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# History of Olef James Norr & Mary Jane Harris

The history of Olef James Norr and Mary Jane Harris Norr was taken from the "Norr Family Autobiography" compiled in 1958/9 and published by Vernon M. Norr, son of this subject couple. Uncle Vernon had 50 copies printed and presented the book to each of his brothers and sisters and to each of their children

Norman R. Callahn, a granddaughter of Olef and Mary Jane Norr condensed the information from the autobiography into a few pages, so that children, grandchildren and great grandchildren can enjoy and learn about their ancestors.

The Norr Family Autobiography contains much genealogical information, plus a collection of reminiscences of the children of Olef and Mary Jane Norr during their growing-up years which was at the time when the western United States, and Utah was being settled by the Mormons and the "homesteaders" The parents of both Olef and Mary Jane Joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day-Saints in Europe and had left their families, friends and homelands to come to the United States to join the Mormons in Utah. Living up to their covenants and practicing their religion was a prime factor in their lives.

Olef Norr was not quite 6 years old when his father died in 1863. In 1865 his mother joined the church.

The following is from his personal journal: I was born 10 November 1857 at Melby, Fredericksborg, Denmark. My name on record in Denmark is Ole Jensen Andersen. When my parents married. Mother thought the name of Norr was very odd and not necessary, so she persuaded father to drop it. Therefore, according to custom of Denmark, the children took the given name of the father for their surname. Hence they gave us the name of Andersen and we were known by that name and records as such in Denmark. When mother Joined the L.D.S. Church in 1865 the Elders told her it was improper to give the children their father's given name, but should give them their father's surname in order that their might be a proper record kept. So she changed our name to Pedersen (Petersen), the Elders not knowing she had already dropped the surname of Norr.

When I was twelve years of age I was baptized and became a member of the church. About the tenth of July of that year (1870) my mother, my sister, Mary and myself started for America. My sister Ginie and emigrated two years previous. I shall never forget the time we started for Copenhagen. We rode all night in a hack and arrived in Copenhagen in the morning. That was the first long ride I had ever had. I was in my thirteenth year and just the age to enjoy it.

It was quite a sight to walk through the streets, which were narrow with tall buildings on either side. This was alt new to me and so different from the country scenery. After a few days we were told the place to board the ship, which would take us across the North Sea to England.

After a few days journey we landed at Hull, England, late in the afternoon and in the evening we started for Liverpool and arrived there in the morning. In moving the luggage from the railroad to the ship they used horses hitched one ahead of the other, which looked very odd to me. In this big city there were many new sights for me.

When all was ready, we began our journey to America aboard the steamer "Minnesota" and had a pleasant voyage for about 12 days, although I experienced the usual seasickness, which I will not attempt to describe. We landed at New York Harbor 1 August 1870, where we passed the examination and were allowed to proceed toward Utah. As this was the first year the railroad was built across the plains we were soon at our destination. We arrived in Ogden, Utah on 10 August and went from there to Brigham City by team, quite a difference from railroad traveling. We arrived there on the 12<sup>th</sup>.

We lived in Brigham City nine years during which time I made the acquaintance of most of the people in the city. Brigham had only one ward at the time, which was presided over by Bishop Alvin Nichols. I was soon ordained a Deacon. At that time the church meetings were being held in an upper room of the courthouse and the Deacons were asked to carry the Sacrament dishes to and from the building every Sunday. Arthur Willcox and I were partners and we never missed doing our duty when it was our turn -- we were called "the faithful boys."

In 1879, I moved to Snowville, Curlew Valley (Utah) and took Mother with me. Snowville was a new ward just organized with Arnold Goodliff as bishop. There I took a permanent part in the ward organizations. I was Assistant Superintendent of the Sunday School, and when the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association was organized I was chosen to be the president.

In the summer of 1880, I, along with others, went to Black Pine, about 25 miles west of Snowville, where we went to secure our logs to build our houses. That was the only mode of building houses in the early pioneer days of settling the Curlew Valley. They were built very crude. Most of the houses at that time had dirt roofs. There was no lumber in the valley and I remember going up to the sawmill east of Brigham City to get the lumber for the floor in my house.

The settlers also had a big undertaking in hand in building a canal 9 miles long. The 3 miles on the upper end was made on the hillside and that was all done by plow and scraper. Each man was given 40 rods to build, and as two or three men could work together better than one alone there was myself, Hans Miller and one we called Blacksmith Jensen. We had a yoke of cattle apiece so we worked together which took us about 2 months.

We could go down to Snowville every week for supplies and I remember at the last of the job we ran out of everything to eat except some wheat. We could boll that until it cracked open and then we could eat "it. We had several meats of this kind of food to save going so far with the slow traveling ox team.

When the side hill ditch was finally finished, all the shareholders joined together, some plowing and some picking the sagebrush off. Then we made what we called a "go devil" a sharp tool filled with rocks to make it go down. We hitched about 12 yoke of oxen on the pointed end and they pulled it along in the plowed ground, which would send the dirt out to both sides and form a small bank on each side. That is the way we built the ditch on the east side of Curlew Creek down to Snowville.

About this time the people built a log meeting house, a room about 20 x 30 feet, a door at one end and two windows on either side. On the one side we built a bowery, built of pine poles and cedar boughs for shade. Here we held our town celebrations, and on the Fourth of July 1880, I got acquainted with the belle of Curlew Valley, Mary Jane Harris, who was living at that time about 3 miles west of Snowville, near the bank of the creek, with her mother and step-father, William Robbins, and her half-brothers and sister.

NRC: Grandma Norr's parents had joined the L.D.S. Church in England and had come to America and had arrived in Utah before she was born. The following is from her personal journal:

When I was a small child my parents moved to Mill Creek. (NRC: Mill Creek is a few miles southeast of Salt Lake City). We lived there about 5 years then moved to Salt Lake City where we lived until we moved to Curlew Valley in February 1870 where my father died on 11 April 1870. I was then 8 ½ years old. In about 1874 I went to live at my Uncle Ed Harris's home in Salt Lake City. I lived there one year, and then my grandfather, William T. Harris, wished me to live with them, also at Salt Lake City. I lived there and went to school until 1880, then moved back to Curlew Valley to live with my mother.

NRC: The following was written by Mary Hazel Norr Jorgensen, daughter of Olef and Mary Norr:

Mother's father died when she was 8 years old. Later she was sent to Salt Lake City to live with her grandfather, William Thomas Harris. Her grandmother (Rebecca Morton Harris) had died and he had married a woman who was an apostate to the Church. Mother always remembered to have her secret prayer before climbing into bed. Her step-grandmother's room was just across the hall. One evening, as Mother was kneeling in prayer by the side of

her bed, the woman opened the door, clapped her hands and laughed tauntingly, "Mary's praying again." Situations like this were very hard for Mother who had been raised in a good Latter-day Saint home.

Mother was required to iron many stiff front white shirts for her grandfather. He was a merchant and he insisted on wearing a clean shirt to the store every morning. However, her grandparents treated her very well in most ways and she had every material need -- nice clothes, a good home and good food. In due time she was urged and instructed to go out with the fellows who were not Mormons. This she refused to do, with the exception of one fine young handsome man who was persistent. He proposed marriage to her. He was from a wealthy family in the city, but she knew she would never be happy with a companion not of her own religious faith. She went back to live with her mother at Snowville and fell in love with a poor farmer, but a good member of the Church. To her, Olef James Norr was handsome, jolly and energetic, so she married him -- and knowing him as we do, no one could blame her!

NRC: Again, from Olef James Norr's personal journal:

My acquaintance with Miss Harris led to our marriage, which took place 27 October 1881 in the Endowment House, Salt Lake City. Me had a very nice time visiting all her uncles and aunts and numerous cousins, also her many friends as she had lived in Salt Lake City a number of years before going to Snowville.

After we were married, we made our home in Snowville where we became active members in church capacities. I then built a small house nearby for my mother so she could live quietly by herself.

As time passed on we became very interested in the higher laws of the gospel in regard to the principle of celestial marriage as taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith, and became convinced that in order to receive the celestial glory in the hereafter we must obey the celestial law, so we made the acquaintance of Lillie J. Roundy with whom it became agreeable to become my plural wife. We were married 20 November 1884 in the Logan Temple. There were two boys born of this marriage -- Arnold Leroy and Olef Alvin.

When the laws of the land took it in their hands to persecute those who had entered that principle, Lillie could not stand the hiding and persecution so it was the means of her going astray. She left the boys and me and led a life, which I do not care to mention anything about, as we are all responsible to our Heavenly Father for our own individual acts. About two years later I gave her a bill of divorce signed by President Wilford Woodruff. (President of the L.D.S. Church).

NRC: Lillie Jane Roundy became the second wife of Olef James Norr

During the period in which polygamy was sanctioned by the L.D.S. Church. When this practice was prohibited by the Federal Government and its adherents persecuted, the widespread family cleavages resulting must have been bitter and heartbreaking then, just as they would be now if we as husbands and wives were suddenly forced by a new law to separate and from now on live permanently apart. We should therefore note with understanding

tolerance the sad fact that this marriage came to an end, entered into and dissolved through Church channels. We should rather remember that we too are human. Lillie Jane's two sons, Leroy and Alvin, became, with the other children, one family mothered and loved by Mary Jane Harris Norr.

It was quite a trial for Mary to tend and take care of the boys. Alvin could not walk at the time Lillie left, but Mary took care of them just the same as she did her own. In those days she made all the clothes the children wore, which kept her busy every day. But time passed and the children grew and I began to look around to get a homestead in order to have employment for the boys when they grew up.

I wanted to get a piece of land so I could build on the creek bank in order to have a place handy for watering stock. I took a claim, 160 acres, just over the line in Idaho, about three miles north of Snowville.

This was in the spring of 1888 and during that summer I had to get more logs to build a claim house on my homestead. I had to go up north into Banoc Canyon to get those logs. It took at least three days to make a trip and I made a good many trips during the next two or three years to get timber for the house and sheds for the stock. There was a sawmill up at Banoc so we could get lumber to build with -- different from the time I built my first house in Snowville in 1880.

NRC: Olef J. Norr's personal journal ends at this point; however, his children have many fond memories of those years at Snowville, Utah and Stone, Idaho. The following is a composite of their reminiscences:

During the summer months we lived at the homestead house at Stone, then return to Snowville for the winter so we kids could go to school. The school was held in the Meeting House -- 8 grades in one room. In about 1896, Mother and Dad sold their home in Snowville and for the next few years we lived summer and winter at Stone.

On our farm we raised grain, hay, horses, cows and all our vegetables. With help from the boys. Daddy did all the farm work. Mother was always sewing, mending, knitting or cooking from early morning until late at night. In addition, she raised turkeys, chickens and ducks and we dried lots of feathers for pillows and featherbeds.

The threshing was done by traveling crews who ate at each farmer's house while the job was being done. Usually they were at our place for two or three meals. They numbered about 12 men besides our own family. It was a lot of work for Mother, but of course we all helped her as much as we could.

The house in Stone was built of togs and had a dirt roof. There were two big rooms in the front; the one on the south was a bedroom and the big room on the north was the kitchen for a while. Later Daddy built another room on the west and that became the kitchen, so the big room was used as a bedroom and the southeast room was made our best room -- we called it "the front room." We had a cellar under the north end of the house where we kept our milk and butter. On the south of the kitchen, Daddy built a summer kitchen so we could cook in the summer without making the house hot. Mother was an excellent cook.

The carpet in the front room was woven from rags and tacked down to the wooden floor. Each time Mother housecleaned; the carpet had to come up. We would have fresh straw put under it, enough to make it bulge up, and when we walked on it I remember how it crackled. Our beds also would get fresh straw in the mattresses.

Daddy was very devoted to family, wife and children. We had many wonderful home evenings. We would coax Daddy to play his violin and recite poems in a Danish brogue, or sing to us. Dad loved to sing and entertain with comic songs and readings. We especially loved to hear him recite "Little Yacob Straus."

Dad would often sit and read the paper or books to Mother in the evenings while she was making or mending our clothes or knitting. The only light we had in those days was a kerosene lamp and our heat was a wood fire in the kitchen stove.

Each Sunday Dad would hitch a team of horses to the wagon and we would all go to church. Dad was acting teacher in the Ward for many years, also chorister for a number of years. As Luetta grew up she became the church organist while Daddy directed the singing.

Dad's fiddle and the organ accompanist were the only music we had for dances within a radius of 35 miles. Dad played his violin for the good old country square dances to pick up a little ready cash. Along with the farm work and his dance music, Dad made and repaired shoes. He also made shoes for the neighbors. They would come to our house to get their feet measured and a few days later Dad would have a nice pair of shoes made for them.

Mother used to make such pretty things. She once made some hair flowers by artistically but tediously wrapping strands of hair into the shape of beautiful buds and blossoms. These were set in a big deep frame and covered with glass. The center wreath was made from locks of her own family and the outer flowers were from the hair of people who lived in Curlew Valley.

NRC: I remember the hair picture that Grandma Norr made. It was an exquisite piece of workmanship. In later years I think Aunt Lue donated it to Retic Halt -- the museum of the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers.

In order to have better educational opportunities for us children, Mother and Daddy moved to Logan, Utah in 1901. Ed drove one wagon loaded with furniture and Walter Robbins drove the other one. Mother drove the one-horse buggy with Luetta holding the baby (Vernon) and Hazel. Dad had the rest of the family. A near tragedy happened on that trip. As Ed's wagon was coming down the old dug way, a doubletree pin came out and the doubletree hit one of the horses in the hind legs. The horses started running and went around the curve too fast and the wagon tipped over. Fortunately, Ed was not hurt too bad.

Dad bought a small log house at 429 North 5<sup>th</sup> East. At first, we kids did not like the house, but Dad put lumber siding on the outside walls and later added more rooms. We kids were excited about living in the city, we made a lot of good friends and it wasn't long before we felt right at home. We had a large lot, about an acre. We grew our own vegetables and fruit and part of the lot was devoted to flowers. Mother was a great lover of flowers. She worked hard in the flower garden and our place always looked beautiful. She sold hundreds of dollars worth of flowers every summer.

The old kitchen will always be a fond memory -- and the back porch with the beautiful clematis vines in bloom, and the old cellar covered with Virginia Creeper.

Dad sold the homestead at Stone in 1903 for \$2,500 and a few years later bought an 800 acre dry farm in Blue Creek -- about 30 miles from Logan. Dad and the older boys worked on the farm in late spring, summer and early fall and then back to Logan in the winter to attend school. Dad also had a couple of tracts of land about a mile from our house where he raised sugar cane for our supply of molasses and hay to feed our stock.

Mother was a Primary teacher at the Fifth Ward for several years. She was always well prepared because she practiced on us children at home and we learned much without being aware of it.

Mother's knitting machine, with which she made socks, scarfs and rugs, looked so complicated that I never tried to learn how to use it. It was many times faster than knitting by hand. I often marveled at her as she added a loop or two, or reduced the number rounding the heel of a sock, and then moved the curved iron handle back and forth a certain number of times until she had to make another change. She looked like a professional when she was operating her knitting machine.

After we'd been in Logan a few years we bought a washing machine. It had a wheel with a handle on it and we had to take turns turning the washing machine on Mondays. When we got electricity in the house, Daddy put a different kind of wheel on and added a motor and belt to make the wheel run. Washing was much easier after that, although the wash water still had to be drained and carried outside in a bucket.

Daddy bought us a piano and sometimes helped the girls with their music lessons. All of the girls were organists at one time or another at the Fifth Ward. Hazel became quite an accomplished pianist.

Ed was called by the Church to go on a two-year mission to England. I remember Mother cried when we all went to the depot to see him off, however, it was a never-to-be-forgotten evening when Ed returned in 1908, highlighted by the opening of his big trunk, with all the family gathered in the front room. He brought a gift to each of us.

About 1919 Mother and Daddy built a new home just north of our old house. The new house was ultra modern in comparison for it had a bathroom, including a toilet! Gone forever was the ageless "privy". We had a central heating system (pipeless) a clothes chute, a front hall, a sliding door, porch flower boxes, and a basement. The home was the culmination of Mother's and Daddy's dreams voiced by him as far back as I can remember in these words -- "maybe we'll have a new house in about three years."

Mother's flower gardens made our home a notable sight, mentioned in the "Logan Republican" more than once. When people wanted something special in flowers they would come to our place. She constantly sent flowers to the sick and shut-ins and to Sunday School regularly.

Mother had the loveliest hair. It was soft and very long. When getting ready to go anywhere her hair had to look perfect and she didn't want even one strand out of place. When Mother and Daddy decided to have some real nice photographs taken that they could leave to their children, she could not decide what to wear. Finally she made a beautiful taffeta dress with a lace dickie. They sure

fussed around the day of the picture taking. Mother made certain that her dress and hair were just so and that Daddy's hair was combed real handsome-like and his mustache neatly trimmed. When they were ready to go to the studio, Daddy brought in a beautiful rose and pinned it on Mother, saying, "This is for my sweetheart"

The photograph of Mother, with the rose Daddy picked for her, was reproduced in a Mother's Day publication in 1938, and numerous people have admired it as picturing a typical mother.

NRC: This same photograph of Grandma Norr, plus a picture of Grandpa taken the same day, is shown in this family history.

Most of the children were married by the time we moved into our new home. Mother looked forward to Sundays because the family generally came home to visit and brought their children. We would sit around on the front porch or on the lawn and talk and laugh. We often had big Sunday dinners and usually the table had to be set two or three times because there were so many.

Mother's health was not too good; she suffered a great deal with a bladder infection. She was most anxious to visit her oldest boy, Ed, and his family down in southern Utah. Mother and Daddy bought their first automobile "a new Dodge - in 1921 so they could make the 400-mile trip down to see Ed and his family. They were also planning to go to Zion National Park, and also stop and see many old friends along the way.

All of us were so excited and happy with our new car. Daddy turned the old granary into a garage. He kept the car spic and span. It was a real fancy automobile for those days. When the weather was rainy or cold we had side curtains to protect us, although we had to get them out from under the seat and it was quite a little job to put them on.

Mother and Daddy had to postpone their trip. Mother's problem worsened and she went to the hospital for an operation in the early spring of 1921. She never did regain her strength after the operation but by the middle of the summer in 1922 she was feeling better and they took a trip in their new car back up to Snowville and Stone to see her mother who was then past 82 years of age. Although Mother was very weak and tired after the trip, she insisted on planning for the trip to southern Utah. They left on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August, accompanied by Irma, and Hazel and her husband Ariel Jorgensen- They visited relatives in Salt Lake and then went to Enterprise, Utah, where Ed lived. She was so happy to see her oldest son and family and thoroughly enjoyed the visit for a couple of days. Suddenly her old ailment returned and she became very ill. The doctor was unable to help her and she died on August 29<sup>th</sup>.

Poor Dad was broken hearted when we lost Mother; his strong religious faith was a great consolation to him at this time. Dad also took comfort in the fact that Mother had been able to visit her own mother, her brothers and sisters and her children, all except Vernon, before she passed away. This had pleased her greatly.

Irma was the only one left at home after Mother died and she kept house for Dad. Dad was working as a custodian at the college. As always, Dad was very faithful and diligent at his work. He had a definite schedule every day. He would get up, fix the furnace (in winter), milk the cow, feed the chickens and do the other chores, then wash and eat breakfast and leave for work at 6:30 A.M. to be in plenty of time to start at seven.