

LIFE STORY OF LERONA ELIZA CAHOON DURFEE
BY ALENE BURRELL

My first Great-Grandmother, daughter of William Farrington and Nancy Miranda Cahoon, was born the 17th of September 1828 in Adam-On-Di-Aman (also called Adiamon), Davis County, Missouri. She was given the name of Lerona Eliza after her father's sister.

As a young child, she witnessed many trials and persecutions of the Saints in Illinois and Missouri.

Her parents left a beautiful seven-room house, well furnished and all paid for in Kirtland, Ohio. Because they could not dispose of it, they just turned the key and locked the door. Surely this was difficult and heartbreaking, a great sacrifice on their part. The persecutions of the Saints was so trying that they had to move onto Far West. They arrived there May 5, 1839.

The Cahoon families remained there until the early fall of that year, and then moved onto Adam-On-Di-Aman. Weather conditions were still favorable so they could be comfortable living in a tent while William Farrington Cahoon built a log house. Again angry mobs harassed the people, they lived in fear of peril day after day, night after night. The building of homes could not go on and there was not ever time or ways to procure food for their families. No one would grind corn for the Mormons, so they punched holes in pieces of tin and then grated the dried ears of corn. They had to live on this ground meal for six months.

It was under these trying times that Lerona Eliza Cahoon was born and just seven weeks after her birth, William Farrington and Nancy Miranda buried their other child, a daughter.

They moved to Far West, with many families of the Saints. They remained there until the 4th of February, when the time came for the poor exiles to leave the state and seek other homes somewhere in the wide world.

When they arrived at Quincy, Illinois, they found a people who treated them with the greatest degree of hospitality and kindness, assisting the Saints with food and houses to live in. Five weeks later they journeyed to Montrose, in Lee County, Iowa.

During this time the prophet, Joseph Smith, had purchased a small location for the Saints which he laid out in squares. He named the city Nauvoo.

In the spring of 1842, the Cahoon's moved to Nauvoo. Lerona's father was a carpenter and joiner and he was called to work on the great Nauvoo Temple. The Lord

prospered him and William Farrington Cahoon built a small house for his family in Nauvoo. Houses were being built in all directions and the city grew by leaps and bounds. Zion was greatly blessed and the saints rejoiced in the Truth and in seeing his purposes and plans carried out, as they were revealed through his servant, Joseph Smith.

A hush fell over the city of Nauvoo on the 27th day of June 1844, at 5:00 A.M.. Joseph Smith and his brother, Hyrum were murdered. Lerona's parents grieved for the loss of their prophet and his brother (Joseph and Hyrum Smith were first cousins to William Farrington Cahoon's father, Reynolds Cahoon). (Grandma Durfee was 6 years old at this time.)

In the spring of 1845, Lerona's father was appointed to supervise the raising of all the timbers of the Nauvoo Temple.

On the 9th and 10th of September, the angry mob began to burn the houses and destroy the property of the Saints. They kept up a continual scene of persecution until the Saints left Nauvoo.

On the 4th of February, 1846, Lerona's father knew it would soon be time to leave. As her parents began making preparations for their journey into the wilderness, wagons were repaired, suitable clothing was made, household goods were sorted and packed. They visited with many friends to bid them farewell. At one home, Brother.....had 6 little flat irons. Lerona thought they were so very nice that he gave her one for her very own. Although she was only 8 years old, she promised the man she would treasure it all her life. This was one of the very few things that Lerona could take with her across the plains.

On the 15th of February, 1846, the William Farrington Cahoon family left with the Nauvoo Brass Band. They bid farewell to their beautiful city of Nauvoo and started for the camp of Israel, which was Sugar Creek, in Iowa. Here they joined Brigham Young's camp. They had a hard time. The weather was extremely cold, wet with frost and snow, but the Lord sustained them as they journeyed West, pitching their tents by the way. After reaching Garden Grove, William F. Cahoon was appointed to oversee the house building and keep the roll of workmen. They built houses and laid out farms for those who were to follow.

Now that they were camping for longer intervals, Lerona Eliza had time to unpack her prized possessions. She would run her hands over her little iron, hold it a few minutes, then put it away.

On the 24th of May they move on to the main camp as Pisgah, arriving there June 12th. On the 31st of July, they crossed the Missouri River. On the 5th of August they arrive at a place afterwards called Cutlers Park, where they remained until the 21st day of March 1849. Then along with William's brother, Daniel and his family, they started for the Salt Lake Valley where the church had found a resting place. As they journeyed

across the great plains, they felt as if the God of Israel was with them blessing them and preserving them.

When possible, they forded rivers; when necessary they made rafts and built bridges, killing snakes, burying their dead. Boards had been strapped to the outside of their wagons and these boards were used for making crude caskets to bury their loved ones in. It was very difficult to leave their dear ones who had been buried by the wayside. They traveled under severe hardships. It was necessary to guard their cattle both day and night to protect them from marauding Indians.

They traveled day after day for six months and on the 24th of September 1849, when Leron was 11 years old, they arrived in the Valley! Leron's grandparents, Reynolds and Thirza Cahoon, and her father's brother, Andres and his family came to meet them. It was such a joyful reunion!

Leron was the second of eleven children. (Her elder sister, Nancy Ermina passed away at the age of 19 months when Leron was only 17 days old. Had this not happened, Leron would have enjoyed a close companionship with a sister near her age. Among her other brothers and sisters were: John F., Prudence Sarah Ermina, Thirza Vilate, William Marion, Daniel Coyton, Joseph Mahonri, Henry Reynolds, Steven Tiffany, and Andrew Carlos Cahoon.

The establishment of another home was a happy experience because Leron's parents knew it would be permanent. The Lord's protecting hand would be over them and they had no fear. Their log cabin was soon built and Leron, being the eldest was a great help to her mother in assuming responsibility in caring for the family so that her mother could spend more time preparing for the hard winter months ahead. Rugs had to be woven to cover the dirt floor; dresses and shirts and underclothing had to be made. There was knitting to be done and food to be stored.

Leron was baptized a member of the church the 29th of June 1851. She was privileged to be at the groundbreaking of the Salt Lake Temple.

The Christmas of 1851 was a time of rejoicing for the pioneers and Grandfather Reynolds and Grandmother Thirza Cahoon entertained all of their children and grandchildren at a picnic party in the carpenters shop on Temple Square. It had been cleared and decorated for the occasion. Several hundred guests were invited to attend this celebration too.

From midnight to the dawn of Christmas morning, the band serenaded the city. It was here her father, William Farrington Cahoon and his brothers played their musical instruments again. Like magic their music made the sleeping mountains echo with the sound of rejoicing.

Christmas Morning! Leron was up bright and early to help her mother with the younger children so they could all be ready for the festivities.

With her eleven children, there was much to be done. She still found time to help those in need and as a midwife she brought many babies into this world.

In spite of their many children, they only had a 4-room log house with a dirt floor and a hallway that led to a summer kitchen where there was a large stove. Flat rock slabs were neatly laid together on this large kitchen floor. They were scrubbed and kept very clean.

It was a great advantage for folks to have a summer kitchen. The heat that poured out of a stove did not affect the temperature of the house. Lerona had to bake bread every day of her life it seemed, to keep her family fed.

As time went on two rooms were built on for the boys. Their bed was hand carved out of ???wood. The straw ticks were washed and dried every year and take out to the straw stacks to be filled.

Their home boasted of one beautiful red plush chair and the grandchildren thought it was a special privilege to sit on it. Grandma Durfee made her own butter, Aunt Kate would try her best to churn it, but the paddle was too heavy. Grandma would say “Oh my! My! That has to go fast!” This fresh butter was a delicious spread for the homemade bread. Their big meal was always at noon. They ate bread and milk for supper. Sometimes she made Lumpy Dick for a change. This was delicious pudding made of flour, salt, eggs, and milk and served with sugar and cream poured over the top.

Grandpa Durfee was a very handy man about the house. He would tie a very large apron around his waist and around his little granddaughter, Kate. He washed, while she stood on a chair to dry the dishes.

Almo was located miles from the railroad and those who settled there had to be independent in every way. The Durfee’s raised their own vegetables and fruit. Apples were used in many ways and Grandma’s fresh gooseberry pie would help to perk up anyone’s appetite. Currant bushes grew along the ditch banks and fences. They had their own chickens, cows and pigs.

Aunt Nona remembers climbing upon a chair to put the dishes away three times a day in a big tall cupboard. There were many dishes, in fact, it was full of dishes.

Maple syrup and brown sugar were kept in wooden kegs. Aunt Nona liked to go down into the outdoor cellar to get the syrup because she enjoyed licking the spout.

Cake icing was a meringue – beaten egg whites with sugar added.

Grandma Durfee had a round table with fancy ornaments that were quite an attraction to her little grandchildren. She would say, “Now, you can look and look as long as you want, but must not touch.”

There was a small cottage near their home that they used for a store. Among her bric-a-brac were brightly colored hair ribbons. Aunt Kate liked to stay with her grandmother for a few days. It made her so happy to have a pretty ribbon tied in her hair on Sunday morning. Grandpa Durfee took them all to Sunday School.

Dances were held every Friday night. Grandma arose very early on those days to prepare the refreshments which she served and sold to both young and old, who went to the dances. Folks would leave the dance at midnight and go to her store. She served soup from a large kettle, cookies and pies. It is no wonder she loved to sing, "Billy Boy", to her grandchildren and great grandchildren.

I can remember the twinkle in her eye when she sang, "can she make a cherry pie, Billy Boy, Billy Boy? Can she make a cherry pie, charming Billy? She can make a cherry pie fast as a cat can wink her eye, she's a young thing and cannot leave her mother." Perhaps when she sang this her thoughts went back to the days when she actually made three dozen pies before every dance. I'm sure she could make them "fast as a cat can wink her eye."

Most of the time before the dances was spent in ironing white shirts for her 8 boys and grandpa. He must have one for Sunday also. The collars and cuffs had to be starched very stiff, then they were polished by putting her iron in wax and ironing the collars and cuffs again. (the iron she used was the one that was given to her when she was 8 years old way back in Nauvoo. She always treasured this iron and in her declining years, when she was not able to iron any more, she gave it to her eldest granddaughter saying, "This little iron must always stay in the family Nona. Keep it as long as you can and then give it to someone in the family who will treasure it and appreciate it." In the summer of 1960 when I, Alene, visited in Spokane, Nona, after spending a very sleepless night made a very important decision – she gave the iron to me.

In the spring of 1919, my mother Julia G. Miller, went to Almo to get Grandma Lerona E. Durfee, to bring her to Spokane. We were surely happy to meet our only living Great Grandmother. She was frail in form but her mind was very alert. On her head she always wore a starched white cap with a little ruffle all around, and a long white apron over her long skirted dress, and black, high-topped lace shoes. She was very neat and clean in appearance. She had a cheerful countenance that sparkled with every tale she told. During this visit in Spokane, she stayed with her daughter, Nancy Lerona Durfee Miller who was my grandmother. We lived only a quarter of a block away – I was there real often.

It was early summer, Great Grandma Durfee became seriously ill with a very high fever. The Dr. came many times. He advised that she should not be left alone at night and so the family took turns "sitting up" with her. One night I went with Mama. A bed was made for ??????????.over the presence of many devils who surrounded her. Many times she cried out to Mama, "Take them away Juel, take them away."

The family had great faith in Dr. Greaves. The medicine and doses of quinine should have brought her temperature down. All the medication he had prescribed took no effect. Grandma was failing fast, the family was very worried.

The next morning Mama asked Grandma if she would like to be administered to. "Yes, Juel." Mama sent for the Elders. It was not long before a gentle knock was heard. When the door was opened Grandma Durfee said, "There they go!" Mama asked, "Who are you talking about Grandma?" "The devils" she said. The devils just went out the door. Mama knew that Satan and his imps could not stay or even be in the presence of the Priesthood and the Elders held the Priesthood of God.

They anointed her head with holy oil and blessed her that she would be raised from her bed of affliction and be able to enjoy her visit in Spokane and return to her home in good health. These blessings were realized in a very short time! The family was amazed at her speedy recovery. (This experience made a lasting impression on my life. I was 10 years of age.) I saw my mother's faith in action. And Great Grandmother Durfee was a woman of faith, too.

It was late summer, Sept. 17, 1919. The Spokane Branch Relief Society, over which my dear mother presided, visited with Grandma Durfee. It was her 80th birthday. They brought refreshments and a beautiful cake with many candles on it to celebrate the occasion. She was so happy. (I have a picture that was taken at that time).

Before winter set in, Grandma Durfee left for her home in Almo. We were all sad to see her leave. It was not long before we received the news of her death in Almo, Idaho on the 24th of November, 1919. Here she was buried near the grave of her dear companion. She left behind a large posterity of children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren who will ever be grateful for the heritage she gave them.

(Much of her early life story and of her parents I gleaned from "Reynolds Cahoon and His Stalwart Sons" by Stella Cahoon Shurtliff and Brent Farrington Cahoon, and from my aunts, Nona, Nellie, and Kate Miller and my dear father, John Miller.

(Alene Burrell)