

MARY BARR NEFF

--my great grandmother
by Verna Seely Carter

Mary's parents Christian Barr and Susanna Brenneman were born in Zurich, Switzerland. They were industrious, patriotic and loved their native country. Their ancestors had fought valiantly in three wars. In 1386 one distinguished himself in battle against the Austrian Knights. The two sides of warriors met face to face and the Swiss sought to penetrate their foes lines. The ancestor stepped forward gathering as many spears of the enemy he could reach, he buried them in his breast and bore them to the ground and his comrades rushed over his body to pierce the enemy lines.

The Swiss people have always worked in agriculture, but there are many professional people such as educators, physicians, artists etc, among them and they are world famous for wood carving, watch and clock making.

Loving religious freedom a sect known as the Mennonites accepted William Penn's invitation to come to America to avoid religious persecution and to buy land in Pennsylvania. Some time before and around the year 1715 a group bought land and settled in what we know as Lancaster County, Penn. There followed other groups of religious sects from the old county to this area of Penn. Among them the Neffs, Barrs, Brenneman, Herrs, Kendegs, Groffs, Brackbills, Snavelys and Bitners. Mary Barr's progenitors were in this group.

Mary Barr was born December 1, 1801 in Bart Twp, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. The daughter of Christian Barr and Susanna Brenneman Barr.

She grew up in a large well built, brown stone house, one of thirteen children, she being the fifth child. Her brothers and sisters were Michael, Christian², Jacob, Susan, Anna, Elizabeth, Jacob (the first son named Jacob died in infancy), Amos, Fanny, Benjamin, Judith and Barbara. It is interesting to note here that this family at this time knew nothing of the gospel of Jesus Christ there-for believing that when their first son Jacob died that was the end of him.

The mothers in this Pennsylvania colony were good cooks and home makers and the fathers good providers-- they had to be with large families to feed. Though in the early days of settlement food was scarce at times, every bit was utilized and stretched to reach each person, and each child knew what it was to work.

Mary learned to cook, weave cloth, sew, keep a clean house, tend garden and livestock. Holding a lamp close to a bed side while her mother cared for the sick she learned home nursing and the use of herbs as medicine.

The land of Lancaster County was a fertile ground and these industrious families

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cultivated it, raising grain and vegetables with meadows for livestock as their herds grew in number.

There was social activity for the young people but they were strictly even sternly chaperoned. The girls dare not roll their eyes at the young men until the parents said they were of courting age. When Mary was eighteen years old her father painted a fresh coat of blue paint on the gate of the white picket fence signifying that there was a daughter of an age to marry living there, and young men could come calling. They did, to sit dutifully with the family in the parlor until the daughter was permitted to go walking with the young man.

Mary selected the distinguished young John Neff 11 for her husband. He was 28 and she 21. They were married January 12, 1822. Along with quilts, hand woven chair coverings, cured fruit and vegetables Mary brought a cow and several pigs as her dowery.

The Barr children had strict religious training and we believe in the Mennonite faith as some of their progenitors belonged to this sect. We do know at a young age a white bonnet was put on Mary's head and her old age found her feeling most comfortable wearing a narrow white hair piece.

On Mary's wedding day her mother took her in her arms and gave her a tight hug, telling her to be a good wife. Her father patted her shoulder, wished her well and told her "she had now made her bed- lie in it". To interpret means " you have made a marriage- stay with it".

Mary's first child Barbara Matilda was born nine months later on October 28, 1822. Nine other children were born within a year and a half or two years of each other. They were Barbara, Franklin (my grandfather), Amos Herr, Cyrus, Mary Ann, Susanna Benjamin Barr, Amanda, John 111 and Elizabeth. All grew to maturity and married excepting one, but a number of them died at a fairly young age. Mary Ann who married the scout Porter Rockwell was but thirty seven at the time of her death.

Mary Barr made a good choice in a husband. John Neff 11 was an only living son and his father had given him the opportunity of a liberal education. At the time of his marriage he had land and a few head of livestock. With a knowledge of what to do and how to do it, combined with a willingness to work he and his wife built up a prosperous back ground and at one time he was considered one of the wealthiest land owners in Lancaster County. They owned woolen shops, a flour, shingle and molasses mill -- plus a brewery.

The story is told of John and Mary discovering four of their sons slacking their thirst much too often at the brewery so the door was bolted and the sons were put on a diet of straight molasses until they were "purged" of their over indulgence.

American history was made in Pennsylvania not far from the Neff land and the Neff children were taught to respect and honor their country. John Neff was a personal friend of President Buchanan and Mary was a gracious hostess to him in their fifteen room home of rock and lumber. James Buchanan was an educated lawyer and

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John Neff having a good education was perhaps the thing that interested them both and brought them to-gether.

Once when Mary Barr Neff was trying to situate her family in the area allotted to them in the old Fort in the Salt Lake valley, her husband found her in tears and said "Mother what is troubling you?" She smiled through her tears and said "How much easier it was to keep a tidy house in our home back in Pennsylvania".

In 1842 Mormon missionaries came to Lancaster County and John and Mary were converted and baptized by Elder Henry Deem. Seven of their children were also baptized and the others were ~~baptized~~ baptized as they became eighty years of age. John and Mary Neff never faltered in their conversion and devotion to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

We do not know how many times John and Mary visited the Prophet Joseph Smith in Nauvoo but we do know they were there as guests of the Prophet and his wife in the Mansion House in the year 1842 just six weeks before the martyrdom of the Prophet and his brother Hyrum. Mary told her children that the Prophet Joseph said to her husband "I shall not live long!" In grave sadness John Neff inquired "Brother Joseph, then what shall we do?" The reply was "There will be someone in my place". This conversation was repeated by the Neffs son, Bishop Neff, many years later at a gathering of saints.

Before the Neffs left the Mansion House John Neff said to his wife "the Prophet Joseph could use some money to help the saints", and Mary helped him remove some gold peices from the heavy leather money belt he wore around his waist.

Six weeks later news reached the Neffs that the Prophet and his brother had been murdered. With grief John and Mary prepared to sell all their holdings in Pennsylvania, which they did at a loss, and with their family and loaded wagons moved to Nauvoo where the Saints were being driven from their homes. The Neffs joined the exodus from Nauvoo and with the saints suffered the trials of the long trek to Winter Quarters which culminated in a tragedy in their life. Their son Cyrus had become ill on the way and spent many days in fever in the wagon where his mother practiced all the nursing skill she knew. But he worsened, died and was buried at Winter Quarters. He was twenty years old.

The Neffs spent the winter of 1846-47 in Winter Quarters where John and Mary again went to the money belt for help to build a flour mill. In 1847 they moved on with Capt. Jedidiah Grant's company. Their family went with them with the exception of Franklin his wife and little girl. They stayed in Winter Quarters to operate the flour mill as long as it was needed for by the in coming saints.

Arriving in the Salt Lake Valley October 2, 1847 the Neffs spent the first winter at the old Fort. Then when Franklin and his family in the spring of 1848

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arrived, the whole family moved to what became East Mill Creek, built log houses and started to build a flour mill on Mill Creek. The logs were hauled from a canyon which was named Neff's Canyon.

Through all the sacrifice Mary was called on to meet she did it with a steadfast courage. She smiled to see some of her grand children wearing gunny sack clothing. The clothes they brought from Pennsylvania were worn, made over and finally gave out. When silk worms produced silk, thread was woven into cloth from which lovely clothes were made.

When the Neff flour mill was grinding out flour Mary told her husband she agreed to his giving flour to the poor and when he could have sold his flour at \$1.00 a pound to the gold rush people from the East on their way to California, she also agreed with him that it should go for 6 cents a pound to the Utah Saints and as a gift to the needy. She learned how to make tasty dishes from the bran and shorts.

In 1848 she sat in the audience when Heber C. Kimball made the astonishing prophecy that "within a short time States goods would be sold on the streets of Great Salt Lake cheaper than in New York, Boston or St Louis".

In 1849 gold seekers swarmed across the plains for California. Many were well off and had loaded their wagons with fine quality goods, clothes, cloth, boots, shoes, hardware, etc. Salt Lake became a trading post and half way place for this overland immigration to Calif. They realized by now they must travel more lightly and take only the bare necessities. They were eager to trade their goods for what food they could get and for repair work on their wagons. The mormons were able to obtain the best manufactured goods from the east cheaper than they were sold in New York. If they couldn't sell their goods they gave them away to lighten their loads. Heber C. Kimball's prophecy was fulfilled.

Mary Barr Neff won the love and respect of everyone. She was a staunch supporter of her husband, a good wife and mother, an example of good homemaking and thrift, but generous with what they had. The fathers money belt he wore around his waist was well known by the family and they called their father President Youngs Treasurer. They said they witnessed Brigham Young driving up in his carriage to their home, after a brief interlude with their father, John Neff would go to his wife with this statement "Mother, Pres. Young needs a thousand dollars". Then came an entry in the expense account "Let Brigham Young have a thousand dollars to-day". A son records that after a time he didn't see the leather money belt again.

Mary Barr Neff outlived her husband by six years and died in Salt Lake December 1, 1875. She was 74 years old on that day.