

History of Susan Ann Gay Whipple

by Mavis Greer Clayton

In her obituary, it was written of my husband's great grandmother, Susan Ann Gay Whipple, "Another pioneer woman is called" and that "she had the distinction that few women can boast that of walking more than 1,000 miles through a wilderness, before she graduated into long dresses." Susan Ann was born June 12, 1841 in DeKalb, Kempner, Mississippi to Alexander and Martha Covington Gay. She had an older sister, Eliza Jane and two younger brothers, John Franklin and Benjamin. Her father and her mother were both born in Rockingham, Richmond, North Carolina. The Gay's and Covington's were among the early settlers of Richmond County, where they were engaged in cotton growing. About 1840, Susan's parents left North Carolina and moved to the Mississippi frontier, where they heard the elders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints preach. The father was baptized about 1842, and his wife in March 1844. In 1846, the Gays again left their home to join the saints in Nauvoo, only to find that most of the people were leaving for the Rocky Mountains.

Alexander and Martha with their four children cast their lot with the migrating saints, and although, they were very poorly outfitted, reached Iowa in the autumn of 1846. In October at Mount Pisgah, the father and baby brother, Benjamin died of mountain fever (cholera). Susan Ann's mother married a widower, John Warrant Norton. His wife Dorothy and young baby died just a month before Susan's father, and he was left with a large family of young children. They endured many hardships and continued for several years to make preparations to journey to Utah. Two little girls, Mary and Nancy Elvira, were born in Iowa.

On July 7, 1851, Captain John Brown's handcart company, the Norton's and the Gays left the Mississippi River. They were helped by the Perpetual Emigration Fund, and after a long, hard journey, with the children and mother walking almost the entire way; they entered the valley on September 28, 1851. They were met by Uncle Robert Covington, the mother's brother, and taken to his home in Cottonwood, where they were treated very kindly and nursed back to health. In January, 1852, another little sister, Martha, was born in Big Cottonwood. Susan's mother and stepfather helped settle the town of Alpine, Utah, then called Mountainville. This was a very rugged and mountainous area, and the first winter the settlers lived in wagons and dug outs. Here Susan Ann was baptized and confirmed into the Church by her step-father on May 4, 1853. In 1854, her little step sister Mary died. About this time, Brigham Young counseled the settlers to build a fort for protection from the Indians, which they called Wadsworth Fort after William Wadsworth, in whose home church meetings were held.

John Norton was called on a mission to Australia, and Martha Ann moved with her children to Salt Lake City where she resumed the name of "Widow Gay." When John returned after a seven year absence, he married again and their paths separated permanently. In 1857, Martha Covington Gay Norton, Susan Ann and her brother and sisters had to work hard to help support the family, but during these trying years, a deep love developed among this family and Susan

Ann, throughout her life, maintained close contact with their mother, brother John Franklin and her two sisters.

The Gays lived in the 19th Ward and Bishop A. H. Rawleigh advised Nelson Wheeler Whipple to “take another wife if I could find a good one that I could get.” He also received a recommend from Pres. Brigham Young who gave him “leave”. Three weeks after they met, Susan was married to him as the third wife. This marriage took place on Sunday, February 9, 1857 in Brigham Young’s office by Heber C. Kimball, who was a friend of Nelson. Nelson was 23 years older than Susan Ann, who was only 16 when they were married, but theirs was a happy marriage and they were devoted to each other throughout their lives together.

Nelson Wheel Whipple was born June 11, 1818 in Sanford, Broom, New York, the last child in a family of six. His parents were Daniel and Mary Tiffany Whipple. He was baptized into the Church in Hendersonville, Illinois on April 24, 1844. He was married to Susan Jane Bailey by Elder John Hughes on August 5, 1843 at Elyria, Ohio. They were the parents of Maranda Jane, Mary Jenett, George Nelson, Edson and Harriet Emily and a small son who died at birth. They arrived in the valley in 1850. Susan Jane became ill and he hired a young widow, Rachel Keeling West, whom he married in 1853, to tend his family. Susan died June 6, 1856. Rachel and Nelson had three children, Daniel, Cynthia and Nelson Wheeler Jr.

Nelson had been working at a saw mill in North Mill Creek Canyon in Davis County. This mill was owned jointly by him and Heber C. Kimball. In the spring of 1857, after conference, he moved his new wife Susan Ann to the mill. In the summer they came back to the home on Third North and Third West and plowed and planted crops. Nelson was very good to Susan’s family and that first year he hired her brother John to work for him.

Susan Ann attended the famous 24th of July celebration that year in Big Cottonwood Canyon with James Townsend and his wife. There the news came that Johnston’s Army was in route to Utah. Her husband was called as a guard in Echo Canyon that winter. The following January 19th, her first child, Martha Ellen was born. She was named for her grandmother Gay. When the baby was just a few months old, Nelson, Susan Ann and his children Miranda and George went south to Provo to escape the army. They traveled by ox team and camped on the Provo River for several months. On July 12, they returned to their home in Salt Lake. What a hectic time this must have been for Susan Ann! The working habits she had learned as a young child continued in her life as wife and mother. Her husband was very adept with wood working and he made her a precious loom. In 1859, she made cloth and spun 100 pounds of flax that winter. She was living alone when her second child, a son, was born on September 21, 1859. Her husband had given up his saw mill in Davis County and was now at work in Neff Canyon. This boy was named for his father with his mother’s maiden name, Nelson Gay. Susan Ann spent many years alternating from the canyon to Salt Lake in an effort to keep up both places, and worked very hard helping her husband and cooking for many.

In 1861 Nelson built a four room house for Susan Ann and they used two downstairs rooms for a shop and lived in the two upstairs rooms. Next door lived Rachel and her children. These years were hard for the Whipple’s and Nelson was often away from home working on various jobs. On May 18, 1862, Susan’s second daughter was born and they named her Sylvia. My husband’s

grandmother was the next child named Susan Ann for her mother, and born in the 19th Ward on November 3, 1864. In 1865 Susan and her young family again moved, and this time to Big Cottonwood Canyon, where Nelson worked at Daniel H. Well's saw mill. In 1865, Susan Ann's half-sister Nancy Elvira Norton married Charles D. Rollins and moved to Cache County.

Mrs. Gay (Martha Ann Covington Gay) spent most of her time with the Whipples. In 1866-67, John Gay was also at their home because of unemployment. Her older sister, Eliza Jane, had married Orson Badger in 1865 and lived in Ogden. In January, 1867 Orson came to Salt Lake to visit and reported all the family well. John went back to live with the Badgers. A year later he was called to help settle San Pete County.

On March, 12, 1867 another boy Alexander Samuel was born to Susan. She was very ill and suffered with a gathered breast, which was very painful and her health in general for some time was very poor. This year Rachel went to the canyon and again Susan Ann was left alone with her children in the city. How resourceful and courageous she was. In January, when Martha Elle, her oldest daughter, was ten years old, they had a party for her. A group of 15 boys and 20 girls had a square dancing party. My husband's grandfather Robert Widdison and his brother William acted as caller and musician for the square dancing for the young people, and these parties were continued during this spring. Susan encouraged her children in all the arts and learning. They attended school in the 19th Ward schoolhouse, which their father helped build.

On January 19, 1869 John Franklin Gay married Tirzah Farr and moved to Ogden. At this time, Susan's mother, who evidently was married briefly to Benjamin Gibson, came to visit for a week from Cache County. In June, when Susan was back in Big Cottonwood Canyon, her mother and step-father lived with them in a house only ten feet by sixteen feet. It must have been very crowded quarters for nine people to cook, sleep and live in. That November 13, another son Robert John was born and Susan Ann was again in Salt Lake where she was very ill. In 1870 they were again in the canyon and her brother who was working here at the Peerless mine lost the sight in one eye in an accident. In May 1871 Susan and her children went by railroad to Ogden City. They left Salt Lake at 5 A.M. and visited the Badger and Gay families. Another trip to Lehi and one to Provo in 1872 and 1873 were no doubt highlights in Susan Ann's work filled life.

Another sad experience came for Susan. On July 24, 1871, Mother Gay came from Ogden to visit. When they met her at the train station, she was very ill. She was up and around for about a week, and attended by two local physicians, Dr. Lee and Dr. Meeks. She did not improve and got worse with "a kind of consumption." She died August 24, 1871 at the age of 52 years in Susan's home. All of her living brothers and sisters came to be at her home and beside of their mother. Mrs. Gay was buried in Ogden. A few months later, on December 15, Susan gave birth to another daughter Amy Jane, and just two years later to the day, Ida Gay was born.

That fall, Elvira Rollins again came to visit from Cache County. These visits must have been a great source of pleasure to Susan Ann. Another outing was held on September 7, 1876 that was enjoyable to Susan. The Whipples stayed at the home of Brother and Sister Brighton and hiked to Twin Lakes. In December her daughter Susan Ann hurt her eye with a fork and it was feared that she would lose her sight. Through faith and prayers of her parents, she was healed. Susan Ann had been troubled for many years with her teeth, and no doubt they were the cause of her ill

health. In 1878, Dr. Sharp pulled them and made her a new set for \$45.00, which probably was a great deal of money to the Whipples, but her health improved greatly after this. On March 25, 1879 her last child, a son named Anor, was born. All that summer she and the smallest children stayed in the city, where she made overalls to sell at the Co-Op store. She also planted a large garden, milked cows and made five to seven pound of butter each week to sell. For four successive Christmases, her husband was away from home working in the canyons. One of the joys of her life must have been the Mason and Hamlin Organ which her daughters bought for her.

Her husband's health was now beginning to fail and there was much sickness among her children. In 1884, her oldest son Nelson, who had been in Eureka working as a carpenter was taken to the Deseret hospital with Typhoid fever. Susan Ann brought him home and for seven long weeks, she and his step-brother George stayed by his side night and day and nursed him back to health. Her youngest, Ida Gay, was also ill with this dread disease, but not so severely. On July 5, 1887, her husband who had consumption died and was buried in the Salt Lake Cemetery. Susan Ann's four eldest children had married and she continued to live in the home her husband had built for her. By renting rooms and with the help of all, she was able to keep her five unmarried children together.

The Whipples were proud that they took the Deseret News from the time it was first published and also the Juvenile Instructor. The children were taught the meaning of industry early in life and many of them were encouraged in their artistic talents. Her two oldest daughters worked at the ZCMI shoe shop for several years where they made a good wage and learned the management of finances. Her sons from the time they were very small worked in the lumbering business with their father and several followed this trade as their vocation. Susan Ann was ever a faithful Latter-day Saint and loved the Gospel her parents embraced when she was a child. She attended meeting in the old 19th Ward and later the 28th Ward. In an age when infant mortality was high, all of her children grew to maturity. Only one child preceded her in death, Alexander Samuel, who died January 8, 1899 at the age of 32. Her son Anor lived at home and cared for his mother until her death. She died of "general debility" at her home at the age of 70 on September 29, 1911 and was buried in the Salt Lake City Cemetery. Her funeral was held in the 28th Ward and was conducted by Bishop William McMillian and the ward choir furnished the music. It was truly said at her passing: "One of the noteworthy pioneers of Utah has been called home."

Her children and their marriages:

Martha Ellen married May 3, 1883 Jacob Kesler, by Daniel H. Wells. They had seven children,

Nelson Gay married April 7, 1884 Susannah H. Wanlass a daughter of William and Mary O'Dell Wanlass. They were the parents of six sons, one dying as a two year old child.

Sylvia married Frederik Bateman Margetts on November 13, 1884. They had four boys and four girls. This couple was divorced. She died January 20, 1940.

Susan Ann married Archer Walters Clayton on May 26, 1882. He was the son of William and Sarah Walters Clayton and they later had a civil divorce. They had four sons and three daughters. One girl died as a baby. She died Dec. 18, 1885.

Alexander Samuel married Sarah Vanetta on February 5, 1891 and died January 8, 1899 of a heart attack. Two daughters were born to this marriage.

Robert John married Susan Winn, a daughter of William Henry and Martha Evans Winn. He was a lumberman and lived in Lehi, where five daughters and one son was born. Mildred and Miriam were twins. Robert died November 6, 1954 and is buried in Lehi.

Amy Jane was married on June 13, 1900 to John Henry Evans. They had four sons and two daughters. She died September 6, 1962.

Ida Gay was married to a dentist, Ezra Oakley Taylor, on June 26, 1895. His parents were John and Mary Ann Oakley Taylor. They had four daughters and two sons. She died May 21, 1956.

Anor was married November 15, 1917, after his mother's death, to Aurilla May Watkins. She was the daughter of William Lampard and Teah Jensia Elgena Johnson Watkins. They had two daughters and one son. Anor was a noted teacher in the Granite School District and at East and South High in the field of Art. He attended school at the Art Institute of Chicago and Columbia University. He died October 23, 1967.