

## **Bertha Madison Smith**

By: Anina Luff

I would like to welcome you to Lamoni, Iowa and to my home at Liberty Hall. I am Bertha Madison Smith. My parents Mads and Mary Madison migrated from Norway after learning of the Latter Day Saint Church from the missionaries. I was born in Illinois and a year later Joseph Jr. and Hyrum Smith were martyred. The church splintered, but my folks were undecided which church to choose and they waited to make a decision. In 1860 they decided to join the Reorganization under Joseph Smith 111 and moved to Plano, Illinois. Two years later, I was baptized. I met brother Joseph and was hired to be his housekeeper and to help with his very frail wife Emmaline and their three little girls Emma, Carrie, and Zaide. Emmaline had already lost two little ones Arthur and Eve, and she later suffered a miscarriage from which she never fully recovered. Five years later, Emmaline died. Joseph was heartsick and in a quandary over what to do. It was considered improper for a widower and an unmarried woman to live under the same roof, even though I had a female companion to help me. My life was made miserable by rejection and gossip. After much prayer and deliberation, Joseph remarked, "the ears of my spirit heard a voice saying "God bless a tender heart"". This helped him make his decision and he asked me to marry him. I was twenty-seven years old and already loved his three little girls.

Within a year, we had our first child, a boy named David Carlos. Then to our delight a daughter Mary Audentia. Two years later a husky baby boy Frederick Madison (better known as Freddie). Two years later another healthy boy named Israel Alexander. Little did we know

that these bright, lively boys would later become president prophets of our church. To our sorrow, our baby boy Kenneth arrived and only lived a few hours. To bring joy again to our hearth a lively little daughter named Bertha Azuba, Zuba for short, was born. Three years later a hearty, healthy baby boy named Hale Washington joined our growing brood; as you can tell by now, we were delighted with our large family. A few months after Hale's birth, Joseph and his counselors made the decision to move the church headquarters to Lamoni Iowa. Our first real house was being built, and was nearly completed, so in the fall of 1881 we packed up (no small task) and left by train for Lamoni. We moved into Liberty Hall on October 1st in the middle of a tremendous thunderstorm. Thankfully, I was blessed with good health and a strong body as we arrived with nine children to move into an unfinished house in the middle of a storm. The water cisterns had not yet been installed so the older children and I scurried around finding tubs and barrels to catch the rain. It rained for five days so we were left with plenty of water to start cleaning, cooking and washing in our new home. I loved Liberty Hall, long windows to let in the sunlight and summer breezes perfect for growing houseplants. Walls covered in bookshelves for our very large library of books. A very large kitchen with all the modern conveniences of the day and the water pump was even inside. A dining room that had a great long cherry wood table. There was always room at my table for extra guest's relatives and travelers. An elderly sister in the church lived with us until her death. Our dear friend Thomas Jacobs who was the architect and builder of our home also stayed with us for the rest of his life. As my parents aged and became infirm they also made their home with us and Papa, who loved woodworking, made the crib for our babies as well as chests, cabinets and many things so useful for a large family. I loved having my home filled with children and loved ones, a noisy happy home indeed.

In May of 1883, we were looking forward to our spring baby, but sadly Blossom only lived a few hours. In 1884, our lovely little Lucy was born to gladden our hearts and complete our family. In the words of my husband Joseph, "Liberty Hall throbbed with life, teeming with the bustling activities of a large and growing family. Birth, death, and marriage occurred within its walls, and much of romance might be included in the history there made, as joys and sorrows succeeded each other as days the nights." There was much joy and laughter in our home as music played a large part in our lives. Fred had his tuba (he was the only one large enough to carry it), and Audie the piano and many evenings were spent Singing beloved hymns and other favorite songs. Teenagers were running in and out, Fred had his dark room for developing pictures as well as space to tinker with electrical inventions. And of course, there was baseball. Baseball was very popular in Lamoni and our boys loved to play. There was much sewing to be done, books to be read, china painting and scrap books to fill. Liberty Hall hummed like a huge bee-hive filled with bright busy children. I was never so happy. I had my family, my garden, fruit trees, cows and horses, and chickens all contributing to our needs. I had my church, good books, dear friends, and flowers to feed the soul. And of course, my Joseph. He was often away from home doing church work but we always knew he was with us in thought. Many small gifts of pressed flowers and leaves, packets of soil from different parts of the world, sea shells, rocks and arrowheads and various mementos from his travels brought his experiences to share with us at home.

This time of joy was shattered one fall day in 1884 when our little Zuba was struck across the throat with a stick being swung by a school mate on the school grounds. She lived only a week, and Joseph returned home only in time to be with us at her funeral on her sixth birthday. She was the brightest, liveliest little spirit to ever grace a family, and we all suffered greatly from her loss. A mere two years later, tragedy again struck our home. Our eldest son David Carlos had suffered for eight years from the effects of rheumatic fever and heart disease. He died at the age of sixteen. His last words to me, "Mama, you've been so good to me." My heart was broken at the loss of my gentle first born son. During a raging snow storm, we buried David next to his sisters and brother in Rose Hill cemetery. Only God's grace and mercy can give parents the strength to survive such losses.

Joseph and I enjoyed 27 years of married life with constant love and respect. I regret my stubbornness when I ignored Joseph's warning and insisted on taking our liveliest team of horses into town on errands. While away, a traveler parked his covered wagon near our driveway. The horses were startled by the canvas flapping in the wind and bolted, overturning the buggy. I hit my face and chest against a large wood pile. I quickly recovered from the shock and considered myself unhurt. Nearly a month later, I began to feel badly and went to bed. Though I was carefully nursed, with Joseph and 12 year old Lucy at my side, I turned to them, closed my eyes, and left my beloved home and family. I was buried at Rose Hill next to my four children on October 19th, 1896. I was aged 54. GOD BLESSED A TENDER HEART.

The rest of the story: My eldest daughter Audentia and her husband Ben and young child moved into Liberty Hall to care for her father and siblings. In a year or two Joseph met Canadian Ada Clark, married her and returned to Liberty Hall. They were greeted with love and understanding and raised their three boys-Richard, Wallace, and Reginald-moving to Independence in 1906.