

Klea Laurretta Astle Baer

Life History

Compiled by Klea's daughter, Juanita Astle Baer Davis



On a beautiful Sunday morning in Star Valley, Wyoming, as was the custom, the Hepworth and Astle families, both newcomers to the area in the prior few years, were going to their church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. 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. They have just moved here from Utah." The Hepworth family consisted of Edmund, his wife Hannah, and two lovely young daughters, Eliza and Laurretta. One of the Astle boys, John Francis, made the passing remark, "I'm going to marry (the heavier one) (that young one)." Klea Laurretta Astle's parents, John Francis Astle and Laurretta Hepworth, had just met.

John Francis and Laurretta courted and were married in the Logan Utah Temple of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, on September 9, 1891. John Francis was 21 years old, Laurretta 16. It took them three days to travel to the temple by covered wagon from Star Valley, Wyoming, accompanied by Laurretta's mother.

Upon their return to Star Valley, the newlyweds moved into their first home, a new four-room log house John Francis had built on 40 acres of land. He'd hauled logs from the canyon and had hewn them on one side in order to make the inside walls of the house smooth. The roof was shingled. There were two rooms on the main floor and two above, a door each on the west and east, and a window in each room facing toward the road, corrals, stable, and sheds. From the east door one could see the mountains and beautiful alfalfa and wheat fields. The kitchen was big and square with a table to work on, cupboards, and a cook stove that had been bought in Omaha, Nebraska and brought across the plains by John's father. There was also a living room. The other three rooms were bedrooms. In the southeast corner of the kitchen was a stairway that went to the floor above. In the floor of the kitchen was a little trap door to the cellar or pit where vegetables were kept for the winter. Klea's mother loved her home and took great pride in keeping it clean, carrying water from the ditch for washing, cleaning, cooking, and all household chores.

Klea Laurretta was born at home on her parent's third wedding anniversary, September 9, 1894. She was their second of thirteen children, a pretty fairy-like baby girl with blonde hair and blue eyes. At her birth, her mother was 20 years old, and her father, 25. Her mother dressed her infant babies in long dresses, and then at three months a new set of shorter dresses were made. The day the baby was "shortened" was a big event to all of the family.

A few days after Klea's birth, a letter arrived for her father from "Box B" Salt Lake City, Utah. It was a call from the First Presidency of the Church containing a request for John Francis to serve a mission to the Southern States. It was a great surprise to them. John and Laurretta didn't know how it would be possible to respond at this particular time and under their present conditions in spite of the fact that they both were willing that this mission should be filled. Financially it seemed impossible, not only to go on this mission, but to leave a young wife at home with two small babies to take care of. It was a trying time for Klea's parents, yet, after talking and praying about it, they decided the mission should be filled. In order to obtain necessary money, her father sold hay, grain, and cows, reserving a young heifer and enough wheat for the family during a bad depression. Her father left three weeks later. Her mother now had to take care of things at home, including the farming. Klea's mother's motto was, "I'll always do what I can and the Lord will be ever ready to come to my aid."

The Astle and Hepworth families helped Klea's mother during her father's absence. After 30 months, her father was released from his mission and returned home to find everything in order and working well. Klea's mother was a good manager. Klea and her older brother, Francis, had to get acquainted with their father, though, which didn't take long. Upon seeing her daddy, Klea ran to the house as fast as her little legs could carry her. She must have been frightened a bit to see a man dressed in a Prince Albert suit and a Derby hat, coming with her grandfather.

Klea's mother had beautiful brown eyes and naturally curly hair that was almost pure black. She was a stern, but loving person.



John Francis & Laurretta Hepworth Astle
Klea (on her father's lap) & John Francis Jr. (standing)

Her father always wanted to be called “Papa” or “Pa.” To be called “Dad” was a disgrace, although later “Dad” was accepted by him. He was a stern man, but didn’t spank the children. When he would scold them, he would say the same things over and over. The children would say, “We wish he would just give us a spanking and get it over with.” Her father gave his children every advantage he could afford, and taught them integrity, truthfulness and the principles of the Gospel as well as he taught everyone he met, by everything he did, because he was honest in his convictions and straightforward in his dealings. He was a churchgoer and a church lover. He was not afraid to stick up for anything that was good. He loved truth, honesty and integrity and willingness to work in all vocations of life. He was honest with men and with God.

Klea had six more brothers and sisters born in that log home, bringing her family to 10 people.



John Francis & Laurretta Hepworth Astle Family, 1904

Left to Right: (Back) Klea, John Francis Jr
(Center) Evelyn, Laurretta, Arstanie, Pearl, John Francis (Front) David, Vernon

Klea was taught how to sew and work by her parents. She helped with the washing, ironing, cleaning, and farm work. There was plenty of work for all to do. Monday was washday, Tuesday ironing, mending, baking, and so on. And “wash day” meant wash day. By the time her mother carried in the water from the ditch or well, heated in on the wood-fed stove, washed all the clothes by hand on a washboard, then boiled and rinsed the clothes and waited for them to dry, it took all day.

In the summer, a large garden was planted with potatoes, turnips, beets, and other vegetables that would be harvested and stored in an underground cellar or pit, later to be used during the winter months. After each harvest of wheat in the fall, her father would take enough wheat to be ground so the family would have flour for a full year. He would also obtain enough dried fruit to last them through the winter—prunes, peaches, and apples. He also traveled to Idaho to bring back fresh apples and potatoes to store.

When Klea was 12 years old, her parents sold their farm and bought a larger acreage farm three miles outside of Grover Wyoming, plus a “winter” home in Grover across the street from the school where their children could attend during the school year. Klea would help with the morning work, managing to still be on time for school. The home was a big two-story frame house with a shingled roof and unfinished attic. Her Grandpa Astle worked on the house continuously. It had six or seven rooms besides the upstairs that was unfinished. It had an outdoor toilet. Wood-burning stoves in the kitchen, parlor, and dining rooms heated the house. Her father would go to the mountains for wood. At night, he would put a big block of wood in each stove to burn the entire night. Coal oil was used for lamps. The family ate at a long table in the dining room. There was a carpet on the floor made from old rags, padded underneath by straw. Their water came from a well, drawn up by a bucket. Her father also built a big playhouse for her and her siblings.

During the summer farming season, the family packed up furniture, clothes, and dishes, and moved from their “winter” home in town, to their 400-acre ranch north west of Grover, three miles outside of town. They slept in tents until her father built a summer house to live in. Their “summer” home had two rooms down, and two up. The children would climb a ladder to get upstairs.

Klea worked together with her family for long hours on their farm, but the family still found time to play together. They raised pigs, cows, and various crops, plus had other farm animals such as horses. Twenty-five to thirty head of Holstein cows were milked by hand every day, and the milk sold. It was a big day when the chokecherries and serviceberries were ripe. The horses were hooked to the wagon, lunch packed, and the family would climb in the wagon and head for the hills to fill their buckets with the dark red berries to be used to make jellies and preserves.

The children were taught to pay their tithing. “Sunday” eggs were always tithing eggs. Even though the children didn’t earn or have money, their father would give each of them something to take to the Bishop for tithing. Her father would take hay in for tithing, too.

Klea's family were always in attendance at church. Her father would get up at 4:00 o'clock Sunday mornings to get his chores done. He had a bunch of cows to milk, and his children helped him. Her father kept a nice team of horses, which would be hooked to a white-topped buggy. The family would drive the three miles from the ranch to Church, often being the first ones to the meetinghouse, 10-15 minutes early. Sunday School first, then Sacrament Meeting. Sometimes the children were given a piece of bread to tide them over until dinner. For a while, Klea's mother was the Primary President, and the family would pick up the children on the way to Primary during the week.

On Sunday afternoons her father would play with them. He would stand on the board of the swing, and they would sit between his legs, or he would sit on the board with one of them on his lap. He would pump them up, laughing, 'till the rope went slack. He also played marbles with them, drawing a big circle on the kitchen floor and putting the marbles in the center. Then, each would have a taw and they'd have a big "shoot out." Their dad would laugh and laugh.

The family would help with their Grandma Hepworth every other week and clean her house, trading off with their Uncle Ed's family. Their Grandma was special to them. She always had cookies or crackers to share.

For spring-cleaning, they would put new straw under the carpets. They slept on straw tick beds and when the bed needed fluffing, they would stick their hands in and fluff up the straw.

When Klea was 15 years old, her father again went to fulfill a Church mission, this time in the Eastern States. He left on a cold snowy morning. Klea, her mother, and nine siblings managed the farm while he was gone. There were cows to be milked, heavy outside work, and more. The responsibilities were great, but they kept on, trying to fulfill them. At the beginning and end of each day, her Mother, brothers, and sisters knelt in prayer, giving thanks to their Father in Heaven, and asking Him to help them. Eight months later, her father was released from his mission and returned home. While in the mission field it had become necessary for her father to have a major operation. He recovered rapidly and was asked if he would like to return home; his response was that he would like to finish the mission. The Mission President decided that he should indeed return home and take care of his family, which he did.

Her father served in various church callings—Bishopric counselor, High Councilman, Sunday School Superintendent, and more.

As with all her brothers and sisters, Klea contracted various diseases as they came along. Her mother would be up night and day caring for the sick, sometimes being so tired and weary she could barely walk. One winter, all the children, including Klea, contracted whooping cough. The family was quarantined at home for months. During that time, her seven-year-old sister caught pneumonia and died.

When Klea was 22 years old, her family's "summer" home burned down completely, leaving their family of 12 with only the clothes they were wearing and two things they saved from the fire—the sewing machine and half of one bed. Members of their ward and surrounding neighbors brought bedding, food, and supplies—helping with what they could. A stove was put in a tent, which became the family's home for the rest of the summer.

During World War I, her family built a large barn and a new "summer" home on their ranch, with hot and cold running water piped in from the nearby spring. The home had five bedrooms, a kitchen, dining room, pantry, laundry room, storage room, living room, bathroom, parlor, and a big front porch. The parlor was used only on special occasions. There were even gaslights. Four big bedrooms were upstairs. The children shared the bedrooms and slept two per bed. Eventually their "winter" home in Grover was sold, and her family moved permanently to their new home on their ranch.

Klea's mother, though, did not live long to enjoy their new home. In the winter of 1918, when Klea was 24 years old, a treacherous influenza virus spread over the valley. There were not enough well people to care for the sick. Everyone in the family got sick, except her younger sister and older brother, Francis. Francis was married, but came down to milk the cows and look after the stock. The flu pandemic brought great sorrow into the home. Klea's father, mother, and most of her brothers and sisters were so ill they did not leave their beds. On December 23, her 20-year-old brother died, and the next day, Christmas Eve, her mother died at the age of 44.

There was so much sickness and snow, that no funerals were held. A beautiful white casket was brought to the house where her mother was laid, then taken away to the cemetery while her family looked on from the window.

After her mother died, Klea took full responsibility in caring for her father, and eight living brothers and sisters. She took the lead and management of the many household duties and proved very efficient at it, with the aid of her sisters.

Two years after her mother's death, her father sold the ranch and moved his family to Providence, Utah in June, thinking the children could live at home and not have to travel such a distance to school, and for other advantages. Their home there was brick, big, and situated on a large acreage of land. They had a telephone, electricity, and plumbing, plus a player piano and a phonograph.

Less than a year later, at the age of 26, Klea married Joseph Richard Baer, a widower, in the Logan Temple, on February 23, 1921. She became a mother to his six children, one an infant. They lived on his large fruit farm on the foothills of Providence, Utah, where they continued to raise his children, plus their own—Glen (who died in infancy), Lois, Wesley, Donna, Lloyd, Scott, and Juanita.



Joseph Richard & Klea Laurretta Astle Baer Family
(Left to Right) Donna, Juanita, Lois, Joseph, Scott, Klea, Lloyd, Wesley

Klea died at home November 4, 1939, at the age of 45, after a long illness, while expecting their eighth child. Klea's death was a sad blow to her loved ones. She is buried in the Providence, Utah cemetery.



Joseph Richard & Klea Lauretta Astle Baer Home, Providence, Utah

Memories of our Mother, Klea Lauretta Astle Baer

Wesley Astle Baer

I was barely 14 years old when my mother passed away. Our mother always saw to it that the children went to church. Almost every Sunday afternoon, the family would visit or be visited by a relative. As a family, we went to Bear Lake on an outing once a year and stayed in one of the little cabins there. Klea prepared the meals at home to take to the lake. It always included fried chicken. I don't remember many other family activities other than work on the farm. Mother bought me a fishing pole and took me down in the basement to give it to me. Klea had to spend a lot of time preparing meals and washing clothes. She always bottled fruits and vegetables in two quart bottles. Once in a while, she even helped milk the cows. Mother always saw to it that each child got one nice Christmas present each year. My presents were a tinker toy set, a log cabin set, an erector set, and a small carpenter set. Over the years, we gathered quite a few Christmas decorations, most of them being homemade. The year Juanita (my youngest sister) was born, the kids had Scarlet Fever and we had to burn the Christmas decorations in an effort to fumigate the house. That was a sad occurrence for the children. I remember that our mother almost always had poor health.

Donna Astle Baer Wright

My mother died when I was twelve years old and my memories of her are much less than I would like, but I feel a need to write some of the things that I remember. Mother's first baby, a boy named Glen, died when he was about six months old. I'm sure that must have brought great sorrow to her. She became the mother to six more children. She was a very busy woman. Mother was ill for several years before her death. She had spells when she didn't know what she was doing for a minute or so, then it would pass. I remember being frightened at those times because I didn't understand what was happening. No one ever gave an explanation as far as I can

remember. I found out many years later that she suffered from Epilepsy. Mother came from a large family and she got pleasure from visiting with her brothers and sisters, as well as her father and stepmother. Grandpa Astle's (Klea's father) home was more accessible to the townspeople, so after Mother passed away, her casket was there a day before the funeral. It was cold in November. My older sister, Gretta, was worried about whether my coat looked good enough for the funeral. During the funeral, Juanita (my six-year-old sister) went up on the stand to sit on Dad's lap. One of the speakers talked about Dad being left with so many small children. Mother was buried in the family plot in the Providence, Utah cemetery.

Scott Astle Baer

Mother was ill and had fainting spells. One I remember was on the east porch when LeGrand, my older brother, was just back from his mission. Another time as she was pouring milk at the kitchen table.

Juanita Astle Baer Davis

I was just six years old when my mother died. I only have a few memories of my mother. One was seeing her kneel at her bed in prayer as I passed the room. Another was a day she was making bread, had a fainting spell, and went to her bedroom. Someone came to the door and I told him that no one was home. I have often wondered what he thought when he saw me alone and the bread making on the kitchen table. The day my mother died was a Saturday morning in November. My dad and brothers were at the apple cellar, sorting apples. My sisters Lois and Donna, and I were in the kitchen washing dishes. My sister, Lois, told me to run to the cellar and get Dad because our mother was very sick. I didn't want to go, so Lois ran to get him. When they returned to the house, mother had died. I remember people coming to the house. I was sitting on a stool in the kitchen and people were telling me that now my mother would not be sick anymore. The day of her funeral we left from Grandpa Astle's home (Klea's father's home) in a car to drive to the church. I remember passing the school and seeing the children on the playground during recess and feeling sad that I was not there. As I walked down the aisle at church with a large group of people in the audience, I noticed everyone crying. I went up and sat on my father's lap during the funeral. I was always very conscious that I did not have a mother like the other girls. Whenever we sang songs at church with the word "Mother" in it, I would not sing the word. My father was 55 years old when my mother died, and he was left with six children. He remained a widower for six years. Dad hired women from town to come to the house to help with the cleaning, washing and cooking. The women came in the morning and went home at night. Dad married my stepmother, Jennie Miller Lofthouse, when I was ten years old. Jennie was divorced, with three grown daughters who were all married with families of their own.

Endnote & Sources

This life history of Klea Laretta Astle was based on events as recorded in the written histories of her mother, Laretta Hepworth, and grandfather John Astle, with additional comments added from her father's funeral. Klea's sister, Arstanie, wrote her mother's history. Klea's grandfather's history was written by his daughter, Sarah. All histories used are listed below and may be accessed through Family Search at the URLs provided.

This life history was initially compiled November 2020 by Juanita Astle Baer Davis (Klea's daughter) in collaboration with Deanna Davis Sumsion (Klea's granddaughter). On March 20, 2022, Klea's marriage date was corrected from what was noted in the original manuscript.

1.

Arstanie Elvira Astle (daughter of Laretta Hepworth)

"Life of Laretta Hepworth"

https://www.familysearch.org/photos/artifacts/113147617?cid=mem_copy

2.

Sarah Isabella Astle (daughter of John Astle)

"Life Story of John Astle, Part 1 pages 1-7"

https://www.familysearch.org/photos/artifacts/113152770?cid=mem_copy

3.

Sarah Isabella Astle (daughter of John Astle)

"Life Story of John Astle, Part 2 pages 8-15"

https://www.familysearch.org/photos/artifacts/113152756?cid=mem_copy

4.

"Funeral Services - John Francis Astle"

https://www.familysearch.org/photos/artifacts/8426765?cid=mem_copy