

MY MOTHER, SARAH ELINOR STIRLING SCOTT

By Jessie Scott Redmond

My mother Sarah Elinor Stirling was the seventh of fourteen children born to Sarah Ann Leany and William Stirling. She was the granddaughter of William Leany and Elizabeth Searce, early Mormon pioneers coming to Utah in September of 1847. She was also the granddaughter of Thomas Stirling and Elizabeth Bell early Mormon converts from Scotland where he served as District President of the Dundee District.

Sarah Elinor was born February 25, 1876 in Harrisburg, Washington County, Utah; the temporary home of the family while their home was being built in Leeds. She grew up knowing the toil and hardships of early pioneer life in Southern Utah, however she was always a happy active child, fun loving and adventurous. When but a small child, she shocked her parents by walking merrily along the highest most peak of the family barn.

From her early youth she was most dependable, often caring for her younger brothers and sisters and helping with many household tasks. After the death of their mother she unselfishly stayed at home keeping house for her father and his motherless family. She always encouraged them each in turn to go away to school, employment or marriage as the case might be.

It was only then that she thought of herself – the 12th day of August 1909, she was married to Wilson Lenoir Scott, a young man that had left his home on the Illinois prairie to seek his fortune as an assayer in the mines of Silver Reef. They moved immediately to Modena, Utah where he had purchased a house with a little acreage. Here they were to build a life centered on farming and mining interests as well as a boarding house. Ethel M. George tells of the love and respect she gained for my mother while working for her as an inexperienced young girl. She told of going to Modena to work in the dining room as a waitress. Her mother had made her some pretty white organdy aprons – she was so happy and proud that first day as she went into the dining room. But to her dismay, she couldn't take the jests and kidding of the railroad men and ran back into the kitchen weeping and pleading to be allowed to stay. She would be willing to make beds; scrub floors anything but didn't want to be sent home or back into the dining room. My mother washed her hands, rolled down her sleeves and hurriedly went in to give the men their food as well as a good dressing down for their behavior.

My mother was an excellent cook. I remember tables laden with the delicious food she had prepared. It didn't matter who it was prepared for; the best was none too good for friends, relatives or the hired man in the field.

It was here in Modena that I, her first child, was born. Fourteen months later Dixie Mae arrived in Leeds. Wilbur Wilson was born nineteen months later on Christmas Eve of 1914, also in Leeds. She lived in Modena until 1915 when with her little family she returned to her ancestral home in Leeds following the untimely death of her young husband.

She again took on the responsibility of caring for her aging father's home including running of the Stirling Hotel. Many traveling salesmen or "drummers" as they were called, as well as visiting church authorities or the regular traveler found a haven of rest and hospitality seldom equaled. Often there were exciting political or religious discussions to liven up the long winter evenings.

Sarah Elinor had a special love for the land of her birth and pioneer heritage. To help liven up the Fourth of July celebrations, the Stirling family home was always decorated. The spacious porch with its stately columns draped with bunting and flags. Programs were held at the church followed by foot races and picnics always – great times.

My mother was indeed a woman of much strength of character and courage. Widowhood came to her when her family was very young, her youngest but eight months of age. She never complained or thought her lot especially difficult. The conveniences we enjoy in our homes today and take for granted were not thought of in her day. I remember that until we had the water piped into our little community of Leeds, her day would begin as early as four-thirty or five in the morning when she would carry buckets of cold, clear mountain water from the creek in front of the house. She did this early before the cows would cross the stream on the way to pasture. The water filled a large barrel, which was wrapped with wet burlap, the water was then used for drinking and cooking during the day. She also would fill the top of the cooler. The cooler was a crude cupboard made with a strip of galvanized metal about six or eight inches high tacked around the top to hold the water which dripped down the burlap covering the door as well as sides and back to keep the food cool and clean. The water barrel and the cooler were kept in the shade of the trees on the northwest side of the house – for hand access.

As I grew older the more of the modern conveniences began to make an appearance; the kerosene lamp was replaced by the electric light. I remember what an important day it was, when the old family home (the home built by grandfather Stirling the year my mother was born) was wired for electricity. The light appeared with the flick of a button – something of the past was gone – all that remained was the memory of the pungent odor of kerosene and lamp black. Now my mother had the convenience of a wooden washing machine to replace the scrub board and an electric iron instead of the ones she had heated on the cook stove. Another convenience soon to arrive was the piping into the house of cold water. This made her life a bit easier – even though the water still had to be heated in the reservoir or teakettle on the old "Home Comfort" stove for bathing or wash day.

One of my earliest memories of my mother was watching with awe as she would cut and piece scraps of material left from the clothing she made for herself and her children to make quilt tops. She then took the wool she had clipped from sheep she had raised – carefully picked out any burs it might contain – wash and dry it. Then for the part I took most delight in – the carding of the clean white wool into small bats, which she used to fill the quilts for the numerous beds.

Another special memory was Christmas time – the first Christmas tree I remember was so pretty with its special glow – from real candles she had carefully clipped on the branches and then lighted with matches used for starting fires in the old home comfort cook stove. Of course, we couldn't touch it but as we got older we helped string popcorn and paper garland to decorate the Christmas trees – but nothing could ever compare to the awe we felt when she used the real candles.

She was always being of service to others beside her own family. I remember going with her often when she would take a basket full of goodies – homemade bread, fresh churned butter, jam and fresh fruit or maybe a pie to Mr. Wicks, Mr. Newton or Aunt Miria Wilkinson. Even the tramps that knocked on the kitchen door would receive her generosity.

Harvest time was another special time – when the thrashing machine would come to town, going from one field to the next. When it came the day for the Stirling grain to be threshed, Uncle Dave and Uncle Joe would help in the field. Mother and Aunt Ruth would fill the kitchen with the good smells of large roasts, fried chicken, platters of fresh corn piled high – sliced tomatoes, onions and cucumber – lots of hot rolls with fresh butter, jams and jellies. There would always be coconut cake and of course apple and currant pies fresh from the oven.

After the harvest Uncle Dave would take the grain to the grist mill in Washington where it was ground into four, cracked wheat and germade – reloaded on the wagon and returned to Leeds where it was stored on hanging shelves in the cellar for use the coming year.

It was always a great time when the peaches, pears and tomatoes were ready to bottle. Aunt Ida and Aunt Alice would come with their respective families. I remember mother would make beds all over the house, on the deck and on the lawn. If a sudden storm came up it meant picking up bedding and rushing inside to make beds on the floors – making for more fun for all.

She was always happy for us to bring home our friends. Many times we would gather around the blazing fireplace for games and while she made ice cream or candy for the crowd.

My mother faced another major decision when I completed the eighth grade – all that was offered in our two-room schoolhouse in Leeds. She took a bold and unselfish step, as she often did. Now she left the home she so loved with its trees and flowering shrubs – its many pleasant memories – moving one more time to Cedar City where she felt the advantages would be better for her children. She had to work very hard to provide for us. Each summer she raised a large garden with delicious corn and tomatoes as well as green beans, carrots, parsnips, turnips and the usual onions and radishes. For a special treat she would raise great cantaloupes and muskmelons. She always had large white navy beans in her garden and when they were picked in the fall in large tubs to finish drying – we knew the pleasant days of summer were coming to an end.

Often she would work in the Cedar hotel laundry or take in boarders to make ends meet. She continued to work very hard until her health began to fail. When she finally gave in to go to Dr. MacFalane for a physical, she found out she had a diabetic condition, which required daily insulin shot. This became a task Wilson gladly would perform each morning. She accepted this as a small inconvenience as she did each obstacle she was called to face throughout her life.

At this time Dixie and I were working in northern Utah. In 1939, I married Paul Daniel Redmond. Dixie soon returned home where she worked at the Escalante Hotel and Cedar Breaks Lodge. Mother enjoyed having Dixie and Wilson at home but they were soon to marry and she had to once again change her way of life. She sold her home in Cedar and spent the rest of her life with Dixie or me. Death came 19 October 1953 in Beaver, Utah and she was laid to rest in the Leeds Cemetery by her beloved husband and among many other family members.