

H. Tracy Hall Interviewing His Mother and Father About Their Lives.

Date of interview: June 14, 1959. Voice: Florence Almira Tracy Hall.

I was born in the old family home on west 12th Street (Ogden, Utah). At the time of my birth, my mother was having a difficult time. The civil authorities had been clamping down on polygamy in Utah, making arrests of those who were polygamists; and the U.S. Marshals took my father, having three wives, and he was in the penitentiary at the time of my birth.

In those days, a midwife delivered babies, and the midwife was Ann Bickington. They didn't use antiseptic [anesthesia?] in those times and mother had a very difficult time. She had very little to eat to give her strength to go through the ordeal. She told me about it.

As I grew old enough to go to school, I went to the old school on Groom's Bench, a one room, frame building that had children up to and including the fourth grade. The teacher there, over the years, was an old maiden lady by the name of Linda Erwin. She lived with another elderly lady called Mrs. Bennet, who did the housekeeping.

She was very strict, but she needed to be that way on account of those large boys who were always troublemakers. I remember when we were marching out one day; one of these boys kicked the bucket of drinking water over and spilled it all over the floor. She came down—he was larger than her—grabbed him by the collar and wiped the water up with him. She didn't have any more trouble with that boy after that.

I was always the head of the class in spelling, reading, and other activities; and then on graduating from the fourth grade, I went to Mound Fort to school—a mile and a quarter from our home. The winters were very severe, and it was very difficult to walk that distance, but I never missed a day. I had Mrs. Wade, a very lovely teacher, in the fourth grade.

During one of these cold mornings, my fingers were frozen on the way to school. We were having examinations, and I wasn't able to write. She had me soak my hands in cold water for some time. This took the frozen condition out of my fingers but it left them numb and weak so that I could not hold a pen. So the teacher said, "You just write your examination papers in pencil today, and in a day or two when your fingers are strong and healed, then I'll let you write it in ink, copied right from your answers."

From here I went to the fifth grade, my teacher being Mrs. Olive Barker. She was very strict and not kind and sweet as Mrs. Wade had been, but she was a very good teacher. I remember one time in particular, we were having examinations in arithmetic, and I took my book home and studied. We were given so many pages of arithmetic to do, and we were to be prepared to give all the answers next day on the blackboard. One problem was really difficult, and I could not solve it. I stayed up long after midnight working and working on that, and I remember I just would not give up. I knelt down and prayed that I would be able to solve that problem. I got up, went over it again, and I got the answer.

The next morning we were given turns at participating in the test, and she asked how many had been able to solve that certain problem. Mine was the only hand that went up. She asked, "I asked that questions because I knew it was difficult. And I took it to the instructors in the lower grades to see if they could solve it, and not one of them could solve that problem." So she had me write it down on the blackboard and show how I accomplished it. I was very proud and happy that I had been blessed and able to do that.

[Tracy Hall: Aaron was a half-brother by the third wife of Florence's father, Helon Henry Tracy. Her name was Phoebe Draper Tracy. Aaron later was a schoolteacher. He

became the last president of Weber College in Ogden, Utah, before it became a public Junior College. His mother, Phoebe, was deceased at the time in question.]

We were not dressed very warmly the day I froze my fingers. Mother was a widow with a large family of children, and I didn't have nice, warm winter clothes as children have nowadays. I had one of these old fascinators around my head with air holes all over in it, and my ears were practically frozen. And I didn't have any mittens, so I tried to keep my hands warm in the pockets of my little coat. Brother Aaron was ahead of me, and I felt that I was freezing like I couldn't take another step—and I called to him. He stopped, came, back, met me, and took my hands and rubbed them. There was a fierce wind. He put his arm around me and had me put one of my hands in one of his pockets and my arm around him with a hand in the other pocket. He helped me the rest of the way to school.

I was born in a home that my father built. [Her father was a carpenter and a teacher.] No basement—an old-fashioned, frame house. It set right on the ground, and there was a living room, kitchen, and three bedrooms. It was a long, narrow house and had a lean-to on the back. The back was lower. We could climb up there. Mother used to dry fruit and put it up on the back of the house to dry. I used to take the peaches and apples and spread them out on clean cloths to dry. We had good times. There were a couple acres of ground around there, and it was all planted in fruit trees and berries. We played ball and had good times.

There's one little incident I never will forget. My father was very ill. He was on his dying bed at that time. He had planted a lawn out in front. He was really not able to, but he was determined to, have the yard looking nice, so he planted this grass. Then he called the children and said; "Now be careful when you're playing hide-and-go-seek—don't run across that grass, that lawn that I planted, or you will ruin it."

His bed was in the front room where he could see out the front, low windows, and I was hiding behind some rose bushes over at one edge of the walk. One of my sisters was the "gool" [goal]. She counted to fifty, yelled, "All who's ready, holler 'Charlie.'" We all hollered "Charlie," and she started north, in the direction away from me.

I thought, "Now's my chance—if I run fast, I can get to the goal before she catches me." I darted right across that freshly planted lawn. I was halfway across before I noticed what I was doing, and I thought it would be just as bad to go back as to keep going all the way across, so I went all the way across the lawn. My father saw me from the window and sent one of the children out and said, "Have Florence come in."

So I went in, feeling very bad and very guilty, and very sorry, too, because I had disobeyed my sick father. I stopped in the door and he said, "Come on up to the bed." I came up. "Hold out your hand." I help out my hand and he slapped it. That broke my heart, because he had always been kind. He would drop me on his knee and sing songs to me. I'll never forget the songs he used to sing [at this point she sang the following]:

Oh Bulah land, Oh Bulah land,
Sweet Bulah Land,
As on the mountaintop I stand,
I look away across the sea,
Where mansions are prepared for me...

I forget the rest of it. I was just 10 or 12—I don't remember exactly. [Florence was born November 7, 1886. She was seven years old when her father died.] Well, when he

slapped my hand, I went down on my knees. Broken hearted, I crawled under the bed and cried and sobbed until I went to sleep.

Next thing I remember, I heard my mother's voice in the dark. She said, "Henry, don't you think you could eat a little? I just churned, and I have some fresh butter, and I baked some fresh bread. You could surely eat a little of that, couldn't you?" He told her he could.

So he got up, then down and got hold of my hand under the bed and helped me out. He said, "Come and have a little lunch with Papa." He got a chair, sat me right up close beside him, and put his arm around me; and we ate fresh bread and butter and drank buttermilk together. That's one thing I'll always remember—that experience with my father—and his kindness, and sweetness.

He didn't live very long after that—probably a week, and then he passed away. [Helon Henry Tracy died April 25, 1893, at age 44.] He had been ill for a long time, and it seemed to be stomach trouble, but in those days they didn't know all these diseases like they do now. It seemed more or less in his lungs, too. I guess he had several things wrong with him. I think they called it "consumption," tuberculosis, as we know it now. But he was wasted away. I remember him, as he lay stretched out after death. I stopped by his body and looked. He was very thin. He had fallen away a great deal. Then they took me out of school, and Mother moved up to Idaho.

A kitchen range, and one of those old round-belly heaters in the living room heated our house; the bedrooms were not heated. We used coal sometimes—maybe not always, but sometimes. The house was on west 12th Street, between the old Oregon short-line railroad track and the old Union Pacific that came up around the lake—the old transcontinental line. It went up north of the lake and then on through to California. The house was on the north side of the street and faced south. It has been torn down for a good many years. My oldest brother took over the property when Mother went to Idaho. He was married and had a family and he had built himself a nice home. He left the old home there for a number of years—just as a relic, but finally it was torn down.

My mother's sister, who was also my father's wife, was named Jane and she lived in a house nearby on the same piece of property. She was right close to the old Union Pacific railroad track. She was to the west of Mother's house. We children played together. There was no such thing as half-brother or half-sister. We were all united—we thought just as much of one as of the other. Aunt Jane was so kind. I remember when Mother was out to work once and I had a tooth that was aching. She was a small woman and I was quite a big girl, and she took me on her lap and rocked me in the rocking chair and help applications over my ear and my jaw to ease the toothache until she rocked me to sleep. When Mother was away, she took care of Mother's children, just like she would her own. There was never any trouble—never any quarrelling. I think I thought as much or more of what we called half-sisters and brothers as I did my own brothers and sisters.

Father's third wife, Aunt Phoebe, lived in Star Valley. She had three children, Aaron W. Tracy, who lived in the home of David O. McKay for a while when he was trying to get through school. President McKay took him in and helped him to get through school, and he [Aaron] later became President of Weber College, and is now a member of the state legislature. He has two sisters, [Sarah Ann Olive Henderson and Phoebe Henrietta Draper]; one of them [Phoebe] is still living. [Phoebe died in 1955.]

Aunt Phoebe had a home in Star Valley and father brought her down one time. They traveled in one of these large camp wagons and I remember when they came down to our home and stayed for a short time and then went back.

When I was a young girl, the Bishop of the Marriott Ward was James Richie. I think he was the bishop for a long, long time. He was the father of the Richie who was bishop of the Marriott Ward when you, Tracy, were a kid in Marriott. It was his son that married my sister, Naomi Tracy Richie. He was a very kind and good man as I remember as a child. My father built the meetinghouse of the Marriott Ward. It's still standing—the part that he built. As the ward grew in numbers, they put an addition—a large addition—and an amusement hall on the back of it. But the original meetinghouse that he built was still in use. My father was a carpenter by trade, and he built many homes in that section of the country, and his work was so well done. There's an inscription on the front of this meetinghouse, telling when it was built and I think there's a record there of who built it.

We had to walk a mile and a half to the west to get to church, and I remember some of my teachers—the Powell girls, and one that I was especially fond of was one of Bishop Richie's daughters—her name was Elizabeth—and she was a very lovely teacher. I wouldn't forget her teachings! And of course I was still in my early teens when Mother left there and moved to Idaho. So I didn't have much experience in the Marriott Ward as a young woman. My older brothers and sisters—Naomi, and my older brothers and my sister, Ruth Meriam—had moved to Idaho about seven miles north of Idaho Falls and belonged to the Iona Ward. They thought they could better take care of mother if she would move up there. They sent her money—the boys did, my brothers Dick (Richard) and Adam, who had gone up to Idaho and were helping Naomi on the ranch. They thought if she would move up there they could help her better, so she moved up to Idaho Falls when I was a girl in my early teens.

I helped on the ranch. There was always so much work to do with hired men at threshing time and haying time and all the year around. Naomi had a long table in the dining room and it was always crowded all the way round with Mother's family and her own family. It was a large house. It had an upstairs full of sleeping rooms, and it accommodated all of us. We were quite comfortable there. But Mother worked awfully hard. She would work if there was work to be done and my brothers felt that she shouldn't be doing all this hard work so much. She was getting along in years, and her health wasn't too good. They purchased a little home up near my brother Adam's home, about three quarters of a mile from the Richie home. She had two rooms there and she lived there and was real comfortable. My brothers supported her and helped her along.

We lived something over three miles from the meetinghouse in Iona and I was very religiously inclined and wanted to attend all my duties in the church and in the organizations. I walked that distance very often and stayed with my sister, Ruth Miriam Whitehead, in Iona.

Iona was three miles to the southeast of where my mother lived. It was seven miles east from Idaho Falls, and we were farther north from Idaho Falls, so we had to go south and east to get to Iona. I walked much of the time and my brother-in-law, Ben Richie, would let me take a pony and I would ride a pony over there on a Sunday morning, early. I would stay to the Sunday meetings and the MIA meetings on Monday night and then chorus practice was another night, so I was at Iona a great deal of the time and stayed with my sister, Ruth Miriam. I think I was 16 or 17 at the time. I was in the seventh grade for half a term in Mound Fort School before we came to Idaho. I came back to Marriott and stayed with my sister, Annie, so I could get through the seventh grade. Some of the family criticized me to a

certain extent for being “overly” righteous, and walking so far to get to church. They thought I should stay at home and work on the ranch more, but I didn’t like that.

I stayed with my sister in Iona and I belonged to the choir, and I taught a Sunday school class. I became secretary of the YLMIA, then a first counselor, then a second counselor of the YLMIA. There was a patriarch in the ward who was also the caretaker of the meetinghouse. He used to come over and unlock the door and let us in for the meetings, and he would sit down on the stand or in the choir seats while we were having our meetings, and wait until we got through so he could lock up.

One time, in particular, we were having a testimony meeting, and he was a patriarch, so I asked him if he would come up and talk to the girls and he did. He came up and bore his testimony and gave a fine talk to the girls. After the meeting when I went to leave, he said, “Sister Tracy, come back here for a few minutes, will you? I’ve been impressed to give you a blessing.” And he had me sit down and he put his hands on my head and gave me a wonderful blessing. Later I had my patriarchal blessing. I haven’t read it for a long time. But he promised me some wonderful things—that I would become a mother in Israel, and I believe he said that my seed would be known through all generations of time. I think that’s in there and that’s been fulfilled because I’m very proud of our five sons and their accomplishments.

Now I never did care for things in Idaho because there didn’t seem to be any more school for me—any chance to advance or get anywhere, and I didn’t like being a household drudge—cooking for hired men and seeing so much food all the time. My sister really loaded that table with food. When there wasn’t another place to put a dish of food on the table, she would put it on the sideboard. The thrashers always had some of their machinery break down while they were there so they could stay longer because of her fine cooking and the way she fed them. This was all ranch country with houses few and far between. They had plenty of irrigation water.

I was just cooking and doing that type of work and I wanted something else so I came back to Marriott when I was between 17 and 18 and I worked around at different places—anywhere to have a home. I worked for the bishop of the ward at that time, Thomas Powell, when his wife had a baby. I also worked for the Zeemer family—they were not members of the church but they paid me well and treated me good. I worked in their home for a while. Zeemer was a fruit farmer in Marriott and he had a large packinghouse there. I went there to see if I could get work in the packing plant, packing fruit. She said, “Oh, I wish you’d come and help me in the home—I need someone bad! I’ll pay you just the same money you would make out there packing fruit.” So that’s how I came to be in their home.

I helped around their house. She did most of the cooking because she was such a wonderful cook—she was known all over Ogden for her abilities as a cook. She had friends come out from Ogden to visit real often and enjoy her cooking, so she took care of that. But she taught me many things that I’ve never forgotten about cooking. I learned a great deal from her, about canning fruit and doing different things like that. I just kept the kitchen clean. They kept their bedroom clean. I didn’t have a great deal to do and they were very nice to me.

From there I went to the sewing school in Salt Lake—The Keister Sewing School. I wanted to learn something else besides how to keep house and cook. I went down and found out what the set up was there and the man and his wife had charge. They did the drafting but they taught me how to make patterns. I remember that many of those who came there to

have their sewing done there were prominent women in the church. Bathsheba Smith came there and had her sewing done, and I assisted in making a dress for her. I learned how to sew and when I graduated from that class, I attempted taking in sewing and I got a place to live where I could work part time for my board and keep and sew for people.