

FRANCES MARIA STILLMAN RUSSELL NEFF

*By Verna Seely Carter - granddaughter*

Born May 29, 1830 in Eri Otiego County, New York, the daughter of Jason Stillman and Harriet Elizabeth Seymour Stillman.

Frances Maria grew up in a home where there was great love between her father and mother, but where much work and responsibility fell upon the shoulders of the mother and children because her father was ill with an incurable disease and the word "consumption" was whispered about.

The young child adored her father and it seemed he paid a little extra attention to her. She always remembered the time he decided to find a home in a warmer climate where he could move his family and possibly recover his health. The family worked together packing his wagon with clothes and food for his journey, and when he started the team of horses at his leaving it was Frances Maria who rode on the seat beside him to the last field's gate and there to get down from the wagon and stand to tearfully wave at him until he disappeared from sight. He never lived to make a return journey.

Frances Maria was taught by her mother to sew, to keep a house that was clean and shining, using the admonition often "anything worth doing is worth doing well" - and this saying of virtue has been used from mother to daughter to the present time.

Growing up was not an idle time for the little girl, it was necessary for every member of the family to work at any available job to get food and clothing and many times there was little of either.

The family joined the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and this probably was the reason they moved to Illinois. We have no exact date of this move nor if the father was with them at the time of the move.

When Frances Maria was about nineteen years of age, in the year of 1850 she was among the saints who made the journey across the plains. Her story is like many of the others who endured hardship, sickness and tragedy along the way west to make a home in Utah.

She married quite young. A Mr. Russell, friend of the family. We call him Mr. Russell because the records we have of this marriage and another marriage of Frances Maria to his brother following his death. We have three names recorded in family writings, a Samuel, Lester, and Isaac Nelson Russell and no clear indication as to which names belong to which brother. The recorded information by family states the first Russell brother Frances Maria married died and she married his brother who joined the gold rush and was declared dead sometime later. However, two children were born of this marriage. Two girls, one dying and the other little girl, Ida growing up to womanhood.

It was a happy meeting between Franklin Neff and Frances Maria, for they fell in love and were married January 1, 1855. Franklin was a widower of two years and had a little daughter, Martha Elizabeth. So it was a large family group when Franklin and Frances had nine children of their own. Their children's names were:

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Frances Maria, Mary Minerva, John Franklin, Barbara Matilda, Rosella Salome, May Seymour, Alice Amelia, Seymour Howard and Alfaretta (my mother).

Three of these children died the same year of dyptheria, which was a sorrow hard for their parents to bear.

Grandfather was a friend to the Indians, giving them flour from his mill and acting as a scout among them for Brigham Young. So he persuaded grandmother to name their last daughter Alfaretta, which he said was a pretty and perfectly suitable Indian name for the child. She had red hair and blue eyes! Grandmother Frances always called the child Alfie.

Franklin and Frances Maria made their home at the mouth of Mill Creek canyon and he operated a flour mill with his father John Neff and later inherited the mill. While he was generous with the flour and corn meal to the Indians they seemed to prefer the biscuits baked by Grandmother Frances and there was almost a constant stream of these people at the Neff's door.

One can imagine how busy Frances Maria found herself with a family of eleven children, Lamanites begging at her door for biscuits and caring for the numerous less fortunate people that she and Grandfather took into their home.

Along with her family and household chores Grandmother was one of the first school teachers in that area. The school house was built of logs and situated not far from the Neff home and served also as a building for church and social gatherings.

She sang in the social gatherings, was an officer in the Relief Society and Primary organizations, and always a teacher. She entertained and provided for the church authorities when they visited the ward. Family notes list some of these visitors as Joseph E. Taylor, Steven Marks of the Sunday School and Mary Freeze of the Y.L.M.I.A.

She would tell her children of her childhood days in Illinois when the Prophet Joseph Smith would visit her parents and holding her on his knee talk with her.

Grandmother taught her children well and two principles stand out clearly in the mind of each of her children. Honesty and obedience. Another favorite expression she used often was "it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong". A story is told by a young girl who visited the Neff home as a child. While playing on the parlor rug she found what to her was a beautiful breast pin. It was long and shining silver. She slipped it into her pocket and took it home with her. She kept it for a week looking at in secret and thrilling to it's shining beauty. But her conscience bothered her because she had listened to the teachings on honesty that Grandmother Neff taught her family. At the end of a week she approached Grandma and with tears running down her cheeks returned the breast pin and asked her forgiveness for taking it home. Sister Neff accepted the pin graciously and put her little guest at ease. The beautiful breast pin was only an extra large safety pin, but the lesson on honesty given and learned was the thing of value.

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As most hardy pioneer women, Frances Maria Neff was a practical nurse and at any time of day or night would pack what healing ointments and herbs in her bag and go to the bedside of a sick one or to deliver a baby.

Her husband Franklin died while there were still four children at home, the youngest being ten years of age. She raised her children and after they were all married continued to live in her old home alone. Later she went to live with her youngest child Alfaretta, husband and family. The husband Arta Seely welcomed her into their home and treated her with affection as his own mother had died when he was a small boy.

Grandmother Frances Maria Neff died September 13, 1903 at the age of 73.

P. S. I have a duplicate copy of ' Sealings in the Temple at Nauvoo, Hancock County Illinois - page 465 ' show Frances Maria Stillman born May 29, 1830 in Westmorland, Otsego County, New York, was sealed to Samuel Russell born Sept 25, 1812 in Erie, Erie County, New York. The sealing was done January 20, 1846 in Nauvoo by H. C. Kimball- witness Richards. Esther Hill and Abigail Horn were sealed to Samuel Russell at the same time as Frances Maria. This sealing was cancelled later and Frances Maria was sealed to Franklin Neff, and the children those not B I C to them, also.

From the records of Edith Russell Woods we have the following:

Isaac Russell came to Salt Lake Valley with his father Daniel Russell and his step-mother Harriet Elizabeth Stillman Russell and some of their children in 1848. They settled in East Mill Creek.

Isaac married his brother Lester's widow Frances Maria Stillman Russell about the year 1850, when Frances Maria joined the Russell family in East Mill Creek. She and her first husband Lester Russell had started out to join the family but Lester died on the plains.

Isaac and Frances Maria had one daughter, Ida Russell.

Isaac left East Mill Creek and went to Calif. We have no record of a divorce from Frances Maria but he married Isabelle Orr 24 Dec. 1860 in Danville, Calif. They had six children. He died in San Francisco, Calif. in 1921 at the age of 93.

NOTE; It is now being checked if it was ~~ix~~ Samuel Lester that Frances Maria married or just where the name Lester enters into the picture.