

Life of Laretta Hepworth Astle

Written by her daughter, Arstanie Astle Nye

Laretta Hepworth, daughter of Edmund Hepworth and Hannah Cowling was born September 26, 1874, at Oxford, Idaho. Her parents were of English birth, converts to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They immigrated to America in 1863 to be near the main body of the Church and to be able to have an active part in the Church, as well as, to teach their children to live good, clean upright lives.

The Hepworth family lived in Salt Lake City their first winter in the United States. Early in the spring of 1864, they moved to a frontier settlement to the north of Smithfield, Utah and then on into Oxford, Idaho. In Oxford they took up a few acres of land, built a home with logs brought down from the canyons. It was a one room house with a dirt roof and floor, one door and a small window, but it was theirs and a humble home to them.

They buried their first child, a girl, while living in Smithfield. She was born to them while crossing the Atlantic Ocean. While yet in Smithfield, a little son was born to them, he was named Joseph Edmund.

Laretta was the fifth child born to them while living in Oxford. She learned to help with the work while yet a very young girl.

They lived in Oxford twelve years, worked hard, raised good crops and had a very happy, enjoyable time.

The people in Oxford were becoming a mixed group of Mormons and Gentiles, so the Hepworth's and others, decided to move to Springdale in Utah's Dixie. On May 5, 1877, a six mule team was hitched to the wagon loaded with what furniture they had (bedding, boxes of clothing and vegetables raised in their garden and other things). They set out for Springdale. It was a beautiful morning, birds singing and all were happy. They went by way of Ogden and Salt Lake, camping near the Jordan River. Laretta being just three years old commenced asking, "When are we going to get to our new home?" (Springdale is situated on the north fork of the Rio Virgin River, about two miles from the south entrance to Zion National Park.) The boys helped their father clear the land for planting. Sugar cane, wheat and vegetables were planted, there was much work to be done.



Edmund and Hannah Hepworth Family

Back Row: William Henry, Laretta, George William,
Hannah Eliza, John Edmund

Front Row: David Edgar, Edmund, Hannah Schofield
Cowling, Joseph Edmund

Logs were cut and hauled to build houses, as well as, fences and other buildings. Their house was build of rock with a board shanty on one side. Snakes and bugs would often crawl into the house which proved, by most uncertain terms, to be very unpleasant.

The family became ill with chills and fever so they had to move to a higher climate. In April 1880, they moved to American Fork where they worked a sixty acre farm owned by Peter Cowling, a brother of Lauretta's mother, Hannah. They only lived there a short time then moved to Bountiful, Utah.

Lauretta's father took another wife while living in American Fork. Plural marriage was sanctioned by the Mormon Church, but not by the laws of the land. U. S. Marshals were always on the watch for the men with more than one wife. This was the main reason they moved to Bountiful, to try and escape the persecutions. President John Taylor advised the brethren to evade the laws and find a place for refuge.

In the spring of 1887, only one family had moved into Star Valley, Wyoming. This valley had been dedicated as a gathering place for the Saints.

The roads were extremely rough through the mountains. There were no dugways or grades so they traveled in the canyon bottoms. There were a few other families living in the Valley when the Hepworth's arrived. The cabin they chose to live in had been used as a shelter for horses, so of course it needed much cleaning and fixing.

In the fall of 1889, the other Hepworth family moved into the Valley. They lived in a log cabin with a dirt roof. The house was running north and south. The north room had a door and window in the west side, the south room had a window in the south end. Each window had six panes of glass 10 x 12 inches. The old ranch was a beautiful, quiet place with much timber growing and clear spring water, bubbling and trickling down the lower slopes.

A year or two before the Astle family had moved into Star Valley, they had come from Montpelier, Idaho, where they had lived quite comfortably on a 160 acre farm.

On a beautiful Sunday morning, as was the custom, all the people were going to church. The Astle family had just tied their team to the old hitching post when another team of horses drove up. Someone said, "There's Brother Hepworth and his other family." The family consisted of himself, his wife Hannah and two lovely young daughters, Eliza and Lauretta.

As usual, young men were interested in the young ladies. One of the Astle boys made the passing remarked, "I'm going to marry that young one."

It wasn't long after this statement that a courtship really began between the two, John Francis and Lauretta, the younger Hepworth girl. Their courting consisted of much horseback riding, sleigh riding, dancing and candy pulls along with other things. All during the courtship, plans were being made for a wedding in the near future. John Francis worked hard on the farm and spent many long hours hauling logs from the canyon to build a new house for his future bride.

Lauretta helped her mother with the cooking, washing and all things she could do to help with the work. She also watched the building of the house and was pleased with the progress being made.

Now was the time for Lauretta and her young man to be married. They left early one morning in a covered wagon, taking her mother along for the trip to Logan, Utah. It took three days to make the trip. They were married in the Logan Temple on the ninth of September 1891, with President Marriner W. Merrill officiating. On their return, the newlyweds went to their new log house, their first home.

The logs used for the house were hewed on one side which would make the inside of the house smooth. The outside was plastered with white line mortar. There were two rooms on the main floor and two above it. The roof was shingled. They had very little furniture. The bed had no springs, just board slats that held the straw filled mattress. The cook stove was one bought in Omaha, Nebraska and was brought across the plains by John Francis' father. Lauretta loved her new home and took great pride in keeping it clean. She carried water from the ditch for washing, cleaning, cooking and all household chores. They worked together in the home and on the farm and joined in all activities of the Church.

On the 13th of July, 1892, a little son came to them; this was a big event in their young lives. Lauretta was not yet seventeen and her husband was twenty-two. The baby was given the name of John Francis, Jr. Then on their third wedding anniversary a little girl was welcomed, she was given the name of Klea Lauretta. She was a pretty baby with blonde hair and blue eyes. Lauretta worked long hours, washing, ironing, mending, cooking, churning butter, making bread, plus garden work. She would get tired but yet never a word of complaint. She was always ready to help someone else.

A few days after Klea was born, a letter from Salt Lake City arrived; it was from the First Presidency of the Church. It was at this time that John Francis was called on a mission to preach the Gospel to the people of the world. The letter was a great surprise to them, but they were happy and yet sad. They didn't know how it would be possible, but after talking and praying about it they decided the mission should be filled. They only had three weeks to do all the necessary things, but with the help of the Lord and the people, Elder Astle was ready to go on time.



Lauretta and John F. Astle with son,
John Francis Jr.

They sold hay, grain, cows, to get a little money. One young cow, hay and enough wheat for the family's bread was kept. Laretta was happy for her husband to take a mission, but she really had a big mission herself to fill at home with two babies to raise, farm to do, along with all other things. Her motto was, "I'll always do what I can and the Lord will be ever ready to come to my aid."

The two families, Hepworth's and Astle's, were good to her and the children. Laretta was up each day at the break of dawn to milk the cows, feed the chickens, and to work in the garden while the children were still sleeping. The milk was put in flat pans, making it easier to skim the cream off. The cream would then be saved each day to make butter once a week.

The butter churn was a barrel type, with a handle on one side and a peg on the other. The barrel was placed on a stand made with two upright boards fastened together with cross bars and these were nailed together with another at the bottom. There was a notch cut in the top end of the two boards for the barrel to rest in, then it could be turned over and over until the butter came.



John Francis, Laretta, Klea, and
John Francis Jr.
- Taken about 1897 -

The butter would be worked, washed and then worked again to get all the buttermilk out, then salted and worked some more. It would then be made into round mounds placed on plates ready to be taken to the market in Afton. Butter sold for ten or fifteen cents a pound and eggs, eight or ten cents a dozen. Laretta did much of the work, saving what money she could to help keep her husband in the mission field.

After thirty long months, her husband was released from his mission and returned home. That was a happy time for the family. He found everything in order and working well. Laretta was always a good manager. The children had to get acquainted with their father, which didn't take long. The couple still young in years, but much older in experience, picked up together once again to work the farm and raise a family.

Vernon was born April 5, 1898, in the north downstairs room with Grandma Hepworth in attendance as mid-wife. (In those days there were very few doctors in the Valley.) Laretta and the two children, Francis and Klea, were happy with the new baby. For about two weeks after the birth of each new baby, it was really the only rest period Laretta received, but from the bed she was managing the meals and keeping the house.

Laretta was always in attendance at Sunday School and Sacrament Meeting which followed. All the children went along each Sunday. Sometimes they were given a piece of bread to tide them over until dinner. Laretta was very happy with each new baby, although it was more

work and longer hours. Each child seemed to bring a greater blessing for the parents. Laretta washed, mended and always kept them clean. A new baby was added about every seventeen or eighteen months. I remember hearing the cry of the new baby and Sister Constance Egyleston meeting us in the kitchen as we came downstairs, she being the mid-wife who Dad brought in during the night. We all surrounded the bed to see the baby and each in turn would get to hold it a few minutes.

The time of cutting the grain and threshing was an event which called for extra cooking and washing of dishes. Mother would be up at 4:00 a.m. to help milk the cows, care for the milk and cook the breakfast so the men could start the horse powered threshing machine by six or seven in the morning. At noon, she with the help of one or two others, would have a big dinner ready for



Laretta and John F. Astle Family - 1904
Back Row: Laretta Hepworth, Klea Laretta, John Francis Jr., John Francis Astle
Front Row: Evelyn Vilate (Laretta's Arms), Arstanie Elvira, Clara Pearl, David Elmer, Vernon Lenox

ten or fifteen men. After the days work, at dark, some of the men would stay for supper.

I remember helping to tend the babies while still quite small. One day mother had me sit in the big rocking chair with the baby on a pillow, to get it to stay asleep while she was washing. In those days, it took nearly all day to wash. By the time she carried in the water from the ditch or well, heated it on the wood fed stove, washed by hand all the clothes on a wash board, and then boiled and rinsed them and waited or them to dry, no wonder it was called a “wash day.”

There were eight children born to them while living in that house. In 1906, the farm

was sold and they bought a large house in town, Grover, along with a larger acreage farm. The house was across the street from the school. The older children could help with the morning work and still be to school on time. Francis, Jr. the oldest, but still only fourteen or fifteen years of age helped with much of the farm work.

On July 3, 1907, a rather dark stormy day, much thunder and lightning surrounded the house. In the early evening, Grandma Hepworth came from the bedroom where mother was and said, “You have a new baby girl in there.” The family of eight, along with the parents, made her welcome. Doretta, just a baby of 15 months, hardly knowing what it was all about, was a little jealous of the new baby, but she soon got over that. In those days, the babies were dressed in long dresses, then at three months a new set of dresses were made. That was a very big event to all of us, the day the baby was “shortened!”

Mother did all the sewing for the family and taught each of the girls how to work as we got old enough. She had each of the girls help with the washing, ironing, cleaning, and of course, the farm work. There was always plenty of work for all to do. In the summer, a large garden was planted. Potatoes, turnips, beets and other vegetables that would keep would be put in an underground cellar or pit where they could be got during the winter months.

Mother would have a set time to do this and a set time to do that, Monday was wash day, Tuesday ironing, mending, baking, and so on.

The children all had the diseases as they came along. Mother would be up night and day caring for the sick, sometimes being so tired and weary, she could barely walk.

On May 23, 1909, a Sunday morning, stake conference was to be held in Afton. It was raining but the team was hooked to a covered wagon and all the older children were ready to go to the conference. Father, Mother and the two younger girls stayed home. It being President George Osmond's birthday made it much more impressive. A large black leather chair was given to him. When we returned home in the late afternoon, we found another baby girl had come to our home. She was the tenth child and the seventh girl. She was given the name of Elva May.

In the month of November 1909, Mother was left again with the family of ten children, a large farm to manage, cows to be milked, but Mother would not stand in the way when it was the Lord's work to be done. Father had been called to fill a mission in the Eastern States. It was a cold snowy morning; they were up very early to drive the distance of fifty miles to Montpelier, Idaho, where Father would take the train for Salt Lake City to be set apart to do missionary work.

There was much heavy outside work for Mother, but with some help from Francis, he being seventeen, and the other children, the work was completed each day. The responsibilities were really too much for Mother, but she didn't say, "I give up; it can't be done," she kept on trying. At the beginning of each day, Mother and the family would kneel in prayer and ask the Lord to help them; then before going to bed at night, they again gave thanks to their Father in Heaven for His guidance and protecting care He had given them that day.

July 1910, Father was released from his mission and returned home. A big load of responsibility was lifted from Mother's tired shoulders that day.

During the winter of 1910, the children all had whooping cough and the family was quarantined home for months, so it seemed. Evelyn, the fourth daughter, took pneumonia and past away March 23, 1911, at the age of seven. That was a great trial for Mother, but she kept up her courage and her faith.

February 19, 1912, another girl joined the family, Grace Emily. Then on January 16, 1914, Jane was born but only lived a few months. She died in April of 1914. July 14, 1915, a little boy was born. He was a large baby weighing 14 pounds, the fourth son and the first child to be born in

a hospital. He too only lived a short time. Through the blessings of the Lord, Mother's life was spared. The large family needed her and was praying for her.

Along about this time the family packed furniture, clothes, dishes and moved to the farm during the summer months. We slept in tents and lived mainly in a lumber building that had been used as a grainery. Mother would go along helping at all times. She was a heavy woman which made it harder for her. We all worked together putting in long hours, but still never finding it to tiresome to play together.

It was a big day at the time when chokecherries and service berries were ripe. The horses would be hooked to the wagon, lunch packed and we would all climb in and head for the hills to fill our buckets with the dark red berries. Mother made jellies and the most delicious service berry preserves or sweet pickles.

Each Sunday morning all would be up early to get the work done and to be ready to go to Sunday School. Father always kept a nice team of horses, they would be hooked to the white topped buggy and we would drive the three miles from the ranch – often being the first ones to the meeting house. Mother was President of the Primary for awhile, so we would pick up the children on the way to Primary during the week.

One day in May 1916, Mother and some of the girls were out raking and burning rubbish, while the others were doing their work in the usual way, when someone noticed smoke coming from the roof of the house. The house, just being a lumber shell construction, was all in flames. The fire burnt everything except the clothes we were wearing. The members of the Ward and the surrounding neighbors brought bedding, food and supplies, helping with what they could. A stove was put in a tent and we made out for the rest of the summer. It was during World War I, that a beautiful new house was built on the ranch. It had hot and cold water and a bathroom. Mother was so proud and happy it being the second new home built for them and by them, in her few years of married life. Mother did not live too long to really enjoy the new home. In the winter of 1918, influenza spread over the Valley which was a treacherous disease. There were not enough well people to care for the sick. It brought great sorrow in the home. Father, mother and most of the children were so ill they did not leave their beds. On December 23, 1918, Vernon the twenty-year-old son past away and the next day, Christmas Eve, Mother died too.

There was so much sickness and so much snow that no funerals were held. A beautiful white casket was brought to the house. Mother was dressed in a white dress and her temple clothes, she looked beautiful. We all stood looking from the window as she was taken away and laid in her final resting place. She was still a young woman in years, just forty-four, but yet old with life's experiences, of laughter, love, sorrow and joys. Our Mother, Laretta Hepworth Astle, had certainly lived a life of all lives.