

# REMINISCENCES OF JOHANNA MARIE NIXON

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Edited by Richard Smoot Nixon, great grand son

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Picture a little, old-world village named Honsinge, in Denmark. Picture the comfortable, home of the prosperous, well-loved village blacksmith, Mr. Schultz. Picture this happy family: the capable, happy-hearted mother, the contented hard-working father and their only child, the little girl, Sidse. You now have a picture of the home into which baby Johanna Marie Schultz was ushered on April 1, 1844.

Little Johanna led the carefree life of any normal child until she was eleven years old, when the great change came. By this time there were two other members in the family, little Ferdinand and Mary. This family of six, like all the other families in the village, was of the Lutheran religion. But when Elder H. P. Lund and Elder L. Erickson from the Mormon Mission at Copenhagen, about fifty-six miles from Honsinge, came to the village and presented the religion of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to the inhabitants, the Schultz families were the first to recognize and receive the truth.

Of course all the friends and relatives immediately became the enemies of these brave advocates of the new religion. One Sunday the old Lutheran priest of the village was invited by Elder Schultz to come to his home where Brothers Erickson and Lund were staying, to debate the question of Lutheranism vs. Mormonism with the Mormon Elders. Eleven-year-old Johanna was a silent but interested spectator. The priest, a short, heavy set, an important old gentleman, became steadily angrier as he found that he could not overthrow the arguments of the Mormon elders. Finally, in a towering rage, he threw reason to the winds, declared Mormonism to be worthless, and enforced his statement by bringing his hand down with all his strength upon the Bible, lying upon the table. Elder Lund, not realizing the remark he was about to make would remain with one of his hearers, little Johanna, the rest of her life, reproved the old priest by

saying: “It is not becoming in a servant of God to give such a slam on the Bible.”

That evening, after the meeting held in the Schultz home, the mob tried to break into the house to kill the Mormon elders, but the elders managed to escape through the windows. The lawless men then threw rocks at the building, broke the windows and tried to climb through the chimney, but becoming discouraged, finally left the unoffending inhabitants in peace.

Soon after this, Brothers Lund and Erickson blessed Elder Schultz, making him a priest, and sent him to preach in the city where he used to buy coal, iron and steel for black smithing. While there preaching to his merchant friends whom he thought would at least listen to him, they sent for the police. When Elder Schultz returned home, he described the outcome of his adventure thus: “Today I have received the greatest testimony of the Gospel I have ever had. I expected to be imprisoned, but when the policeman came to me, face to face, God blinded his eyes so that he didn’t see me.”

After two such years filled with trouble, chaos, misery and danger, life at Honsinge became unendurable to the Schultz family, so with a certificate from Elder Erickson recommending any member of the Schultz family to the Mormons in Utah, Johanna and her loved ones, with about three hundred other Scandinavians of the same faith, set sail in April 1857, for America—the long promised, long dreamed of “Land of the Free.” The father had a very small amount of money which he had luckily been able to obtain from the sale of his prosperous farm and his home. Johanna was then thirteen years of age.

This little colony of Mormons, of whom a Brother Funk was put in charge, were six weeks on the ocean. Many of the company died of Typhoid Fever. Johanna’s father died ten days before they landed. Realizing that he would never see the land for which he had waited and prayed so long, Brother Schultz called Brother Funk to his bedside and left him this charge: “Please see that my wife and children are safely delivered in Zion.” Brother Schultz was wrapped in his feather bed, weighted with a sack of coal, and sunk into the sea without any funeral services.

After landing in America, two more sad, troubled-filled years followed for Johanna, in Burlington, Iowa, where she and the rest of the family spent their first summer in the new world. The health of the mother and two younger children, Ferdinand, three years old and Mary, five years old, steadily failed. By the kindness of a noble lady, Mrs. Lawrence (Lawrence), who heard of the penniless state of the unfortunate family, Johanna obtained work in her hotel, and Sidse obtained work from a certain widower, a friend of Mrs. Lawrence. Every day Johanna would bring a basket of goodies given to her by her kind employer, home to the hungry little children whose wistful, pinched little faces were always flattened against the window pane. But one day the little faces were missing and Johanna and Sidse, with the aid of the kind Mrs. Lawrence buried little Mary and Ferdinand. The mother, broken down with grief, followed them about Christmas time. Before she or the younger children died, she prophesied their death, and also said that Johanna and Sidse would reach Zion successfully.

After the mother's death, Mrs. Lawrence and her friend wished to adopt the two orphaned children, but remembering the wishes of their parents, Johanna and Sidse finally obtained passage for the journey to Utah with Mormon company from Fairfield, a town a short distance from Burlington. The company was composed mainly of the people who had been on the ship which had carried the Schultz family to America. The same Brother Funk was in charge. This company, consisting of seventy-five wagons or more, each drawn by about three yokes of oxen, started in 1859 for Utah. Johanna was then fifteen. Captain Brown was sent from Salt Lake as a guide and they left Fairfield in the spring. Johanna and practically all of the other members walked all the three months it took them to reach Salt Lake City. The wagons were filled to capacity with provisions and so no room was found for riding.

Johanna was one of the thirteen people belonging to Brother Funk's wagon. Among the thirteen people were two very old persons, the mother and father of Brother Funk. They also walked. The greatest share of the members wore thin moccasins purchased from the Indians. But the days of the journey were peaceful, happy days. At night when they had found a suitable, water-furnished camp ground, the men would drive the wagons into the ring used for protection, the people and animals when inside were safer from possible Indian attacks. After the occupants of each wagon had supper, prayer followed. Then, if the ground was an especially level piece, the people would sometimes enjoy a dance, as there were a number of musicians in the company with violins or other instruments. In these dances young and old participated, and out on the green grass, under the starry sky, they would frolic in happy, carefree abandon.

The only death Johanna remembers was that of a fine, strong looking man who ran a prickly pear thorn in his foot. Blood poisoning set in and he died in a few days. A simple grave was dug at the side of the road with a rude board for a head stone, to which a piece of paper bearing his name, etc. was attached. Here, in the hot desert sand, with the coyote, the lizard and the horned toad for company, and with the vast dreary stretches of cactus, sand, sagebrush for a graveyard, the lonely sleeper slept on. Encountered on the way were many such graves, grim evidence of the hard struggle. Then, one could read the names on the crosses; now, unrelenting nature, in her fight against man's invasion of her precincts, has long since obliterated every trace of the last resting place of her victims.

One day, while walking along, Johanna received a stone bruise in her heel which soon became festered so badly that she was unable to walk. Captain Brown simply lanced her foot with his penknife. She rode in the wagon that afternoon, but the next day walked with the others.

During the journey many people drove cows. At night, after milking, they would put the milk in the churns, and after a days jolting in the wagons, the milk would be churned to butter. The people always slept on the ground under the tent if the weather was stormy. Many times Indians would come up. Then the white men would sit with their red brothers in a circle and smoke the Pipe of Peace. Often, for the sake of peace, the white men would have to give food to the Indians in groups of from fifty to one hundred. Therefore, when the company was within one ----- from Salt Lake their food gave out and each person received only a biscuit a meal. But finally they reached their destination in safety. Johanna says now that she would not mind

having this experience over. She spent a very happy three months. Because they were in God's care, the people were united and peaceful, and their watchword was always: "Something better ahead."

In Salt Lake City, Johanna and her sister were taken care of by Erastus Snow. Then Johanna met Brother Nixon, a young Mormon boy, and married him. She was then fifteen years of age. After her sister's marriage, Sidse lived with a certain Squire Wells.

Brother Nixon purchased a small farm in wild, unsettled East Weber Valley. A rude log cabin was Johanna's home, six miles from nearest neighbors. The cabin, originally one-room, was made two-rooms, and a small six pane front window of glass put in. After a time Johanna was able to afford narrow bleach cloth curtains for the window. The tiny house originally had only the ground for a floor, but Brother Nixon managed to obtain some lumber and to make a rough board floor, which was however carpetless. There was a dirt roof, and in the bad weather the rain and mud would stream into the room. Milk pans were put under the places that leaked the most. The furnishings of the home were three-legged stools, slab tops with holes for the legs, made by Brother Nixon, a huge chest, which held every odd thing, for a table and homemade lumber bedsteads, cumbersome and awkward. In the logs of the walls, holes were bored and wooden pegs fitted in these. The pegs, on which clothing was hung, constituted, the wardrobe, when Johanna's first baby was born. She was then seventeen. Her husband hewed her a crude cradle out of a log.

Johanna's next pioneer home was in St. George, where she and her husband, responding to a call for volunteers to come to Dixie, moved after four years in Weber and two in Salt Lake. This was the greatest trial of Johann's life to leave her happy, comfortable home in Salt Lake, where they had moved after renting their farm in Weber, and to come to the barren, unfertile southern country whose reputation had already been spread afar. But Brother Nixon, being a tinner, was requested to come to St. George and make tinware—plates and pans, etc. So during the cold winter, riding over the snow part of the way on sleds, they came and were three weeks on the journey. Traveling with them were some emigrants going straight through to California, as was Brother Nixon. He intended to purchase tools for his tinning business there with the money he had received by selling his East Weber farm and home. So it was that his wife's first home in Dixie, during the three months that he was gone, was simply a tent with straw on the ground. He barely had time to place Johanna and her three little children in this tent before he had to leave for California with the emigrants.

Besides being a tinner in Salt Lake, where he made his living by furnishing the people with pans, kettles, tin plates, etc., Brother Nixon farmed, built his house, and was somewhat a "jack-of-all-trades." In building, he used mainly an augur, a hammer, a saw and an ax. The tools were brought from the East. Wooden pegs were used in place of nails. Rawhide was used for almost every purpose.

The clothing Johanna and her small family wore was any kind of material to be obtained. Johanna's first dress in Utah was a blue denim dress made by herself. Calico, at fifty cents a yard, and factory at one dollar a yard, could be purchased in Salt Lake. A spool of thread was

twenty-five cents. The stockings were home-knit. The wool was taken from the sheared sheep, washed, dried, then carded with hand cards and made into spools, after which it was spun on the spinning wheel. Cotton came in skeins that were woven on the loom. The dresses, some of them home-knit and woolen, were dyed by cochineal bought in the stores. One dress Johanna made for herself was composed of the black wool of a sheep and the white wool, died four different colors. She wove it herself into a beautiful woolen piece of cloth.

Shoes were made by local shoemakers. The hats in style were called “shakers,” being simply painted, pasteboard shaped like sun bonnets. The slat sunbonnet was also worn. Only the cheapest kinds of food were used. Tea was five dollars a pound, molasses was used for everything that called for sugar, especially for preserving fruits. Molasses cake was the main dessert on Johann’s table. The meat was jerked.

The only education Johanna received after leaving her native Denmark was during the first year after she was married, when she went to school to a certain Bishop in the Eleventh Ward in Salt Lake. Teaching was very slow. Almost a whole winter would be spent in simply learning the letters, at best only the “three R’s were taught.

After her one year of schooling, when Johanna lived in East Weber, she had a strange experience with some Indians. Her husband had gone up into the canyon to work. Before going he had warned her of Indians. “Now don’t get frightened, but if they should come my revolver is under the pillow and my gun in on the wall.” There had been a rumor that Indians, without their squaws, which meant danger, were coming up the valley. Frightened, seventeen-year-old Johanna was sitting in her little log cabin rocking her tiny baby in its rude rough cradle and looking out of the small window trying to realize that her nly neighbors were six miles away. The Indians wouldn’t come, of course. But suddenly her staring eyes saw them, painted and in battle array, coming up the road. There were only two of them, but that was enough for Johanna. One slunk away, but the other, more bold, made straight for the defenseless cabin with the blue smoke curling out of its chimney. Johanna grasped the revolver in nervous fingers. The door was locked, but with only a simple catch. The Indian tried the door and called to her to let him in. Then he tried to force his way. Johanna was almost fainting from fear. Then suddenly another voice mingled with the guttural grunts of the Indian, and Johanna, recognizing the voice of a neighbor boy, knew that she was saved. The boy, who had seen the Indians, and guessed their intention, finally pacified the Redman and persuaded him to leave.

In this incident, as in all her life, Johanna says she feels as if she had been under God’s care. All her hardships are over now, and she is living peacefully and happily in St. George. But no matter what her trials may have been, she has always been cheerful and hopeful, and like the rest of our noble, fast-disappearing pioneers, her watchword has always been: “Something better ahead.”