

Persis Goodall (1806-1894)

Persis Goodall was born 15 March 1806 in Watertown, Jefferson, New York. She was one of thirteen children born to Joel Goodall and Mary Swain. Joel Goodall, originally from Massachusetts, is listed among the earliest settlers of Watertown, a settlement that began in 1800.

Little is known of Persis' early life, but at age twenty she married Lorenzo Dow Young who had come to Watertown to visit his brother-in-law. They married on 6 June 1826 and shortly thereafter moved to Mendon, New York--the first of many moves. Persis was an intelligent woman with a love of learning. It was said of her that she was an avid reader and a student of the Bible, as well as the Hebrew language. She was a devout Christian, and loved prayer.

But Persis was frail and struggled with illness most of her life. Much of it was the result of the hardships she suffered as she was persecuted and driven from place to place with others of her chosen faith.

Lorenzo and Persis joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1831. In November, with two small boys, they started down the Allegheny River, headed for Missouri. As they reached Pittsburgh, Persis became ill and could not travel further. Lorenzo and his brother Phineas rented a room and moved in with their families for a season. In the spring of 1832, Lorenzo left his family in Pittsburgh while he went back to New York on a mission. While he was gone, Persis gave birth to a daughter, Lucy. Upon Lorenzo's return, the family of five continued their journey down the Ohio River.

Persis continued to battle illness and the family found it necessary to stop and spend the next winter at West Union. At that point, they changed plans and went to Kirtland, Ohio where they remained for four years. During that time, Persis gave birth to two more children. Lorenzo went on several missions for the Church and Persis was left in Kirtland to care for the children. In the summer of 1836, the family suffered a great tragedy. During one of the absences of Lorenzo, little three-year-old Lucy caught her clothes on fire and burned to death.

Due to persecutions against the Mormons in Kirtland, the Youngs sold their property and once again headed for Missouri. The year and a half spent in Missouri was filled with hardship and suffering. Strong persecutions were going on when they arrived in Daviess County. When warned that a mob was approaching to burn down their house with the family in it, they hurriedly left with their four children and a few possessions. They fled to the community of Far West, 20 miles north, and were never able to return for their belongings. They were left destitute.

As mob threats continued, settlers tried to protect their homes. After the Battle of Crooked River, Lorenzo was forced to flee for his life with twenty other men. Persis was left behind again. Before Lorenzo could return for them, Governor Boggs issued an order for all Mormons to be exterminated. Several Missourians came to the Young home and shot and killed their only cow, leaving them with frozen potatoes and cornbread for survival. With the help of others, Persis managed to get her children out of Missouri and she caught up with Lorenzo in Illinois. Her son recalled that on that difficult journey, his mother would bed down her children next to logs in the snow and pour out her aching soul to the Lord in prayer.

The reunited family settled first at Winchester, Illinois where Persis gave birth to two sons and Lorenzo tried to provide for his wife and children. Weakened by the persecution, the whole family was plagued by sickness. Within four years, they had located at Nauvoo, hoping for better things. Nauvoo should have been a haven of peace for Persis, but it was not. She gave birth to three children there, including a set of twins, but all three lived only a short time. In 1843, Lorenzo married Harriet Decker as a plural wife. Although the record is unclear, Persis apparently left him about two years later. Instead, she

became a second wife to Dr. Levi Richards on 27 January 1846, just prior to the exodus from Nauvoo.

In the company of many others, Persis made the journey across Iowa to Kanesville (Council Bluffs) where the Mormons established Winter Quarters and prepared to move on to the Rocky Mountains. By 1848, all of Persis's sons had left for the West in wagon trains. Even six-year-old Lorenzo S. had joined his father in the first company of 1847. Other children followed in various companies. Before Persis could follow with the Richards family, Levi was called on a five-year mission to England. He took his wife, Sarah, with him and Persis was left in Kanesville with her fourteen-year-old daughter, Harriet. It was a difficult and lonely time.

Apparently, the marriage between Persis and Levi was platonic, more like a close friendship. Her letters to Levi and Sarah in England were often addressed to "Respected Brother and Sister Richards." The letters spoke of loneliness, lack of means and her reliance on neighbors for help. She lacked the funds to go west. Finally, after considerable disappointment, Persis was able to gain help from the Church and join the Edward Hunter Company of 1850. She and Harriet arrived at Great Salt Lake in October and set up living quarters in a wagon next to son William. The next year a small 10 x 10 foot adobe house was built there for her.

Over the next thirty or forty years, with support from the Levi Richards family, Persis lived with some of her children in Salt Lake, Payson, Kanab and St. George. A great-great granddaughter said, "In her later life, she was quiet and withdrawn and seldom went out to Church or public gatherings. She was always very gracious to visitors, especially her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She told them stories and taught them how to spell." Toward the end of her life, Persis returned to Salt Lake City where she was cared for in the home of Levi's son, Levi Willard Richards, who was married to her granddaughter, Persis Louisa Young.

Persis Goodall Young Richards died on 16 September 1894 at the age of eighty-eight. She was buried in the Richards family plot in the Salt Lake City Cemetery across the road from Lorenzo. --Colleen Helquist, few additions by Ron Young, 2020 Feb 3.

Excerpts from letters that are in the Church Archives;

MS 1284, box 2, folder 3, frame 45

1849 Jan 1, GSLC

Rhoda recounts 3 accidents (children) on trail, all better. I was sick all the way across the plains. Sister Harriet's health is much improved; she has buried her little son; it would have been one year and 3 weeks today. She [Persis] tells me Joseph [she also mentioned William as a possibility] has been very steady and is doing all he can to get his mother out here. Lorenzo with his wife expect to start for the states in a few weeks, not to return for one year. (also has three letters Persis wrote to Levi.)

Once Persis was in Salt Lake City, Rhoda reported to Levi:

Sister Persis has her ups and downs as usual; I sent H. and L. to see her a few days since. [box2, folder 3, frame 34, Letter from Rhoda 1852 July 31]

Gave Sister Persis a pair of boots and slippers. Three weeks yesterday (now Sep 26) she attended meeting and called here and took supper; have not heard from her since. [Rhoda, 1852 Sep 22.]

