

## History of Rebecca Bird Tew, grandmother of Deseret Mendenhall Berry

Rebecca Bird Tew was born October 28, 1838 in Yardly Birmsham England. She was the daughter of John Bird and Ann Russen. As a child she and her parents belonged to the Church of England. When she was very young, she worked in the Gillett Pen Manufacturing Company and also the Raybolt Rule Company.

When she was 17 years of age, she heard the Mormon Elders preach and was so impressed with their sincerity that she joined the church and was baptized by Elder Bailey in the Livery Street Chapel. Later her parents joined the church and they embarked for America and Zion.

Her older brother, John Bird, had preceded them to Utah several years in advance.

After three weeks on the ocean, an accident happened to the vessel, the "Charles Buck", and it was towed in for repairs. They lay in dock for three weeks, but finally they started on their way again. They arrived at Atchison, Missouri, safe and sound, but while there cholera broke out. It was a very sad situation for them and many more. So many died at Mormon Grove and among the dead was her dear father, leaving her mother with five children to continue the journey to Utah. They were in the company of Richard Ballantyne (who began the first Sunday School) was president of the company, and he promised her mother that she would continue on to the valley of the mountains and she would never want for bread. This promise was literally fulfilled.

The arrived in Salt Lake City in the fall of 1855. From here they moved to Springville, Utah where son John had settled with his friend, Thomas Tew. Before leaving England, Rebecca and Thomas had fallen in love and the following year Rebecca was married to Thomas on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January, 1856 by Bishop Aaron Johnson. Later they were married in the Temple. They lived in the Fort Row which was built to protect them from the Indians. Rebecca's brother, Walter Bird, and Thomas Tew worked together, and they were the first men from England to come to Springville. That was how she met her husband. They raised nine children, two sons and seven daughters. Fifty-four grandchildren and eighty-two great grand children were the fruits of this marriage.

Ethel A. Titus, a granddaughter of Rebecca recalls the following: *"I remember hearing my aunts reminisce. They told of the dirt floor in their cabin in Idaho and how, when they were tiny, my grandmother would send them out in summer time to gather bags full of new leaves which were strewn evenly on the floor. These were swept up each morning, and new ones were laid again. This was in lieu of the carpet they couldn't afford for a couple of years.*

*Like other pioneers, she passed through the hardships incident to her time without complaint, because she was then and remained always, deeply in love with my grandfather. She made all her family's clothes by hand and by candle light, carding and weaving much of the cloth.*

*She had a cheerful, sunny disposition. She sang a good deal and taught her children the joy to be found in a song. She loved nothing better as her children grew up than to gather them all about her for a day and prepare huge dinners for them. She made it a joy for them to get together. She was an excellent cook and her 'boiled old English current pudding' has become a legend. She got her joy from simple things. She loved to put up fruits she had grown herself and she enjoyed quilting. Her closets and trunks in later life, were stuffed with lovely quilts she had made.*

*Grandfather, being more of a dreamer than a realist, wrote his wife a great deal of poetry. These scraps of poetry, plus her big, fat, feather bed, were her choicest possessions.*

*My only memory of her was on a rainy Spring afternoon in Springville. I was nine and had been taken to see her. She wrapped me in her gray crocheted shawl and sat me in front of the fireplace to get warm. She chuckled over me like a little mother hen. There is nothing fabulous about her. Some folks might say she never did a spectacular thing in her life, but she left behind her a homespun memory we all hold very dear."*

At the age of 81, she was hale and hearty, living in Salt Lake City with her daughter, Melvina Smith. She died March 10, 1922 in Salt Lake City, Utah, at the age of 83 years. She was a faithful wife and mother and true to the Gospel to the end.

(poem written by my brother, Aaron Mendenhall)

*Years filled with service  
Life filled with love  
From sage and cedar to fruits and flowers,  
Making home life sweet with cool shady bowers.  
Striving, yearning, longing, sending sons afar  
Gospel message cheering souls across the bar.  
Memories surround her, "Sweet Mother Pioneer",  
Associations dearer growing year by year.*

Biography of Rebecca Bird  
by Melvina Tew and Eliza Tew

---

----- Similar account that includes additional detail -----

Rebecca Bird was born on 28 October 1838 in the little town of Yardley, near Birmingham, England; the second daughter and third child of John Bird and Ann Russon. Eliza, her older sister, died when she was a child of about eighteen months, a year before Rebecca was born. Walter, the oldest of the family was six years older than Rebecca, and three more children joined the family—John, Ann Elizabeth, and William Henry.

As a child, Rebecca and her family belonged to the Church of England. When very young, she worked for Gillets Pen Manufacturing Company and also for the Raybolt Rule Company.

Rebecca belonged to a family who heard the gospel and responded to the sound of truth. Sometime in 1847 Walter, the oldest son, joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the parents followed a couple of years later. Rebecca was twelve years old when she was baptized by Elder Bailey in the Livery Street Chapel. Walter and a friend, Thomas Tew, Jr. were the first to emigrate and both of their families eventually followed them. They left England on 1 January 1851 and had many trials along the way. Finally, after eight months of struggle, they arrived in Utah on 30 August 1851 and began preparations in Springville to welcome their families. This took a lot of effort on the part of those two young boys, but they finally had sufficient funds to ask for assistance from the Perpetual Emigration Fund. Thus, on borrowed money (partially), the families were granted permission to sail.

Rebecca, along with her mother, father, sister and two brothers, ate Christmas dinner aboard the “Helios”, which was anchored at Liverpool, England. When out at sea three weeks, an accident occurred and the ship was tugged back into the harbor and lay there three weeks for repair. When the passengers were taken aboard again, it was on a far inferior ship, the “Charles Buck”, which sailed on 17 January 1855. The ship carried four hundred and three souls under the direction of Richard Ballantyne.

After eight weeks and three days on the open sea, Rebecca and her family landed at New Orleans, Louisiana, transferred to a river boat and sailed for St. Louis, Missouri. After boarding still another boat, they made their way up the Missouri River and landed at Atchison, Kansas to join other immigrants waiting to be outfitted for the trip across the plains. There in a little settlement called “Mormon Grove”, Rebecca's father died. He had been weakened by working in lead in Birmingham. Also, the voyage had taken its toll and his life's work was completed on 11 May 1855.

Richard Ballantyne comforted the family and promised Ann, the mother, that they would be able to make the trip to the valleys of the mountains and that they would not lack for bread.

The company left Mormon Grove on the first of July...402 souls traveling with only 45 wagons. All who possible could had to walk, often passing many of the graves of those in the S.M.Blair company, just ahead. In one instance, they saw the spot where three persons had been buried in one grave. This must have been exceedingly depressing to follow a company afflicted with cholera. However, the Ballantyne company had only three accidental deaths on the way. Two were shot and one run over by stampeding oxen. All considered, they managed to evade the buffaloes and the marauding Indians and arrived in Salt Lake on 25 September 1855 after a long and often heart-breaking journey. They soon joined Walter and established a home in Springville.

On 22 January 1856, at the age of seventeen, Rebecca married Thomas Tew, Jr., a man who had seen many hardships in his twenty-two years. The ceremony was performed by Bishop

Aaron Johnson, and the newlyweds lived in the fort which had been built to protect the settlers from the Indians. This union had the blessing of nine children, most of whom lived long upon the land.

About 1865, Rebecca and Thomas took their three children, Eliza, William Thomas, and Lorinda, and moved to Paris, Bear Lake, Idaho. The two oldest children drove cows most all the way barefooted, often through prickly pears, until their feet were sore and bleeding. Thomas drove one team, and Rebecca's brother, Will drove the other. The trip took almost two weeks—a distance of about 200 miles. When this little party reached the Bear River, the wagons were put on a raft. This was a terrifying experience as it was the spring of the year and the water was very high. The children were convinced that only the prayers of the parents kept the wagons afloat.

Winters in Bear River were very hard, with frost every month in the year and deep snow in the winter. Thomas sometimes had to dig steps for the children to get out of the house and go to school. Grain was so frozen that the bread was black and sticky, but spring brought wild strawberries and other wild fruits. Rebecca and the children loved to watch Aunt Polly take her lovely things out of her trunk and tell stories about England and her ocean voyage. Eliza learned to knit and made garters for her mother that were about a yard long. Rebecca would wrap them around her legs. Knitting stockings, candle-making, dying yarn, hand-sewing clothing, etc. occupied most of the time for the mother and her children. Home-made flannel and linsey dresses were worn all year round. Rebecca had a good spinning wheel and her daughter, Eliza became an expert operator. Often she would go to spinning bees and carry the wheel on her hip. She would spin 4 skeins a day.

At school all sizes and grades were in one room. The school house was built of logs, with slabs for seats. Holes were bored through and legs put through them. Books and slates were limited, usually one to a student. Many times bone was burned until it turned white to use for slate pencils. The children did not realize that times were hard, and they were happy.

Thomas made some snow shoes and when spring came he made his way over the mountain to Richmond, Cache County, Utah to secure work. Then he returned in the fall with food for the family. After three and one-half years of this sort of endeavor Thomas moved his family to Richmond, having added 4 more children, Julia, Anna Belle, John Henry, and Cora. This proved to be a good move, as the family lived on a farm and Thomas worked at his trade as a mason.

Indians were numerous and troublesome. There was a village of them living about a mile away. Many times quite a band of them would go through town, singing and dancing and expecting the people to feed them. If they were ignored the first time, they would make a second trip through the town, and some would have painted faces. On one occasion a little girl, Annie Thurston, was stolen. Her parents and friends hunted for her for years, but never found her.

One day Thomas and Rebecca left the children at home, cautioning them to watch out for Jim, an Indian, one who had brought fear into the hearts of the women in the area. Well, Jim came over the hill and the children locked the doors, pulled the blinds down, and huddled quietly together. Jim knocked on the doors and windows, determined to enter the house. Hearing nothing inside, he finally went back over the hill. The children breathed again.

In 1872 Thomas and Rebecca moved back to Springville. Rebecca had made a large chicken pie with two chickens in it for the trip. When the family reached the far side of town someone

remembered the pie back in the cellar cooling. Being a bit superstitious, Thomas and Rebecca would not turn back, so the new owners of the home enjoyed chicken pie. Possibly they thought it a good-will gesture.

The first winter back in Springville was spent in the home of Thomas Tew, Sr...a family of 9 living in one front room. Soon Thomas and Rebecca purchased seven acres of land in exchange for a yoke of oxen and a team of horses. Thomas made the adobes himself for their new home. He tramped the clay with his feet, as there was no machinery available at that time. This was a long and tedious process, as the adobes had to be dried before using. He undoubtedly had help from the children along the way. Although Thomas had only two weeks of schooling in his life, he knew just how many adobes to make to complete a home. He learned the trade when he first moved to Utah, and he helped build the old meeting house in Springville which was erected in 1854.

Thomas studied hard and learned to read, write and figure. Rebecca was never able to read or write, having had no education, but she cherished the poems written by her husband, a natural poet.

In 1882-84 Rebecca consented to allow her husband to serve a mission in England, leaving her with 8 unmarried children. Her oldest son, William Thomas, supported his father, and married before his return. Two of the poems which Rebecca received from her husband during his absence follow:

*I do not promise thee page to wait  
Nor maiden to bend the knee.  
I do not promise thee robes of state  
Nor gilded canopy.  
I may not lead thee to lordly dome,  
where pride and proud one be,  
but I'll share with thee in our future home  
what Kind Providence will it to be.*

*Holym free and unpolluted  
will this land forever remain.  
Let us seek the Holy Spirit  
and forever praise His name.*

*Jesus Christ is my Redeemer,  
he for us a ransom paid.  
Let me try and praise the giver  
for the gift that He has made.  
Zion is by walls surrounded.  
Blessed are the Saints of God  
if they are faithful to the message  
of the Servants of the Lord.*

*Oh, may we all be reunited  
with the Saints who dwell above,  
ever keep our vows we've plighted  
with the Lord who doth us love.*

The last of Rebecca's children were born in Springville-Melvin and Erma. Her husband passed away on 6 August 1904, and she was a widow for almost eighteen years. Rebecca was always cheerful and sunny in disposition, always looking on the bright side. She was a good mother, full of faith, true to the Gospel to the end. In her later years she lived with her daughter, Melvina Smith, at 862 East 6 South in Salt Lake City. Here she died on 10 March 1922 at the age of 83 years, four months and thirteen days. Six of her 9 children were living at the time, along with fifty-four grandchildren and one hundred and twelve great grand children.