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ON FAITH

She Journeyed to Utah, Land of Like Belief

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Lucretia Hancock Robison clearly saw the road she would take. It was paved with faith in God.

When two missionaries came to town preaching a restored religion, she first laughed, then listened, and her soul caught on fire. Soon thereafter she raced to the ice-covered Oswego River in upstate New York to see if she could be baptized into the church before her husband. He won the race. The missionaries cut a hole in the ice to baptize them.

That faith moved the couple in 1844 to travel 1,000 miles to Illinois, where they were to gather with fellow believers who loved the Savior as they did. By the time they got there, many of the faithful had been mobbed, robbed, murdered and scattered to new places. The Robisons kept their distance from the trouble and established a prosperous farm in Crete, Ill. But Lucretia still kept her eyes on the road map. She wanted to join with the believing people who had gone west to the Rocky Mountains, away from the persecution, far from the boundaries of the United States to the Utah territory.

She knew what to do. She baked crackers enough to fill a 40-gallon barrel. She packed meat, apples, sugar, beans, bacon, flour, 200 pounds of sugar and other provisions to last her family of 15 for two years. She sawed off the curved wood on the back of her rocking chair so it would fit snugly in one of the seven covered wagons she had secured for the trip. She would place the chair by the campfire each night while her bread was baking in the stove of her husband's wagon, and she would rock baby Lonny, the youngest of their 13 children, to sleep. She would pour milk from the cows in the churn each morning, then place it in a wagon to jolt its way to butter.

She had to convince her husband that the family should move. It was often difficult in her marriage for the fast horse and the slow horse to pull together harmoniously in the same team. Her husband (she referred to him as "Mr. Robison"), being of a less adventurous nature, did not want to leave their comfortable farm. Though the two were deeply in love, conflicts of opinion were not uncommon between them.

Lucretia prayed for help. An unexpected visit and gift from her father soothed her husband's objections, and Mr. Robison relented. She quilted her newfound inheritance of \$2,200 into her petticoat and down the bosom of her dress to safeguard the money during the journey. Alfred, the oldest son at 25, angrily refused to go. It was a bitter disappointment to her. The family left without him.

The journey took four months across territory that had taken the lives of many who had

attempted the trek. Lucretia kept her pistol close by, should any variety of savage (the two- or four-legged kind, she said) threaten her family.

The Robisons crossed the Mississippi River, then traveled 500 miles to Omaha. They were tested by the wind, sun, rain and dust. At night, the sons took turns keeping guard over the 30 animals traveling with them. The family journeyed 1,000 miles more across the great American desert, and in August 1854 arrived safely in the Salt Lake Valley.

It was a joyous day when the family was finally in the company of those of like faith. Mr. Robison immediately went to pay his tithing to the church. The family settled in southern Utah. Lucretia planted apple trees, gave quilts to those in need, fed the hungry Indians who asked for food and was seen on occasion pushing a wheelbarrow filled with flour, ham, potatoes and squash for the sick or destitute.

Sorrows came, and she kept them close. Her young son Proctor died in 1857, and 10 years later her son Henry died. Her son Alfred never came to visit. Through her path's twists and turns, her faith in God was unbreachable.

Seven years after she died in 1899, at age 92, a letter was discovered behind a cabinet in the local post office. It was from Alfred, asking his mother's forgiveness for his bitter parting from the family and telling her he wanted to visit her in Utah.

Lucretia's story is part of me. I'm bound to her by admiration and bloodline. She is my great-great-great-grandmother. A fire of faith in God flows between us and through many of her other descendants.

At times I have thought of her as I have walked the dusty roads of history in a little village nestled close to the mountains in Salt Lake City. It is where the first company of Mormon pioneers stopped on July 24, 1847, to look down at that desert valley for the first time. It is now the site of a reconstructed pioneer village. Time flows in both directions there, yesterday intersecting with today. Horse-drawn buggies trot down the dirt roads, and today's artisans and volunteers share the stories and skills of yesteryear.

I will place Lucretia's story at This Is The Place Heritage Park, joining the accounts of others who have enriched lives. I think Lucretia will like that. I suspect Alfred will feel good about it too.

We build our lives on those who came before. Each is a gift from God. It's good to share our treasures.

On Faith is a forum for Orange County clergy and others to offer their views on religious topics of general interest. Submissions, which will be published at the discretion of The Times and are subject to editing, should be delivered to Orange County religion page editor Deanne Brandon.