HISTORY OF ZACHEUS CURTIS

By Dora Curtis Taylor

In the year 1635, fifteen years after our Pilgrim Fathers set sail for America on the “Mayflower,” another ship left England coming to America. This was the ship “James.” One of the passengers on this ship was Zacheus Curtis from Downton, England. He first settled near Topsfield and Box Creek, Massachusetts.

He had a son Zacheus, who had a son James, who had a son James. James II had a son Moses, who married Molly Meacham. The fifth child of Moses and Molly was called Nahum, who married Millicent Waite. Lyman Curtis is their second child. He is my grandfather. He married Charlotte Alvord. My father, William Fredrick Curtis, son of Lyman and Charlotte Alvord Curtis, is their ninth child. He was born on the plains somewhere in Nebraska, near the Platte River, on 14 July 1850, when the family was on their way to Salt Lake in a covered wagon drawn by a yoke of oxen, in the Steven Markam Company.

Lyman Curtis, my grandfather, joined the church three years after it was organized and was baptized in Michigan on 14 March 1833. The next year, while a member of Zions’ Camp, he married Charlotte Alvord, daughter of Thaddeus Alvord and Sally Wellington. He helped in the building of the Kirkland and Nauvoo Temples.

At the time of the Martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, a reward was offered for the head of the Prophet. Zacheus and his brother, George, stood guard over the bodies. At that time, Lyman had what was called a very good gun, (now in a museum in Salt Lake), and was chosen by Brigham Young to be one of the scouts and hunters in the first company of Pioneers that came to Utah. He left his brother Moses to look over his family along with his own, and to get out timber, and make wagons for their final trip to Utah. He came into the valley as one of the nine horsemen with Orson Pratt on 22 July 1847, and made the first bonfire down in the valley.

He built two log homes and then started back across the plains with five other men to bring their families across the plains. They had one horse to carry their bedding and supplies, which was very scant (6 lbs of flour each). The men walked and carried their guns. One night, while camped on the plains, their horses were stolen, but a light snow had fallen and they trailed it to a Sioux camp. When they told the chief their condition, he stood in his doorway and made a call that brought Indians from all sides. He said “Go bring food, bring horse, mend moccasins,” which the Indians did. He called the white men his friends and sent them on their way rejoicing.

When Lyman got back to Cag Creek, Missouri, where his family was, he and his brother made ready to take their family back to Utah; they went to a store to get some supplies and asked the clerk for an empty barrel and got one. When they got home and opened the barrel, it was two-thirds full of brown sugar. For once the children were turned loose to have all they wanted, for they were hungry for sweets.
It was on this journey across the plains that my father, William Fredrick Curtis, was born in 1850. We never knew if the wagon train stopped for the birth or not, but Julia, the oldest girl, had to drive the oxen because Lyman, the father, had to help make roads, hunt buffalo, mend broken wagons and so forth.

When I was a small child, I asked my father what town he was born in? He smiled and said, “My mother found me under a buffalo chip on the plains.” His mother gave birth to eight children before William, but four babies had died soon after birth, because of hardships and persecutions of the Saints, so she had four children older than my father that crossed the plains – Julia, Adeline, Samuel and Joseph N.

The hunters in the company would shoot the buffalo, then dry or smoke the meat so it would keep. When the family got to Salt Lake, they still had two sacks of jerky, as it was called, and with fish (suckers) caught in the stream, they felt they had a fairly good living.