

HISTORY OF

JOHANNA OLSEN MAXFIELD



Johanna Olsen, was born 25 April 1870 in Loiten, Norway, to Elias Olsen and Petronella Pedersen. She was born the eighth of eleven children and was next to the last to be born in Norway.

Her father and mother had joined the Church on 3 August 1862 and subsequently had many trials and persecutions because of that. Her father was finally told by the foreman of the foundry where he worked that he would have to leave the Mormon Church or lose his job. He chose the latter. Following, the family sold its possessions and left Norway for the United States and Utah in 1874, when Johanna was four years of age.

The trip by ship in those days was most arduous and long, requiring several weeks to cross the Atlantic. While on the journey, her mother became very ill, and it was feared she would die and have to be buried at sea. In those days, people were afraid that whales would follow the ship if there was a dead body on board. That was very frightening to them, and they feared they might have to throw the body overboard if she died. Fortunately, she recovered, and the journey was completed in safety, eventually terminating in Provo, Utah.

Their earliest home of recollection was on Fifth West and Second South, Provo, and remains there today. It would have been built quite some years before 1900, so it may have been their first home.

When she was 21 years of age, her brother Elias, age 23, died of blood poisoning from a lead pencil puncture in his leg. Then, but a year later, her sister Marie, age 19, who was engaged to be married, died. She was especially close to this brother and sister in companionship and loved them very dearly. Her grief over those losses extended throughout her whole life.

She worked in the Manti Temple for perhaps a year, living in Manti with a cousin, Peter Dyring, and his family. After this, she worked in the household of Abraham Owen Smoot, in Provo; and it was at this time that she met and fell in love with William Albert Maxfield, who worked there on the farm. They were married in the Salt Lake Temple on 29 November 1893.

They established a home on a farm along the road next to Utah Lake, a short distance south of the Geneva Resort. They remained on this small farm for about seven years. While there, the first three children were born: Albert, Tena, and Elton.

About 1903, the family acquired undeveloped farmland in Vineyard. After much hard work in clearing the land of sagebrush, then leveling and draining the land with tile pipe, it developed into a very rich farmland. Although the land was irrigated, this land always remained quite moist during the summer. In fact, the garden area, near the house later built on the northwest corner of the farm, produced the very best quality of vegetables and melons without irrigation. The house was built about this same year and consisted of three bedrooms, a kitchen, and a living room. Toilet facilities were outside and water for household use had to be obtained from a flowing well nearby. Here the rest of the children were born: LaVern, Margaret, Arnold, and LeGrande, and VerNile (twins).

Because of her husband's accidental loss of an eye and limited use of the other, it was decided to rent the farm and move to Provo where he could be engaged in the real estate business. A house was obtained at about Sixth West and south near the railroad tracks.

The family remained at this residence for about four years after which they were delighted to move to Grandview on a farm of about thirteen acres. In addition to a three-bedroom house (one downstairs and two upstairs), there was a barn, some sheds and pens, and an "out-house." On the farm were many, many kinds and varieties of fruits and berries. Also, there were about three acres of alfalfa plus one acre of garden.

From harvesting and marketing berries and fruits to planting seeds and hoeing and weeding crops, Johanna always took part. She was never lacking in energy and ambition and was a great motivator. She motivated her family in their work by leading the way, actively participating in much of the hard work on the farm. There were also times when she would do all the evening milking chores in addition to her regular duties. She always looked to the rewards that could be realized from hard labor and impressed them deeply upon her family. She especially delighted in the harvest season, even the canning of fruits, the canning and drying of vegetables, and the storage of foods.

Some of her special pleasures were when the family would take trips to see her brother Peter and family in Koosharem, and to visit the many relatives in Salt Lake City. Those were major trips in the early 1920's over unpaved roads in automobiles that usually traveled between fifteen and thirty miles an hour.

Likewise, she delighted in having relatives and friends stop by her home, stay overnight, and sometimes spend several days. She had no prior notice for preplanning but was always able to provide accommodations and also serve fully home-prepared delicious meals. Family gatherings were most important during her life, such as reunions at Fish Lake and other interesting places.

Soon after moving to Grandview, she was called as Relief Society President and served in that capacity for ten years. She was often called upon to assist in a home where there was serious illness. And, where there was death, it was her lot to obtain burial clothing for the women and children and to assist in laying them out in their caskets. In those days, this 'was done in the home, where the body remained until the funeral.

Besides the farm animals, many chickens were raised. They provided eggs for most of the year and meat regularly during the year, especially during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. She always planned and prepared well for the holidays by baking many kinds of pies, making donuts, and baking a variety of cookies and cakes. Pork raised on the farm was processed at that time of the year and then again later in the winter. It was freely expressed that no one could make as delicious sausage nor the very tasty headcheese as she did. Breadmaking of the finest texture and taste was one of her truly outstanding abilities.

Since the house was heated with coal stoves, it was she who acted as an alarm clock to arise early on winter mornings to build fires in the stoves to warm the house before others arose. After the chores were done, it was one of her prime interests to see that the family started the day with a good, hot breakfast. All meals were timely prepared and seemed to have the touch of a genius.

The six cows on the farm provided a surplus of milk for the family use. The milk was run through a separator to collect the cream for churning into sweet cream butter. From the churn, it was placed into a wooden mold and rounded at the top so that it always weighed slightly more than a pound. After wrapping it in a pre-printed paper to identify the maker, her phone and address, it was delivered to customers in Provo. Immediately, orders exceeded the supply, and it was a good source of income.

She was particular to see that clothes were always clean, even though it meant washing them on `a scrubbing board or later in a hand-operated washing machine. Washing was hung on lines even in the cold of winter. Although they would freeze stiff, they would dry and bring a delightfully fresh smell into the house.

She and her husband with the remaining family moved back to the large farm in Vineyard in 1925. That required her to arise by 5:00 a.m. to see that chores were done, and work started in the fields in the summer, and to get the children off by 7:00 a.m. for a two-mile walk to catch the school bus. Even then, she took part in raising and harvesting the crops; and she prepared meals for the extra farm hands during the next two years.

In 1927, the family still living at home then moved to Salt Lake City and resided at 1010 South Ninth East for four years. The family next lived at 1978 Windsor Street until the death of her husband in 1933. For various periods of time, she resided with children in Ogden and Salt Lake City, last living with her daughter Tena. Complications from a fall and a broken hip soon resulted in her death on 30 August 1948. She was buried in Wasatch Lawn Cemetery.

She was a firm but kind disciplinarian, without angry words. She was a most kind, loving, exemplary mother and devoted wife. A more generous person was never known. Encouragement to attend church and take care of responsibilities came from her husband; but both encouragement and the perfect example for her family were mirrored and completely portrayed in her life.

Written by VerNile E. Maxfield