phebe Spurgeon. On February 6, 1883, Fanny married Frederick Harvey Quincy of Salina. He later became one of the founders of the Planters State Bank of Salina. Jessie was going to school, apparently doing very well as her report card in June, 1888, when she was 13 showed her receiving 95 and 93 respectively in math and geography and 85 in other subjects.

It is not clear whether Alex's health was a problem at this time, or whether he chose not to keep up the pace set by Louisa. Whatever the reason, he did not stay long in Grand Lake, but made his home in Denver, going eventually to the Soldiers Home in Monte Vista. He died there on January 18, 1911, at the age of 77.

Louisa continued the Grandview House serving the incoming tourists, miners, and other travelers. In 1901, the Grandview was razed by fire. Josephine Young tells the story: "Mrs. Adams had the most beautiful furniture I ever saw. There was one lovely sofa with a hand-carved back in the parlor, with chairs to match. The hotel caught fire one morning. I was making carpet rags. Jake and Chris, my boys, had gone out to the water hole in the ice of the lake to water the horses. Jake ran in and said, 'Mama,

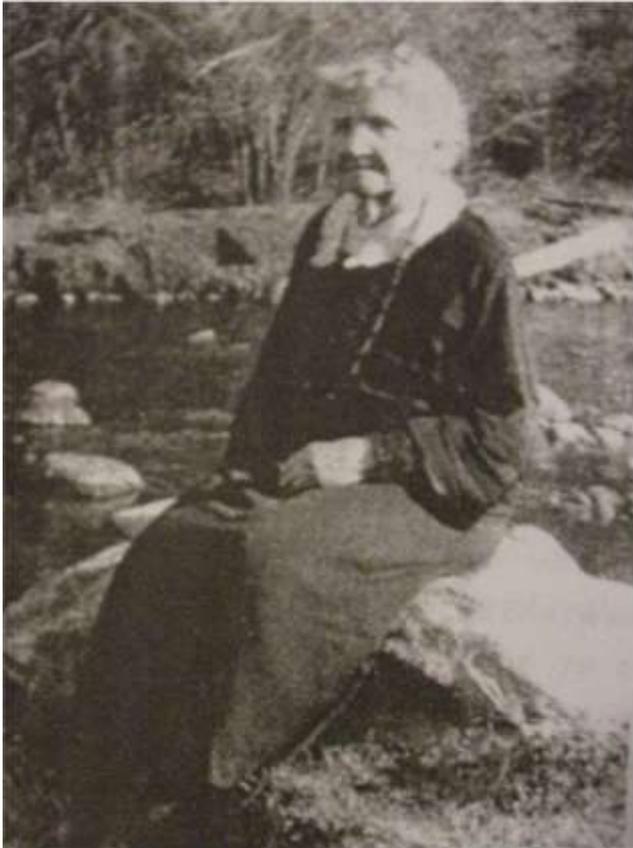
Mrs. Adams house is on fire'. Chris, my husband, was reading. I called him and we all ran. We saved what furniture we could, but there was no way to save the building. There was no water – the lake was frozen. Pieces of burning wood kept falling on the things we tried to save. It was terrible! We saved only about \$300 worth of furniture. We threw bedding out on the frozen lake. She had a new rag carpet on her parlor floor; she tried to save it, but the house above was burning furiously and the upper story was about to fall in. Chris tore the carpet from the floor and saved it; just as he got out of the house the burning walls fell in.” (Cairns, Grand Lake Olden Days, page 126.)

Louisa leased the Kauffman House and operated it for many years. The building still stands on the north shore in the center of Grand Lake Village and has been restored by the Grand Lake Historical Society as a museum. Many of Louisa’s handmade rugs and quilts are part of the furnishings. As she grew older, Louisa moved to a little home near the site of the Grandview and there we visited her in the summer of 1921 when I was six years old. It became a memorable occasion for me. Unnoticed by my mother, I got into a canoe on the shore of the lake and pushed off into the water. I was rescued by some neighbors after my brother and sister reported my plight. It was an experience I have never forgotten.

Louisa visited our family in Roosevelt when I was 15 and she was 90. She always wore a long black shirt covered with a gray and white checked apron. She carried pink peppermints in the slit pockets of her skirt and when she observed one of the children doing a good deed, she would slyly slip us a pink peppermint. I remember she told me to think of raising hogs. Hogs are a good investment, she said.

Geneva Braithwaite, a niece, lived with Louisa and took care of her for many years. Later she moved into a nursing home in Denver. I visited her there in the summer of 1939. She died on August 20, 1940. Her body was taken to Salina, Kansas, and

interred with her daughter Fanny in the Quincy room of the Hillcrest Mausoleum at the Smokey Hills Cemetery. Wynn and Bette and the children and I visited there and also made the trek out to Mulberry Creek where the Spurgeons, John and Phebe, had settled when they first came to Kansas.



Louisa J. Spurgeon Adams

ALEXANDER ADAMS

Alexander Adams was a small man, 5 feet 5 ½ inches tall, weighing 115 pounds. He had a fair complexion, gray eyes, and black hair. He wore a black mustache. He was born east of Portland, Fountain County, Indiana, on the Wabash River on October 12, 1834. We do not know his parents. He lived in Indiana until he was 21 when he went to Iowa for about 1 ½ years and to Missouri for two years.

Alex, as he was usually called, enrolled as a private in Company F, 6th regiment of the Kansas Volunteer Cavalry on the 4th of October, 1861, to serve during the Civil War. He also served with Company A, 6th Regiment of the Kansas Volunteer Cavalry. He was honorably discharged on August 10, 1865. While in the army he suffered from pneumonia and from “bloody flux”, a condition which bothered him the rest of his life.

Alex was first married to Agnes Ross. She died in Salina, Kansas, on November 20, 1869. In 1874, he was married to Louisa Spurgeon Spray, a widow with one child. They were married in Lincoln County and lived at Hedville until 1880 when they attempted to drive 500 head of cattle to Middle Park, Colorado. They were caught in heavy snows in September on Berthoud Pass and lost all but about 100 head of the cattle. They took up a small farm in the meadows south of Grand Lake Village.

In 1888 they bought the Garrison House, a hotel on the west side of Grand Lake, near the outlet. They enlarged it, adding another story and refurnishing it. At some point Alex went to Denver where he lived at 3645 Zuni Street for several years. On October 26, 1909, he moved to the Soldiers Home in Rio Grande County, Colorado. He died in Monte Vista, Colorado, on January 18, 1911, at the age of 77 years.

JESSIE LOVE ADAMS MITCHELL

Jessie Love, my maternal grandmother, was a mysterious figure in my lineage who stirs deep feelings of love and compassion. She was born in Hedville, near Salina, Kansas, in 1875 to Louisa Spurgeon Adams and Alexander Adams.

Her mother, Louisa, had one daughter, Fanny Spray, 14 years old when Jessie was born. We assume that Jessie was left in Kansas, possibly with the grandparents, John and Phoebe Spurgeon, when Louisa and Alex Adams made the abortive attempt to drive their cattle to Colorado in 1880. No doubt Jessie spent some time in Colorado, but we know she went to school in Salina. Her sister, Fanny, married Frederick Quincy in February, 1883. Perhaps Jessie spent some time with her.

A picture of Jessie at about eight years old shows her as a nicely dressed, composed little girl. A report card from her Salina school indicates that she received good grades in school. At some time she lived in Grand Lake with her parents. Here she met Ben Mitchell, a somber, quiet man, 13 years her senior, who played the fiddle for the local dances. Louisa opposed Jessie's association with Ben. Nell Pauly told me that Louisa told her that she had said to Jessie, "If you marry him you can not come back into my house." Jessie defied her mother and married Ben. Ben filed on 160 acres, the entire hillside behind Grand Lake Village, and built a sturdy log cabin. Three children were born to them, Rennie Aaron in 1882, Myrtle Lucy in 1894, and John Alexander in 1896.

We can assume that Jessie was weary of the hardships of the mountain town. She was not welcome at her mother's home. Ben spent every Saturday night playing the fiddle for dances with his brothers, Hugh and John, and she was left to her own devices. A tragedy occurred one night at a dance at the Chris Young boathouse by the lake. Nell Pauly writes that it was customary for many of the men to wear a six-shooter in a

cartridge belt on one hip and a hunting knife in a sheath on the other. During intermission a wise-cracking stranger named Harry Randall who had been drinking too much tried to stage a fight with Ben who declined to fight and turned away saying he had come to fiddle, not to fight. As he walked away, a prankster, anxious to hurry things along, pushed Randall from the rear so that he lunged against Ben, shoving him roughly. Ben drew his knife from its sheath and stuck it into Randall's back, killing him instantly.

Ben was filled with remorse, crying that he had taken a man's life, a precious thing he could not replace. Ben was tried and convicted, the judge saying, "I am giving you the least possible minimum sentence. There are others more guilty than you. Unfortunately, I cannot reach them by law." The sentence was to serve 18 months in the state prison at Canon City, Colorado, of which Ben had to serve only six months.

But Jessie was through. Her mother had told her not to come back to her. Her mother-in-law, Polly Mitchell, was a sturdy German woman who would be hard to live with. Jessie left town, we are told, with a Mormon who invited her to go to Salt Lake City with him. And that is all we know of Jessie. My mother, Myrtle, tried to find her, and I have tried as has Valerie to find some clue to her whereabouts. Louisa, her mother, lived to be over 100 years old. Jessie could have lived a long time. We had a clue when we met Jessie Mitchell Olsen who told us that she knew there was a Jessie Mitchell in Salt Lake City in the 1930's because their mail was often mixed up. But she is gone; the gentle, shy little girl of the picture is a mystery that will continue to haunt me. We have arranged to have her temple work done. Would she want to be married to Ben for eternity as the LDS Church promises? Who knows?

THE SCOTCH-IRISH

The Scotch-Irish, the most numerous of the newcomers to America, were not Irishmen at all, though coming from Ireland, and they were distinct from the Scots who came to America directly from Scotland. In the early 1600s, King James, to further the conquest of Ireland, had seen to the peopling of the northern county of Ulster with his subjects from the Scottish Lowlands, who as good Presbyterians might be relied upon to hold their ground against the Irish Catholics. These Ulster colonists, the Scotch-Irish, eventually prospered despite the handicap of a barren soil and the necessity of border fighting with the Irish tribesmen. Then after about a century, the English government destroyed their prosperity by prohibiting the export of their woolens and other products, and at the same time threatened their religion by virtually outlawing it and insisting on conformity with the Anglican Church. As the long-term leases of the Scotch-Irish terminated, in the years after 1710, the English landlords doubled and even tripled the rents. Rather than sign new leases, thousands upon thousands of the ill-used tenants embarked in successive waves of emigration.

Understandably a cantankerous and troublesome lot, these people were often coldly received at the colonial ports, and most of them pushed out to the edge of the American wilderness. There they occupied land with scant regard for ownership, believing that “it was against the laws of God and nature that so much land should be idle while many Christians wanted it to labor on and to raise bread”. Among their illustrious descendants was the characteristically Scotch-Irish Andrew Jackson. American presidents of Scotch-Irish background count Polk, Buchanan, Andrew Johnson, Grant, Arthur, Cleveland, Harrison, McKinley and Wilson. (Uris, Ireland, a Terrible Beauty, page 108.)

Uris notes that some 200,000 Scotch-Irish came to America during the Eighteenth Century. These were a remarkable caliber of pioneers of a sternly devout and industrious ilk. As fighters they were in the top rank of the American Revolution. At the time of the Revolution, one seventh of the population was Scotch-Irish.



Polly Ann Yarger Mitchell
James Washington Mitchell

THE MITCHELLS

James Washington Mitchell, Scotch-Irish, a democrat, born about 1810, came from New York State to Henry County, Illinois, before the Civil War with his family, including three sons, James Washington, Jr., Ransom, and John.

James, Jr., born April 15, 1831, in New York State, came as a young man with his father and others of his family to Geneseo, Illinois. In Atchinson, Illinois, he worked on the farm of Benjamin and Hugh Yarger, Germans who had moved recently from Ohio. He was attracted to pretty 22 year old Polly Ann Yarger, Benjamin's daughter and they were married May 29, 1856.

Seven children were born to them. (Mary Jane, James III, Benjamin Joseph, Hugh, Hannah Ellen, Eva Marie and Ida May) About 1880 the Mitchells moved to Colorado. They took up land in the beautiful pine-covered mountains north of Grand Lake and built a sturdy log cabin from the giant trees on the North Fork of the Colorado River north of Grand Lake. They trapped and hunted and probably they tried a hand at the gold mining that was going on at that time at Gaskill, Lulu and Teller City. John (uncle), Hugh and Ben (brothers) were master fiddlers and they played for the Saturday night dances that brightened the bitter winter nights in the area.

John, J. W.'s brother, kept fish traps and sold fresh fish and caviar to the Denver market. J. W. died in 1901 and was buried in Grand Lake. A note in the Grand Lake Prospector for July 12, 1883, says, "John Mitchell is pulling trout out of the lake at the rate of from 15-25 pounds per day. For these he receives thirty-seven cents a pound here. John will have a fat pocket book by fall."

THE YARGERS

Benjamin Yarger, a Democrat, born in Pennsylvania, and his wife, Hannah Hall Yarger, lived in Hillsboro, Highland County, Ohio, for at least ten years. Her parents were William and Mary Hall from Pennsylvania. Her grandfather was a Dr. W. W. Adams from Pennsylvania. Benjamin and Hannah were married in Hillsboro, James, born Dec 12, 1828, Joseph born July 19, 1832, Polly Ann, born February 2, 1835, and Hugh, born June 7, 1837.

In 1853 the Yargers went to Atkinson, Illinois, for a short visit, returned to Ohio, and a short time later moved to Atkinson. Benjamin and his son, Hugh, both took up land and raised corn.

They were hard working German stock and they did well in Illinois. Benjamin was very proud of his fine horses. Benjamin gave land for the Grand View Cemetery directly across the street from his home. When he grew older, he sold the farm and moved into town. He died March 22, 1877, at the age of 71. His wife, Hannah died May 2, 1888 at the age of 81. They were both buried in the Grand View Cemetery.

POLLY ANN YARGER MITCHELL

Polly Ann Yarger, the only daughter of Benjamin and Hannah Yarger was 18 when the family moved to Illinois. She was a buxom, highly colored girl with sleek black hair drawn back from a neat center part and smoothed out in fashionable flares on the side and back down over plump cheeks. A daguerreotype of her shows her in a stylish dress of the Civil War period with wide sleeves and heavy lace-edged shawl dropping down from a dressy lace collar.

Polly married the handsome James Washington Mitchell at the county seat in Cambridge, Illinois, on May 29, 1856, when she was 21 and he was 25. Their first child, born May 18, 1857, was a little girl named Mary Jane. She died November 23, 1862, at the age of five. Their first son, James Washington III, born Nov 7, 1860 was named after his father. Benjamin Joseph, born January 12, 1863 was named for her father, Benjamin Yarger. Hugh named for her brother Hugh, was born May 20, 1866. Another little girl named Hannah Ellen, for Polly's mother was born March 7, 1868, but she died when she was five years old, September 10, 1873. Eva Marie was born in Iowa on September 2, 1871, and Ida May was born March 16, 1877, back in Illinois. Apparently, J. W. Mitchell traveled to several different states for we find him variously in Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska.

In the early 1880's the Mitchells found their way to Middle Park in Colorado, a veritable paradise.

BENJAMIN JOSEPH MITCHELL

Benjamin Joseph was born January 12, 1863 to JW and Polly Yarger Mitchell. He was named for her father Benjamin Yarger.

On June 5, 1891, Ben, then 28, married Jessie Love Adams, daughter of Louisa J. and Alex Adams who owned the Grandview House in Grand Lake. Jessie was sixteen years old, a shy girl twelve years younger than Ben. She had spent most of her life in Salina, Kansas. Ben filed on 160 acres of mountain and pasture land just north of the town of Grand Lake and built a fine log cabin. The children came quickly, Rennie Aaron on May 24, 1892; Myrtle Lucy, January 9, 1894; and John Alexander on October 22, 1895. After the tragic death of Harry Randall in the summer of 1896 Ben was sent to prison in Canon City, Colorado. Jessie, 21 years old with three children, found the situation unbearable and she left Grand Lake and the children, going, it was said, to Salt Lake City with a Mormon. Polly Yarger Mitchell (mother-in-law) took the three children into her home and raised them; Rennie was four, Myrtle was two, and Johnnie was one.

Ben was released from prison after six months, and he returned to Grand Lake. He took up his hunting and trapping but he no longer played for the Saturday night dances. His spirit was broken. His hair turned white over night. He was a morose and somber man. The children went to school during the elementary years in the county, but when they were older they were sent to Denver to school. He was a gentle, kind father, but the spirit was gone. J. W. died in 1901, and Polly carried on as long as the children needed her. James (Jim) married and went to Oregon. Hugh married and stayed in Colorado. Polly died October 23, 1911, at the age of 76. When World War I broke out, Rennie went with the American Expeditionary Forces and Johnnie joined the U.S. Marines and spent many years in the Far East, the

Philippines and China. Myrtle married Ray Wagers and moved to Utah.

Mother took us to visit Ben when I was six years old. Johnnie, Ev, and I had a good time playing in the little stream that flowed by his cabin door on the edge of Grand Lake. He was a gentle and kindly old man with white hair and a white flowing mustache. A sad and lonely man, Ben died November 29, 1923, at the age of 60 from pneumonia. He was buried in the little cemetery on the hill above Grand Lake under a white granite stone reading, "In the mountains that he loved".



Ben Mitchell, mother Polly, Rennie, Myrtle, Johnnie

MYRTLE LUCY MITCHELL WAGERS



Myrtle Lucy Mitchell was born in Granby, Colorado, January 9, 1894, the second child of Benjamin and Jessie Love Adams Mitchell. Her father was a hunter and trapper in the mountains above Grand Lake, Colorado, where their sturdy log cabin was built.

As a child Myrtle played among the rocks and the trees with her brother Rennie and Johnnie. She recalled helping her Uncle John catch trout and strip the eggs to make caviar. She remembered holding down the little lion hounds which her father kept and pulling quills from their noses with pliers after they had had a bout with a porcupine.

When Myrtle was two, tragedy struck as the mother, Jessie, left the family and, they believed, went to Utah with a Mormon. Their grandmother, Polly Yarger Mitchell, came to live with them and take care of Ben and his children.

There was a warm relationship between Myrtle and her cousins, George, Oliver, and Alice Snyder, and Margaret Evans. She attended the little one-room schoolhouse with the Blaney and McQueary and Selak kids. She loved school and was a quick learner. Later they went to Denver during the winter months in order to have better schools. When she was in eighth grade, however, she quit school in Denver because an uppity teacher from the East called the students a bunch of “uneducated hogs”, and her father, Ben, said they didn’t have to take that.

When she was 18, she took the normal examination to teach school and passed it. Just about then she married the fun-loving Ray Wagers and moved up to the Church Place. There her first three children were born – Marjorie, Evelyn and Johnnie. Ray's mother was the midwife, and the children were born at home.

Myrtle was a good mother, a proud mother, with those three, dressing them up, taking many pictures, taking them for picnics in the meadows. She moved with Ray to several jobs during those first years: to a little mine called Butcher Knife; to Parshall where Ray baled hay and hauled it; to Haybro where he worked in the coal mine; to Steamboat Springs. Jessie was born in Steamboat Springs.

In 1921 Myrtle took her four children back to Grand Lake to see her father before she and Ray moved to Roosevelt, Utah with Ray's father Bert. In Roosevelt, Ray worked for the Peppard Seed Company, buying, sorting, storing the alfalfa seed. Two more children, Raymond and Iril were born. Jobs were hard to find in Roosevelt, and Ray went to Provo, Utah where the Ironton plant of Columbia Steel was being built. Later he went on to San Diego, California, still seeking a good job. After 1923, he never did come back to Utah and Myrtle raised the little family by herself. It seems that she always hoped he would come home but the money he sent was far from adequate and she began doing washing and sewing for others to make money to feed her children.

She was a clever seamstress, and her children remember waking late in the night many times to find her sewing up a new dress for one of them to wear the next day. Her relationship with Mama and Papa Wagers was always very close. Her own father, Ben, died in November 1923. Bert and Laurie were as good to her as to their own daughters. She sent the children to Sunday School at the little Episcopal Mission, and had them baptized in the Episcopal church, perhaps to protect them from the Mormon doctrine.

Life was very hard. She carried water in from a standpipe in the yard, heated it on the coal stove, washed the clothes (in the early years on a washboard) and then carried the water out to throw it in the yard. The clothes froze on the line in the bitter Uintah Basin winter; the water pipes froze and had to be thawed out by building a fire around them. At one time, Iril was severely burned when his clothing caught fire as he stood too close to the fire set to thaw out the pipes. At another time, Iril had pneumonia, and she held him under a sheet, pouring boiling water into a can containing eucalyptus oil to provide a steam tent.

She worked hard to make good times for her children, too. Always there were new clothes at Christmas, Easter and the Fourth of July. She would dress them all up in their new clothes and they would walk down to the fair grounds for the Fourth of July celebration. On Easter, they hunted Easter eggs and went on a picnic if the weather was good. At Christmas, there was always one toy and one article of clothing in addition to the packages that came from the aunts in Colorado.

There were few new clothes and few pleasures for Myrtle outside of the satisfaction of seeing her children well clothed and well fed. She kept a live start of yeast, saving the water off boiled potatoes to make the bread moist and good. A substantial breakfast of hot oatmeal always started off the day. She cooked lots of brown beans, rich and good in their juice, heaping pans of fried potatoes, corn and green beans bottled up during the summer months by boiling for at least four hours in the wash boiler. Special treats were deviled eggs, rich strawberry pie, and steak, floured and fried in the big cast iron skillet with rich milk gravy and hot biscuits. She must have fed her children well, for they had few sicknesses outside the usual childhood diseases.

She bought one of the new electric washing machines in 1929, a Maytag, and the washing became easier. She was skilled at ironing white shirts, polishing the cuffs and collars with careful pride. She earned 15 cents each for washing and ironing

a white shirt, and in one month in 1933 she made \$75. She kept careful account of every cent, finding a little money on Saturday for the kids to see the Saturday matinee at the movie house.

In 1933, Marjorie graduated from high school and wanted to go to college. Ray wrote that he could not give her any help. The neighbors commented that “you can’t go to college on a dime”, but Myrtle saw in this the fulfillment of her own dreams of further schooling, and in September Marjorie went to school at BYU in Provo. For two years, Myrtle sent what money she could. At one time when Marjorie wrote home for money, Myrtle wrote back, “Ride the hog home; we’re out of pork”.

She moved her brood to Provo in 1935, renting a house near BYU large enough to rent rooms to students to help pay her own rent. Evelyn had married John Pritchett and was living in White Rocks. Johnnie left home about this time, going to San Diego to live with Uncle Bud and Aunt Kitty and soon afterward signing up with the Army to go to Hawaii. Myrtle took a job with the Utah State Hospital, a job she was to hold for 20 years.

Tragedy struck in 1936. Thirteen-year old Iril, playing in the railroad yards with a buddy while Myrtle and Marjorie were working an extra job at a tomato cannery was struck by a rolling boxcar and lost a leg. She retained a lawyer suing the railroad for maintaining an attractive nuisance. The lawyer advised her to settle out of court for \$1,000. This she did, giving the lawyer \$500 for his services, the doctor \$250 and spending the remainder for a bicycle for Ike and a radio.

In the next few years, her boys and Jessie in junior high and high school were a great worry to her. Ike, bright but impudent, was having skirmishes with the truant officers. Raymond didn’t like to go to school; Jessie was making undesirable friends. But life went on and Myrtle continued to work at the State Hospital where her industry and dependability had earned her the job of night supervisor.

Jessie married Rolland Brown and went to live in Benjamin. Raymond married Elaine Peterson; Marjorie married Harold Thatcher; and Ike married Darlene Hadlock. Johnnie was out of the Army and he and Ike had found jobs in defense plants, but with the outbreak of World War II, both Raymond and Johnnie were called into the service, even though Johnnie by this time was married to LaVee Christiansen.

One cold night in 1950 as Myrtle walked the five blocks home to Marjorie's house from Center Street where she had left the hospital bus, she was attacked and raped by a neighbor boy. She suffered a heart attack at that time from which she never recovered. In the fall of 1955, she broke her collar bone in a fall; she developed diabetes; and in April she had another heart attack. She died on Marjorie's birthday, the 6th of June, 1956. She was buried in Provo, Utah.

Myrtle had a keen, quick mind, a great zest for life, a driving need to learn. She was creative, artistic, idealistic. One of her favorite lines was "If you have two loaves of bread, sell one to buy hyacinths to feed your soul". But the one which shows her more practical quality and mental balance was "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I can't change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

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Marjorie Wagers Thatcher
Kaysville, Utah
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