

ELIZA JANE CHENEY RAWSON

1837-1922

Eliza Jane Cheney was born in Kirtland, Ohio, on 29 August 1837, a daughter of Nathan Calhoun Cheney and Eliza Ann Beebe. Before her birth, her family joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and moved to Kirtland to be with the Saints.

By 1840, the family was living in Nauvoo, Illinois. Her father reports on life in the city of Joseph: "There is more inhabitants in the City of Nauvoo than there ever has been before since the people called Mormons began to gather. The people are very busy in building them houses to live in. The newcomers are building very good houses, they are building mostly with brick and frame houses, also the house of the Lord is building. The city is divided into ten wards so we work every tenth laboring day on the temple, there is probably from fifty to seventy people to work every day on the house. In the basement story, one room is 40 feet square, . . . [this] room has got a baptismal font in it, the font stands on twelve oxen, the oxen are made with wood, the oxen look as natural as though they were alive except the horns . . . [which are] overlaid with gold plate. There is a company of men gone up into the north country for pine lumber. Our people are . . . engaged in . . . building up a City, [and] have opened some very large farms on the prairie."

In January of 1848, when Eliza was ten years old, her family was living in Winter Quarters, Nebraska, having fled Nauvoo. Her father arranged for his family to stay in a little cabin, and then went to St. Joseph, Missouri to find work. Their plan was "to earn money to prepare us to go on in the spring, or as soon as may be convenient."

The family finally did migrate to Utah two years later in 1850. Eliza was thirteen years of age. They were members of the William Snow/Joseph Young Company. During their trek across the plains, they experienced the full gamut of weather. At times it rained so hard they could not travel. Later, it was so dry and windy that the dust blew until the nearest wagon could not be seen. In one section of the journey, the ground was white with alkali. Toward the end of the trip, the nights got cold enough that there was ice in the water pails in the morning.

One day her little brother was driving the team when he fell from the wagon. He was run over by the wagon and thought to be dead. He was anointed and administered to, and was up playing by the next day. The buffalo on the prairie were so numerous that someone had to ride ahead of the wagon train to move the herds out of the way so the wagons could pass. Eliza enjoyed good health throughout the entire journey.

While on the trail, she met William Coffin Rawson who was a member of another company. She was very impressed with him, and felt within herself that they would someday marry. However, he took little notice of her since she seemed so young to him at the time.

Her parents both died within eighteen months of their arrival in Utah, leaving Eliza and her brothers and sisters orphans. At the time of their mother's death, Helen was fifteen, Eliza fourteen, Nathan seven, Franklin two, and Emily was less than three months old.

Six years after arriving in the valley, Eliza did marry William Coffin Rawson on 12 October 1856, in Farmington, Utah. They were later sealed in the Endowment House. Eliza was described as the personification of a great lady. She was lovely to look at with beautiful brown eyes and dark brown hair. She was about five foot ten inches tall and had a graceful quality about her.

After their marriage, they lived first in Payson, Utah, and later in Ogden and Harrisville. They were the parents of seven children. The first two, Eliza Jane and William Franklin, were born while they were living in Payson. The remaining five, Olive Ann, Zenia Vanetta, Sarah Emily, Nathan Cheney, and Elizabeth Rebecca, were all born in Ogden.

She kept and operated a store in her home for many years. A large room had been added on for this purpose. She had a large group of customers from the surrounding communities.

Olive's son, James McEntire, remembers his grandmother's great faith. He told this story: "My mother was so seriously ill after my sister was born; everyone thought she was going to pass away. I remember the room full of people, as was the custom in those days, and when they thought Mother was passing, father kissed her good-bye and left the room crying. My Grandmother Rawson kneeled by her bed and prayed aloud so all in the room could hear. She asked our Father in Heaven to spare the life of her daughter that she might live to take care of her family. After the prayer, Olive recovered and went on to have three more children. She had good health until she died at age seventy-four."

Olive and her family lived next door to Eliza and William for many years. In 1891, William passed away, leaving Eliza a widow for over thirty years. Her children and grandchildren often helped with chores. Her grandson, James, lived with her for two years while attending school in Farr West. He would feed the pigs, cows, and horse, as well as clean the stables and milk the cows. He loved his grandmother dearly.

Eliza's home burned down when she was nearly eighty years old. This was a great sadness to her since she had lived in it for nearly all her married life. She lost nearly all of her furnishings, including many old items that were of sentimental value. At this point, she moved to Ogden and lived in an apartment.

About two months after falling and breaking her hip, Eliza passed away in Ogden, Utah, on 22 November 1922, at the age of eighty-five. The theme of her funeral was "This great and good lady." She is buried in the Ogden City Cemetery.

SOURCE:

Ancestral File. Family Group Sheets, compiled by Brian Taylor.

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