Laura Tietjen Young

From Gary Tietjen, Ernst Albert Tietjen: Missionary and Colonizer (Bountiful, Utah: Family History Publishers, 1992), 332-42

Laura Josephine Tietjen was born in Savoia on the 17th of March, 1880. We have previously described the little log cabin which "for three years provided shelter from the rain, snow, and wind in winter, and warmth from the winter's cold blasts, and cooled the burning rays of the summer sun." Laura, nicknamed "Lola", was the second child to come to the "humble home" of Ernest Tietjen and Emma C. Pederson. Laura's husband wrote that the Tietjen "family were … the first white settlers in this part of the country, in a radius of twenty five miles and … the first family of Latter-day Saints to settle [permanently] within the boundaries of the state of New Mexico." That honor was shared by Ernest's companion, Luther Burnham. We learn further "that the family was poor to the extreme, and of course their daily fare was of the most common, coarse, but wholesome variety. Their bread often times was made of flour that was ground on the little coffee mill … accompanied by potatoes and gravy. The rough corners of the bread would be smoothed over with a liberal coating of butter and washed down by drinking freely of the fresh milk which was supplied by the good cow … Meat was reasonably plentiful. Fruit was very scarce and sugar and candy were often talked of and wished for but seldom enjoyed …"

"The children were taught while young that they must take part in the work, not only in keeping of their rough log house clean, and washing and mending their limited amount of clothing, but to take care of the garden, from the preparing of the ground to the harvesting of what was raised, and the work was often extended to help their father in the field. In all of this work the children were taught by example and words of kindness. I do not think they were ever punished by being whipped."

Laura attended school whenever it was offered in the one-room log house that doubled as church meetinghouse, dance hall, and school room.

"The teacher often received as much as thirty or thirty five dollars a month, and besides teaching school, the teacher saw that the wood which the men hauled was chopped [by the older boys] and the fire kept burning, the floor swept [by the girls] and anything that was for the interest of the school was looked after by the teacher. Oftentimes the parents complained because the teacher got up a school program, claiming that the minds of the children, while learning the parts for these programs, were taken from their schoolwork of reading, spelling, and arithmetic.

"To raise the money to pay the teacher for her work, each student of the school was charged a fee for attending the school, which often amounted to three dollars and fifty cents a month and when the parents of a student could not pay the monthly fee, the child could not go to school."

At times "these schools were kept going by some member of the ward teaching the school for a month" and occasionally "one of the larger or most advanced students" would have to assume the teacher's duties, but without the pay.

There is a hint in these remarks that there were times when Laura's parents were unable to afford schooling, but she did complete the sixth grade. Even that much school required sacrifices, and "her mother, in her determination to see that her children had the advantage of these schools would go, when she could get the chance, and do a week's washing for a large family and mop the floor after the washing had been done, for a whole fifty cent piece."

When Laura was sixteen she moved to Bluewater and "spent the winter with her half sister of the same age." There, in the big ranch house, she taught school to her younger brothers and sisters. Eda had taken on this task before Laura came, but Laura had more education, so it fell her lot. In addition, Ernest was farming a large acreage and Laura "was looked upon as a good hand in the field." Irrigation was a big part of the field work. Gladdus Tietjen, a niece, remembered Laura being up to her knees in the mud when she sighted the missionaries at the far end of the lane. They mustn't see her looking like this! She rushed into the house, put a comb through her hair and powdered her nose, then assumed her post in the muddy field, shovel in hand, and greeted them like a lady.

When Laura was nineteen, she was allowed to go to Fruitland to stay with her sister, Annie Stevens. Annie was homesick, so Emma C. took the whole family: Laura, Olga, Augusta, and Doris, to see her. The visit had another purpose: she and her daughters could can fruit for winter use. Fruit was abundant on the San Juan River and very scarce at home. The peaches, pears, apricots, and melons were a wonderful sight for the Tietjen family, and they began preserving as much as they could for their use at Bluewater.

Olga met a man there who tried to persuade her to marry him. Unknown to her, he was already married. She fell deeply in love with him and was inclined to accept the proposal, but on the return to Bluewater, her father disapproved strongly and sent her to the St. Johns Academy in Arizona. At Ramah, Olga talked with a friend and discovered that she had received a proposal from the very same man. The man felt that polygamy was still O.K. with the Church if kept secret. This hurt Olga very deeply, but she knew she had to give up on him. At St.

Johns she met Niels Peter Johnson, a man who was quite a bit older than she. He had been married previously and had lost his wife. Her parents now encouraged her to marry him. While Olga had some doubts, she married him and they moved to Cowley, Wyoming.

While in Fruitland, Laura met a young widower, Samuel C. Young, and married him on October 10, 1899. The couple traveled by wagon and team to Santaquin, Utah, then took the train to Salt Lake City for the ceremony. Six children, Wilford, Clara, Samuel Hubert, Clifford, Raymond, and Golden, were born to their union. The couple spent the next four months in Bluewater where "poverty and hard times still prevailed." They moved to Fruitland, and this was fine for Laura, still starved for fruit. She soon grew tired of the new life, for it was fruit, fruit, and more fruit—preserving it all summer long, then eating it all winter long.

Soon Laura was getting homesick for her family in Bluewater. Sam made his living by taking produce from the San Juan valley to Gallup and the surrounding communities to sell. He had contracted malaria from the mosquitoes that flourished in the wetlands along the river, and he was finding it nearly impossible to work. Laura had to do much of the work in the fields. The doctors thought Sam would be better off in a dry climate rather than in the river bottoms around Fruitland. It occurred to Sam that Bluewater would be a suitably dry climate and it would make Laura happy. While on one of his trips, Ernest Tietjen offered to give him some land in Bluewater, enough for a home and a farm. Sam accepted and put up a two-room frame house in 1903. He filled the framework with adobes so that the house was very warm.

Before they could get moved to Bluewater, there was a smallpox epidemic in Fruitland. Four hundred cases of smallpox in the community taught Sam's family and others that it was best to keep the patient out in the fresh air if possible and to drink cold skim milk; nothing that was "heating" should be taken into the body.

In Bluewater, Sam farmed and ranched for a living. His health improved, but they did not prosper: "Poverty, in Bluewater, became so oppressive that oftentimes it came to a point of almost suffering for the want of the most common articles of food and clothes … Hard times in Bluewater were everlasting."

Much of the hardship was caused by the fact that "for a number of years there was no water in Bluewater for irrigating the land, beyond a very few acres, and water for the house was often hauled, in barrels, by team, as far as five miles … lots of times this water would be dipped up out of a pond, at the end of a small stream in the canyon that was so rough that a wagon could go no further, and while the water was being dipped up with a bucket and put into the barrel there may be a herd of sheep and from fifty to one hundred head of

cattle and horses drinking out of the same little pond of water …"

"In 1907 a well, one hundred and ninety feet deep, was drilled on [Laura's] lot near her house. When the pump and a windmill with a small water tank was completed, the cost of it all amounted to eight hundred dollars, which was worked out, at small wages, beginning in 1905 and mostly paid off in 1909."

No doubt Sam begged Laura to leave the place and find an easier place in which to live, but "she [was] opposed to leaving Bluewater, as her folks lived there and she seemed to like the country and she believed it was wrong to leave the place, and when she thought anything was right she would stick to it, even facing death, if necessary, without flinching."

"In 1908 it seemed that the hard, oppressive conditions began to ease up a little, and the family began to get ahead a little by them getting a few head of cows around them."

Just when things began to get better, tragedy struck their home. While they were branding calves in 1909, their third son, Samuel Hubert, two and a half years old, got too close to the branding fire. His clothes caught fire and he was burned to death.

New opportunities opened up gradually. In 1910 Sam got a job with the Forest Service, and in 1911 he worked with the American Lumber Company as a "standing timber estimator." Just as he was getting a little cash reserve, he was called on a two year mission to the "Northern States" in December and stayed there two years. It was common at that time for the Church to call married men on missions. Joe Tietjen and Ernestine's husband, Welcome Chapman, went on missions. Since Mormon missionaries must pay their own way, Laura accepted the challenge of looking after the farm, ranch, and children in her husband's absence. Sam wrote that "she was at home struggling and slaving beyond her strength to keep the family and the missionary going. The beauty of it is, she succeeded."

It was a well-deserved tribute to her faith, her courage, and her determination.

Laura said that her half brother, Joe Tietjen, was a big help to her during this time. Sam had left his livestock in the care of another person who did not take good care of them; it was a case of mismanagement and not dishonesty. Joe would come to visit Laura to see how she was doing and how Sam was getting along. Then he would say: "I found one of your calves on my range that hasn't been branded yet and I would like to pay you for this calf and put my brand on him." Laura thought that in some cases they really weren't hers, but Joe used this as an excuse to help her. He would then pay her for the

calf or cow, usually around $15, which was a lot in those days. Laura appreciated his help very much.

Upon his return, Sam took up a homestead in Pintada, the red cliffs near Prewitt, New Mexico. While there, his daughter's appendix burst and she nearly died. Through the faith and prayers of the family and administrations by Sam and Ernest Tietjen, she was saved from death. Golden was born during a high flood in Bluewater and was a breech baby besides.

With the training from Sam's mission, Laura was prepared to face another challenge in 1923 when her son Wilford was called on a mission. They had no means, and a way would have to open up. They had "a small contract to carry the mail, on horseback, from Bluewater to Diener, going over the top of the Zuni Mountains, a distance of eighteen miles." Since every penny was vital, this task now fell to Laura. It was one of her most difficult challenges, for "the horse used on this work, and often the only horse on the place, was known to be a bad bucker. When she first saw that conditions made it necessary for her to ride that horse and carry the mail, it scared her half to death, as she was a poor hand on a horse. But her son's remaining in the mission field depended upon the money received from the carrying of that mail. Her boy must not come home on the excuse of no money. Duty called and she must not fail. She did as she always did, she told the Lord of her condition, then she put the saddle on the horse and got on him and took the mail and away she went, returning in the evening safe and sound. The horse had not made an awkward move with her during the day, and during the many times she rode that horse and carried the mail while Wilford was away on this mission, that horse was never known to make a bad move with her. But let Clara or I get on that horse and before the day was gone we were almost sure to have a job of pulling leather."

"Clara and Clifford have each filled missions, and she was always on hand to help in any way that was needed; no sacrifice was too great for her to make to keep the missionary in the field until they were honorably released."

Laura was a faithful worker in the organizations of the Church, seeing to it that her children "were always in their Primaries and Sunday Schools and meetings, and she was there with them." She was a good Sunday School teacher, with little sympathy for those who had discipline problems in their classes; she believed that if a teacher was well prepared there would not be any problems. Her motto to her children and her students was "He who reads, leads", and she read a great deal, particularly the Farmer's Magazine and anything about agriculture.

Laura was very enterprising, loving the outdoors more than the

indoors. According to Raymond, she raised the "best garden in Bluewater" and provided a good portion of the family's food. Raymond spent many long hours working with her in the garden and "enjoyed every moment of it because she made it fun. She shared with me the plans for the garden and what would be done with the produce. My father came in here too and taught us boys to keep it free of weeds. The garden was a good part of our livelihood. She took care of the chickens and pigs and they were a good supply of food to us too. The chickens became a sort of family industry. We not only sold the eggs that my mother raised with her chickens but supplied many a fryer chicken to the market around about, especially Grants.

"Her vegetable garden was so successful that folks came from Grants and Gallup, fifty miles northeast of us. Folks would take a Sunday drive, come out to Bluewater and buy vegetables from my mother. She would let them go into the garden with her and they would select what they wanted and she would dig it or cut it. She would give them such a good price and always 13 articles to the dozen that they would be very pleased and go out with their arms and baskets full, and come back the following Sunday. That little bit of cash she took in from her vegetables was quite an important part of the family income.

"My mother also loved flowers and the garden around the house and the borders of the vegetable garden were filled with flowers. On a Sunday afternoon the children of Bluewater village would come to our house and beg flowers. Golden and I got tired of this and decided to put a stop to it, so we put up a sign on our front gate that said 'Flowers for sale.' To our surprise the children didn't stop coming. They stopped by with their nickels and dimes. My mother said, 'Alright, sell them some flowers like you said', and told us how much to sell for a nickel or fifteen cents. She let us keep the money we took in and that became an income for Golden and I. That provided us with a little spending money and money for Christmas presents."

Allen Nielson explains that "The New Mexico State University became interested in the development of the agricultural community after the completion of the dam. Samuel C. Young was their main contact and he often planted, on an experimental basis, corn, potatoes, and other possible commercial crops as an experiment directed by the NMSU. He was the motivating force to have a yearly fair to display and compare products and animals for improvement. It was he that showed that potatoes could be grown there commercially.

Sam gave the credit to Laura: "it was largely through her efforts that it was learned that carrots could be successfully grown in Bluewater, and helping to bring that industry into the valley." Within a few years the fine volcanic soil of the valley was producing several carloads of carrots per day during the harvest season. Part

of Laura's work was a contract "with the agricultural college."

There was no cessation of difficulties. Laura's mother, Emma C., had always been a tower of strength but was failing. "As she began to advance in years, her mind became bad and much of her strength left her, and for three years [Laura] had to watch over her mother as she would a little child." The strain finally became too much for Laura and she had a nervous breakdown two days before her mother's death but recovered with a little rest. Like her mother, she sometimes served as a midwife.

Having supported her children on their missions, the children in 1941 decided to help their parents realize "a long cherished desire to serve in their later years in the House of the Lord." They moved their aging parents to Salt Lake City and here Laura was able to do a great deal of genealogical work and temple work for her kindred dead. This was a great help to the entire Tietjen family because she was one of the few who had access to the records which were coming into the possession of the Genealogical Society. Laura found work in helping to keep the temple clean but soon a greater talent was recognized: she was placed in charge of the nursery of the temple.

While engaged in temple ordinances, most young couples were obliged to leave their children in the nursery for several hours. Everyone agreed with Sam when he wrote that Laura "is doing a wonderful work in caring for the children … through her motherly way of winning the children over to her … she is admired by all who come in contact with her in her work, for her wonderful way in controlling and caring for the children. Oftentimes as she is walking along the street, children will come to her and say, 'Hello, Sister Young; don't you remember me? You took care of me in the nursery.'"

Out of her salary of thirty dollars a month, Laura was careful to save a bit each month to be spent in hiring a genealogical researcher to work on her family line. In time she had saved $1000 for the work and was able to complete the records for over 500 dead ancestors. During this time, Sam was also working in the temple. He fell from a high step ladder and was seriously injured. Laura tried to care for him while continuing to hold down her small job. Sam nearly died, but recovered with the aid of prayers on his behalf. Sam died in 1954 and Laura lived until November 16, 1964. Her son Raymond said of her that she was a kind woman with an understanding heart, with a sound mind and sound judgment. Everybody seemed to love her because of her kindness and consideration.