

Margaret Maria Mecham (Ross)
Grandmother of Maude King

As told by grand daughter Florence King Riddle, Marie Ross Butcher and Margaret Angie Ross Buchanan. Arranged by Nora Lund-Historian of Nibley Park DUP Camp. February 1961-Filed in Daughters of the Utah Pioneers Building.

Grandmother, Margaret Maria Mecham Ross was born 24 Feb. 1840 at Springfield, Illinois. She was the daughter of Lewis Mecham, who was born 4 Sept. 1814 at Cannon, Grafton Co., New Hampshire and Lydia Wells Mecham, born 6 August, 1817 at Onondaga County, New York. Margaret was the third child in a family of 14. Lewis Mecham, his father Joshua and three brothers, Edward, Ephriam and Moses Mecham and their families joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints during the spring of 1836.

From the first, persecutions of the Mormons were very severe. The Prophet Joseph Smith advised all the newly converted Saints both at home and abroad to gather at one central place. From New York state they moved to Kirkland Ohio. Then on West to Jackson County Missouri. Being expelled from there, the Prophet led them to Illinois. The Mechams were in Springfield when Margaret was born. They moved on to Nauvoo where they helped in the building up of that city. According to the Mecham history, her father and others had their endowments in the Nauvoo Temple in 1846.

After the martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph and his brother Hyrum, Brigham Young was given the power of leadership of the Church. The persecutions continued greater than ever, and finally the Mormons vacated Nauvoo and went across the Mississippi River to Winter Quarters, Nebraska.

All of these troubles and hardships made a great impression upon young Margaret which she never forgot to her dying day. She was 12 years old when she made the long trip across the Plains. Her family traveled with the James C. Snow Company. They left Kaneshville, Iowa in June of 1852 and arrived in the Salt Lake Valley October 9th. The company consisted of 250 people. Their trek was quite pleasant. There was little or no sickness among the group and a good spirit prevailed. They were the 16th Company to cross the Plains in 1852.

The Saints were coming to Utah in such great numbers that President Brigham Young sent most of them to other localities other than Salt Lake, to make new homes. The Mechams were asked to go south to Provo in Utah County. They were an industrious and religious family and an asset to any community.

Living in Provo was Thomas Ross and his wife Rachel Smith Ross and their children. The Mechams and Ross families became good friends. When Margaret Maria Mecham was 15 years of age she was encouraged to marry Thomas Ross as his second wife. He was good, mature and religious as well as quite well to do for those early days. Plural marriage was being practiced and preached by the Church Authorities very extensively. Thus it was that Margaret Maria married Thomas Ross December, 31 1855 in Provo. She and Thomas went to the Endowment House in Salt Lake City and were sealed August 7, 1867, according to family records.

Margaret lived right in with Rachel and her family. She acted as a maid in the home, working early and late doing the many household tasks and caring for Rachel's smaller children.

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(Thomas' son Andrew was about the age of Margaret). The family lived in this manner until 1858 when Margaret gave birth to her first child, a girl, 18 October 1858 whom they called Polly Ann.

In the spring of 1859, Thomas moved Margaret to the Heber Valley, east of Provo, on a ranch. He is listed in the Wasatch County History as one of the first settlers of that valley. He wished to expand his livestock holding and Heber Valley was ideal for this. It also gave Margaret a chance to be by herself and live her own life. Her surroundings were rough. She helped with the cattle and sheep. By washing, spinning and weaving and sewing she was able to clothe her children. When her son Lewis was 8 years old she had a tin-type picture taken of him in a little suit she had completed herself, doing every thing by hand, from the sheep to the boy.

Nine children were born to Margaret and Thomas. Five or six were born in Heber. Polly Ann 18 October 1858, Provo. George Lewis 30 April 1862, Joshua 8 October 1864. Died 11, Oct 1864. Lydia Lucinda 13 Oct. 1865. Sarah Leticia 3 June 1867 Died 17 July 1867. Daniel Rhomson 8 Nov 1868, Maria Emeline 24 April 1871. Samantha Matilda 13 Feb 1873.

Oh what a hard struggle this little family had for an existence. Thomas spent a good share of his time with his first family in Provo, leaving Margaret and her children to care much for themselves.

A news item from Heber City published in the Deseret News, May 7, 1862 gives first hand information as to the conditions Margaret Ross and the other settlers were faced with. Quote "Half of the valley stands still covered with snow, cattle and other animals as very poor. Many of the people have been compelled to use boiled wheat and corn as a substitute for bread during the latter part of the winter. The mills are not yet completed and canyon roads are unsafe to travel to the Utah county mill."

A little story which Florence Riddle remembers her grandmother telling, concerned her grandparents and her own mother Polly Ann. On one occasion Thomas was taking his wife and baby to Provo for a visit with her folks. The road down the Provo Canyon was almost impassible due to the spring thaw. At the crossing of the Provo River it was noted that the river was quite high with flood water. Thomas had a good team and knew how to handle them well so he drove into the turbulent stream with little fear. His calculations were wrong. The horses were forced to swim, and the floating wagon was soon filled with water. Thomas did some quick thinking. He grabbed the baby, which was wrapped tightly in a blanket and threw her to safety on the bank. Then assisting his wife, they swam to shore and were saved. The horses also made their way to the bank farther down the stream with the empty wagon.

The settlers of Heber Valley as well as other localities experienced much trouble with the Indians. They took the settlers livestock and in many instances the lives of the people were endangered. It was finally about 1870 when a peace treaty was signed with the Indians.

It was about 1872 (?) when Thomas sold his holdings in Heber and moved Margaret and her children south to the new community of Kanosh in Millard County where his first family had just located. The near mountains and hills covered with grass in summer was a fine place for

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Thomas' expanding herds. On their farms in the valley they raised hay and grain for the winter survival of the stock.

Here in Kanosh Margaret gave birth to her last child, Samantha Matilda on Feb.13,1873. Her life went on about as usual here. Every day brought its long hours of work, that of caring for the needs of her family on various ways. She continued to make their clothes. She also raised a good garden as well as drying much fruit for the winter use. Later at Cove they had bees to supply them with honey. This with the milk, butter, meat and eggs gave them a comfortable living.

It wasn't long until the pastures looked greener in Sevier County, so Thomas secured homes for Rachel in Joseph and for Margaret at Cove, 4 miles from Joseph. The Cove house was 2 large rooms. It was set back away from the road and large shade trees were by the fence. There were fruit trees and a good garden here also. Margaret always had a cow to supply her milk and butter needs.

Along in the late 1880's the United States government decided plural marriage must stop in Utah. Co-habitation was breaking the law of the land. In 1890 President Wilford Woodruff signed the Manifesto making it unlawful to take another wife. Thomas Ross agreed with this, but he and other men who had obeyed the church counsel and had married a second wife couldn't just desert them and their children.

Men who weren't too friendly toward the Mormons were deputized to round up the polygamist men and try them in court and send them to jail. Thomas kept from being caught by hiding out and by getting out of the way quick, when notified that these marshals were coming.

Oh, what perilous times for Margaret. She had her children trained that at a certain sign they would pop under the beds out of sight. They scarcely breathed until any suspicious visitor left the place. She would talk in whispers to her children for fear loud tones would attract attention of the marshals. She never got over this habit of whispering. Her grandchildren remember how she would talk in a very low tones.

It was on the 12th of October 1898 that Margaret's husband Thomas died in Joseph. By this time she had her home in Joseph, Utah. Her children were married and had homes of their own. Polly Ann married Culbert Levi King. George Levi married Mary Ann Anderson. Lydia Lucinda chose George Charlesworth. Daniel Thomas married Elizabeth Ann King. Maria Emeline married Volney King. (When she died grandma kept one of the little boys until Volney remarried.) Samantha Matilda married Norton Haight.

Three of her children lived in Coyote (later Antimony) Garfield Co. After Thomas died her children persuaded their mother to sell her home in Joseph and move to Coyote to be near them. She bought a comfortable little home there, but was very independent and insisted on doing for herself right up the last. She happily welcomed her children and grandchild to her home.

Florence Riddle gives a few impressions of her grandmother. "As I remember grandmother, she was always neat and dainty in her dress and appearance. She was an immaculate house keeper-a place for everything and everything in its place. There was such a peaceful quiet atmosphere in

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her home. Her speech was gentle and always kind. Her motto was to always say the best of people, if you can't say something good, then say nothing at all."

"I recall grandma's home in Joseph. It was a comfortable 4 room house. The furniture wasn't too elaborate, but it was nice for the times. In her bedroom was the high, four poster bed with a soft, fluffy feather tick. It was always made up so white and pretty with large pillows covered with shams for the daytime attractiveness. A little round stand was beside the bed with a pretty coal oil lamp on it. A homemade rag carpet pulled tight over new straw, covered the floor. Small braided rugs were placed here and there."

"In her combine dining room and kitchen was a small square table and chairs with raw-hide bottoms. And a dear little rocking chair that had rocked all her babies. This part of the floor was covered with carpets. When the cook stove, cupboard and washstand was, there was bare floor, later covered with linoleum. Her pet cat always was good company for her."

(Marie says she always wore such beautiful waist aprons, both white and colored gingham embroidered with cross stitch and other designs.)

"She was a devoted church member all of her life. She attended to her meetings regularly. She never neglected her prayers and was an honest tithing payer. She always spoke very reverently of the Prophet Joseph Smith who she remembered vaguely as a child back in Nauvoo. She lived the Golden Rule and always shared what she had with others."

"I have always felt that Grandma was rather a neglected second wife. She was 26 years younger than Grandfather and it didn't seem they were too companionable. The first wife Rachel was more Thomas' own age. It was she who was with him through the bitter hardships in Nauvoo, and braved the trials of crossing the plains and who helped him get established in this new frontier. I imagine it was hard on her to have to share her husband with another woman. If she was jealous of Grandma at times and perhaps mistreated her, it certainly could be understandable."

"If Grandma felt that she was neglected and was left alone too much and had too work hard through her early life, no one ever knew it. She never, ever uttered one word of complaint against anyone. We grandchildren remember her as a very reserved but happy sweet little woman."

Angie concludes. "Early in February 1909 Grandmother Margaret was taken very ill and passed away Feb. 9, 1909. Her children and many of her grandchildren were there, and I remember well the heart-breaking sobs of her children. She was prepared for burial and taken to Joseph to Uncle Lewis' home. The next day services were held in the Ward meeting house and then she was put beside her husband in the family plot. Her many friends and neighbors grieved her passing. Margaret was a very dignified lady, quiet and reserved. Everyone loved her sweet gentle ways. She left a large posterity to revere her memory.