
A JOURNEY IN THE WILDERNESS: THE LIFE OF
MARY HASKIN PARKER RICHARDS AT THE MISSOURI RIVER
1846-1848
Maurine Carr Ward

Mary Haskin Parker was born 8 September 1823 in Chaigley, Lancashire, England, the youngest of ten children born to John Parker, Sr. and Ellen Heskin. In 1838, many of the Parker family were converted to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints through the efforts of Heber C. Kimball, Willard Richards, Joseph Fielding, and other early missionaries. In December 1840, Mary sailed from Liverpool to America, following the example of her parents who had left their native land some four months previously. Because of lack of money, Mary and her companions stayed in New York to work, arriving in Nauvoo, Illinois sometime in 1843.

One of Mary's neighbors in Nauvoo was Samuel Whitney Richards. On 29 January 1846, Mary and Samuel were married in the Nauvoo Temple. Because Samuel and his brother, Franklin Dewey Richards, had been called to Great Britain on missions, Mary traveled to Winter Quarters with his parents. Samuel encouraged Mary to write a journal of her experiences. Her daily journals cover the period from May 1846 to May 1848 when Samuel returned.

When Mary bade farewell to Nauvoo in May of 1846 and began her trek westward, she became part of a mosaic of Mormon women whose lives merged with the landscape of Iowa, Nebraska and Missouri.¹ Her husband, Samuel Richards, had accepted a mission call to Great Britain and was unable to accompany her. Rather than follow her father and brother's family to St. Louis to live, Mary had chosen to accompany Samuel's family on the journey into the wilderness. As Mary confided to Samuel: "I rejoice my dear that it is my lot to be with the church. seeing I could not accompany you. for I think the water tastes much better to drink it from the fountain head. than

it would after it had been carried some distance through the hot Sun." Mary's traveling companions were Samuel's parents, Phinehas and Wealthy Richards, and his two brothers, Joseph and Henry. A heterogeneous assortment of extended Richards' relatives either accompanied or preceded this family unit.

The experience at Winter Quarters and the outlying settlements was later described by Franklin D. Richards as "the place where the furnace of the Saints afflictions was heated seven times hotter than it was wont, to be, by all those who were blest to feel its purifying effects. Here the Saints were literally worn out, used up, & consigned to their graves in scores, & hundreds by disease, fatigue, destitution & every ill of exile."² However, Eliza R. Snow wrote that "this is truly a glorious time with the mothers and daughters in Zion."³

At Samuel's suggestion, Mary began a journal the day she left Nauvoo. Six journals cover the period between May 1846 and May 1848. In addition, eleven letters written to Samuel during this time still exist. These writings provide a unique glimpse into the daily life at Winter Quarters as seen through the eyes of a young woman, as opposed to the more famous journals written by leading men in the Church.

Mary was one of the lesser-known Latter-day Saints. Yet because of her close association with Uncle Willard Richards and with Heber C. Kimball, whom she often refers to simply as "Heber," her interaction with and acceptance into the circles of the hierarchy of the church give a viewpoint to their events usually not seen elsewhere. She records friendly visits by members of the council of the twelve apostles and their interest in her

MAURINE CARR WARD is the editor of *The Nauvoo Journal*. She is the second great-granddaughter of Mary Haskin Parker Richards and has recently completed transcribing and editing all of Mary's journals and letters. These writings, along with Mary's biography, will be found in a forthcoming book by Utah State University Press. This paper, derived from material for the book, was presented to the Mormon History Association, 23 June 1995, at Queens's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada.

welfare. She tells of dancing with “Brother Brigham,” and crowding onto benches in the open bowery on Sunday mornings to listen to his fiery sermons, which she later entered in her journals. She also records Apostle John Taylor’s confession that he had difficulties visiting the wives of the British missionaries because they all fell in love with him. Mary’s reply — “I expect it is some what dangerous . . . but I should be happy to have you bring Sister T with you when you come to see me. and if I should happen to fall in love with you’ I will try to keep it to my self”—shows the joking relationships between ordinary saints and their leaders.

Although the histories of other women living at the Missouri River are sparse—indeed, for the most part, non-existent—Mary serves as a scribe to record events as they affected women.

Everyday life at Winter Quarters sometimes appeared repetitive in Mary’s accounts. She wrote of washing, ironing, and sewing and described the weather each day. Yet even in these accounts she painted a descriptive picture: “in the morn Sister Barns came to help me wash bed clothes. We washed 6 quilts, 2 blankets, the tent & wagon cover & 5 woolen sheets, 2 bolster ticks and 4 pillow ticks, &C.” Almost as an understatement she adds, “We had a very heavy wash and was very tired.” Other household chores included baking bread, cleaning a hog’s face and putting it on to boil, then making a pot pie for supper, boiling down pumpkin butter, cleaning the tent, scalding her bedstead and the logs around the bed to rid them of bedbugs, quilting, braiding straw for hats, and sewing and cooking for the family and others.

Mary recorded the joy of eating muskmelons and new potatoes. She told of baking cookies and cakes for visitors, parties, or weddings. While visiting in Iowa, she thrilled to pick plums and boil them down for jam. Undoubtedly, she faced days with little food, as did Samuel’s cousin Amelia Peirson Richards, plural wife of

Willard: “We have lived for three weeks at a time on hulled corn, and salt, having once a day milk enough to wet it and often when we wanted to cook a meal of victuals for 10 or 11 in a family we have had nothing to make it of but a bag of cornmeal and a pail of water. . .”⁴ Yet Bathsheba Smith mentioned finding raspberries⁵; Sarah Colburn wrote of grapes, plums and elderberries, deer and “turkies,” and excellent springs of water⁶; and Ursalia B. Hascall wrote of an abundance of wild onions and artichokes, beans, and bushels full of black walnuts⁷.



Mary ever met with,” winds from the north were driving the snow and obstructing sight⁸— Mary wrote of newly laundered clothes, which froze on the line before she could get them hung up.

It was not until the spring of 1847 that Phineas bought a house on the south line of Winter Quarters. On May 1st Mary wrote: “washed & scoured all the Tin ware knives &C also the sheets & boxes shelves & the floor. got all things fixt in order. I put on a clean dress & sat down. and our little house seemed to me almost like a Palace I rejoiced to think that after passing through such a dreary Winter living in a Tent. and wandring from house to house to keep from perishing with the Cold. suffering almost every inconvenience and often very unpleasant feelings. I had once more a place I could call my home. . .

Mary was not the only woman in Winter Quarters to call a tent her home. Because Phineas was unable to construct a cabin, his family was forced to live through the first bitter winter in their tent outside the city line. When the cold became unbearable, his wife Wealthy moved in with her daughter Maria and Mary went to live with Franklin’s wife, Jane. The men continued to sleep in the tent, but ate their meals with Jane or Maria. Mary often reported that “Jane’s chimney Smoked very bad. so that it kept the tears runing down my cheeks about all the time was very uncomfortable.” On one cold January day—so miserable that Hosea Stout called it the “most cold & disagreeable day

I kneeled down and thanked the Lord for the many blessing[s] werewith he had blessed me.”

Mary’s journals and letters record minor discomforts such as a face ache, felons on fingers, and burns, as well as chills and fever, scurvy, and consumption, all too prevalent in Winter Quarters. Her records also show that Mary was ill much of the time. In addition, she suffered from muscular dystrophy⁹ inherited from her father, although to what extent it was present then is unknown. Phinehas, Levi, and Willard Richards, all Thomsonian practitioners, prescribed courses of medicine, lobelia, comfrey, and steams for her, besides allowing her quinine pills which gave her some relief.

Mary also makes mention of a prayer meeting where the sisters anointed, blessed and prayed for her recovery. According to Amelia Peirson Richards, the meetings were held every Thursday at ten o’clock, with the participants fasting until the meeting ended: “Many are blessed. They have poured out on them the spirit of prophesy, talking, singing, and blessing each other in tongues.” After one glorious blessing in tongues given to Samuel’s aunt Rhoda Richards, Amelia wrote that afterwards it was interpreted and “it was truly glorious.”¹⁰ After a similar blessing, Eliza R. Snow penned that “to describe the scene. . . would be beyond my power.”¹¹ After the birth of her stillborn child, Helen Mar Kimball Whitney had a similar blessing poured out upon her head by Eliza and interpreted by Patty Sessions, after which Helen declared, “my heart is full to overflowing.”¹²

In a letter dated April 1847, Mary wrote: “When I returned home from father Burton’s I found Mother had been sick for near 3 weeks. father also was taken sick about the time I got home. Their illness is called the black leg. This disease commences by the feet swelling and turning black, it continues to ascend up into the limbs and if permitted to reach the stomach, it is considered almost incurable. Mother is getting much better, is now sitting on the bed so as to give us more room in the tent. Father is still quite lame, but I think he is some better, he walks around considerable by the help of his cane.”

Births, deaths, and marriages are recorded quite unemotionally, except when Mary learned that young Joseph Richards had died while serving with the Mormon Battalion. “Samuel,” she wrote, “I loved bruther Joseph. he seemed near & dear to me. I cannot tell why it is that so lovely a young Man should be taken away in his bloom.”

Mary wrote about being suntanned and becoming “quite fleshy” after periods of illness. She indicated that once she would have thought it almost impossible to have lived one week in her situation with rain and cold wind beating through her tent but now found she could live under almost any circumstances. She was grateful for the blessings of the Lord in giving her strength to endure her afflictions. Similarly, Naamah Kendel Jenkins Twiss wrote of sleeping in a wagon and listening to the dogs bark and the wolves howl, then remarked: “I did not know what I could go through untill I was obliged to and I expect that [I] am like a great many others, don’t know what they can go through untill they try.”¹³ Eliza Cheney also indicated that she could endure more than she had thought in the comfort of Nauvoo: “I can stand it to go out in cold weather without having it effect me as it did previously, so I feel encouraged and in good spirits.”¹⁴

The social climate of Winter Quarters is very much evidenced in Mary’s writings. She wrote of attending singing school under Stephen Goddard. William Pitt’s band often went out and played for dances, some where Mary claimed she was “a scouring that floor . . . dancing almost every figure & a mixing round at a great rate.” At other dances she was more melancholy, keenly feeling the absence of her beloved husband as she watched other couples enjoying themselves. On one occasion, Phinehas invited William McIntire in with his violin to provide dancing music. Ursalia Hascall added that all dances were opened and closed with prayer.¹⁵ Amelia informed her mother of a New Years Eve party at Jane’s, where many of the Richards family attended. They spent part of the evening in dancing. “Old people were as lively on the floor as any of the young and enjoyed it just as well,” she wrote.¹⁶ Sarah Colburn’s letter to her brother agrees: “we are indeed in the wilderness but our ears are saluted with the sound of mirth.”¹⁷

Mary often described the beautiful countryside to Samuel or privately in her journal. Each time she went into the Iowa settlements to visit, she was overcome with the beauty she witnessed: “we returned back the same way we had come crossed a beauty full roaring Praira which extended as far as the Eye could penetrate and although Autumn’s Chilling Blasts had began to make its depredations among the Trees that appeared at intervails’ yet the Praira seemed dected [decked] in a rich livery of flowers and presented to the Eye a scene truly pleasing and interesting. about 12 oclock we came to the Bluffs whose towering Summits as I have before described’ presented a very Romantic appearance. a solmn awa came

o'er my feelings as I gazed upon these magestic Piles. and my Soul exclaimed Oh' how wonderfull are thy works O God' and how unsearchable is thy Wisdom & knowledge and thy ways are past finding out. for thou didst lay the foundations of the Earth and these Hills are the Works of thy hands."

Earlier Mary had written of walking on the bluff near her home with some friends: "we gazed with delight upon our City of 8 months groweth its beauty full Gardins and extensive Fields' Clothed with the fast growing Corn and vegetables of every description' above all things pleasing to the Eyes of an Exile in the Wilderness of our afflictions."

The struggle to acknowledge and accept polygyny is another important element in Mary's writings. Although plural marriage was practiced secretly in Nauvoo, Winter Quarters residents openly entered into it. Many of Mary's closest friends were young plural wives. Mary's journals seem to indicate a positive attitude towards the life her friends had chosen, but her letters to Samuel show more hostile feelings about the institution. Often she wrote that her mother-in-law Wealthy was unhappy because Phinehas was not at home with her, but was with another wife.

Once Samuel wrote from Nauvoo¹⁸ that a mutual friend, Ellen Wilding, had decided she made a mistake by marrying Edwin Woolley and wanted to leave him. Samuel asked Mary to talk to her. If Ellen chose to leave Woolley, Samuel wanted Mary to convince her to wait until Samuel returned from his mission and marry him instead. In a most poignant reply, Mary replied that she had always tried to do as Samuel desired her to, and that the love she had for him compelled her to accept his wishes, even though she knew that doing so would deprive her of all hopes of happiness forever. She then added, "[I]f you had seen what I have seen. you would not wonder why I thus wrote for there is no such a thing as happiness known here where a man has more than one [wife]." She begged Samuel to at least wait until he came home and allow them a year or two together before taking another wife.

Possibly Mary's inner feelings about plural marriage caused her to record the first verse of a poem written by Vilate Kimball upon the birth of her son Solomon: "The Lord has blessed us with another Son Which is the seventh I have Born. May he be the father of many lives. But not the Husband of many Wives."

Although Mary suffered many inconveniences and hardships during these two years, perhaps the greatest trial was her separation from Samuel. One letter to Samuel reads: "now 8 months & 6 days have past since I have seen your face and now more than 5 Thousand miles seperates you from my sight while the wide Expanded Ocean rools between us. & heaves its unseasing bosem as if prowld to have seperated us. from each other." In another letter she confided: "Oh! would it have been my lot to have gone with you. me thinks I would gladly have past through the perils of the ocan & the trials through wich I might have been called to pass. could I only have been Blest with your sociaty. but alas! for me-Providance has provided it otherwise. and I must submit to my lonely fate." Another time she cried to Samuel: "Oh Samuel 'tis when I am Sick' that I miss you the most."

In these sentences, Mary shared the sentiments of hundreds of lonely women whose husbands were absent. Rebecca Burton Jones, whose husband was in the Mormon Battalion, wrote to Mary: "O Mary if I could only hear from my Deir husband as you am from yours his absence would be nothing in comparison to what it now is."¹⁹ Helen Mar Kimball Whitney wrote to her husband, who was among the pioneer party to Salt Lake, that she had experienced many many lonely feelings since he left, and added: "I long for the day to come when I shall see you, and rejoice in your dear society once more."²⁰

One of the most significant contributions readers will find in Mary's accounts is her mention of close to five hundred individuals who wove in and out of her life. As Mary chronicled the life around her, it becomes evident that her associates loosely fit into one of five groups. The first group consisted of Richards family members and extended relatives. Also in this group are Mary's brothers, sisters, and father. During this time of dependance upon one another, family bonds intensified.

Mary tucked into daily events interesting portrayals of the relationships between Phinehas, Wealthy, Henry, Jane and herself. Phinehas appeared as a stern, unbending authoritative figure, often hurting the feelings of others in the family. In one passage he argued with Mary over who had transgressed divine law, Adam or Eve. He told Mary a secret to see if she would repeat it. And he locked horns with Jane but had to back down to retain peace in the family. Yet, in spite of his overbearing personality, it is clear that Mary loved Phinehas.

Wealthy struggled with the hardships of cold, illness, lack of finer comforts, Phinehas' insistence on practicing polygyny, and the absence of many of her children. She formed a close bond with Mary and wrote to Samuel, ". . . Mary is truly a great comfort to me. I don't know how I could content myself without her in our travels, I feel thankful she is in our family."²¹

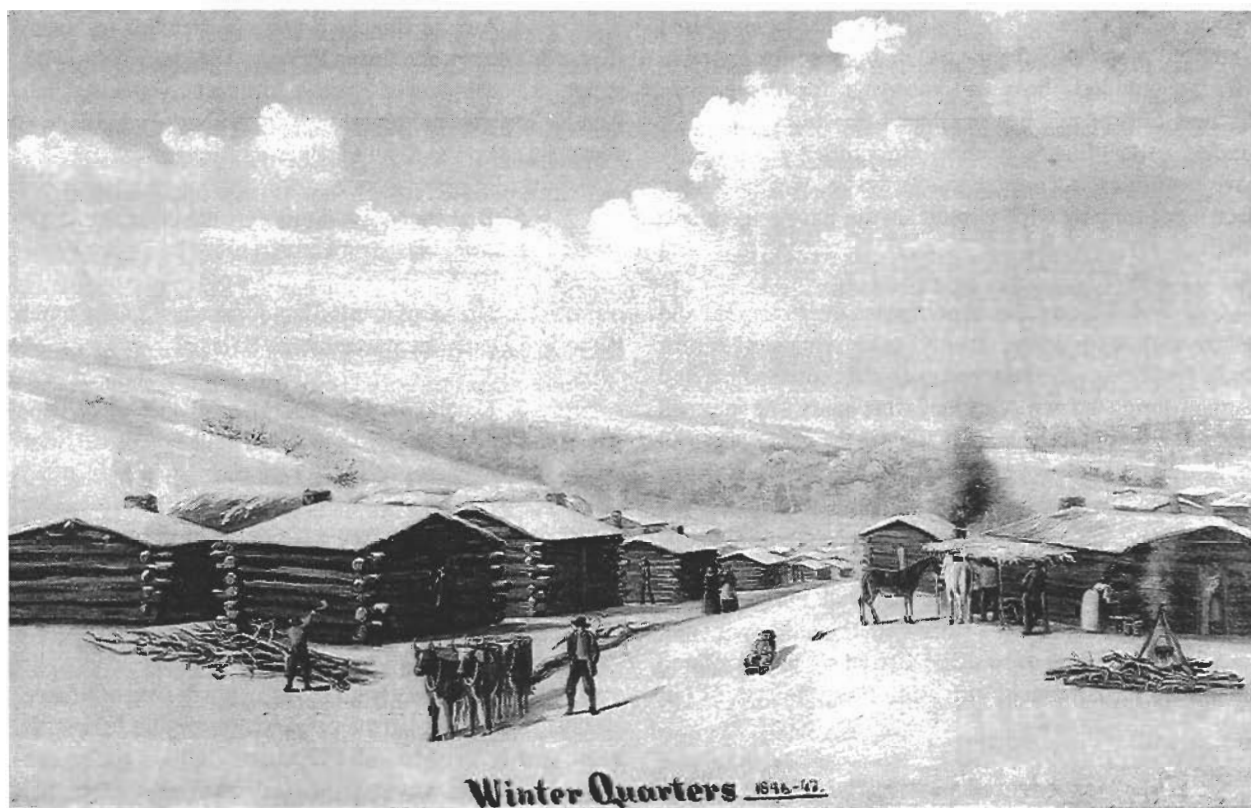
Mary also presented interesting insights into the character of other members of the Richards' family, such as: "Eve[ning] Uncle Levi and Aunt Sarah visited with us. and I think I never saw them appear so interesting before."

Other clusters of individuals in Mary's journals and letters include the older women from New England who visited with Wealthy and became her support group; the many British Saints who knew Mary and her family from Lancashire; the young men and women, married and single, who were friends of Mary and Samuel, who danced,

visited, shared confidences, and exchanged poetry; and finally, close neighbors and members of the Winter Quarters first ward who came to quilting parties, shared produce, gave priesthood blessings, and argued over animals.

One of the unique features of the letters between Mary and Samuel is the interesting manner in which adultery, pregnancy, and menstrual periods are discussed. While Samuel was still in Nauvoo, prior to leaving for his mission, he wrote to Mary concerning news of a man who had left the Camp of Israel, being guilty of adultery with a young woman who was sealed to another man: "as a penalty for which he had either to lose his head, or his manhood (testicles) the only means of salvation for him. I have not heard what is to be done with the woman, should like to know, if death as used to be."

Mary replied with the story she had been told, that Brigham Young had suspected something and told



Winter Quarters is known in Mormon history as the place of great suffering because more than 300 people, mostly women and children, died during the harsh winter of 1846-1847. This C.C.A. Christensen painting is located in private possession of Norman Taggart Estate.

some young boys to watch the woman's wagon for him. When they saw Mr. _____ get into the wagon "they torned it over and exposed them in the very act. after this she mistrusted a young man and blinded him by throwing a cup of boiling water in his face."

Before Mary and Samuel parted, they had hoped and planned that Mary could have a child. Samuel wrote from Nauvoo, "has the visitor [meaning her menstrual period] been faithful with you or not?" Another time he wrote, "Did I know, my love, what your condition is, in relation to that, of which we often used to speak, and which you consented for my sake . . . I would perhaps be more free in writing to you, in relation to that matter." Samuel was aware, no doubt, that his letters would be passed around the family and friends in camp, and therefore exercised caution in the words he used.

Mary answered: "You ask if my visiter is faithfull with me. She has viseted me twice is with me now and has been since last Friday. I sopose you will feel disapointed but surely not more than I do. gladly would I have enjured [endured] it. not only for your sake. but also for my own. why it should have been so I know not. for I have taken the best care of number one that I posably could. . . I fancied I should have taken much comfort could I only have been blest according to our desire. it would have been something by wich I could always have rememberd you."

Finally, one theme permeates every journal and letter which Mary wrote, that of thanksgiving and love for a supreme being who watched over and protected her and Samuel during the two years they were apart. She summed up her feelings in these words: "This is the place where all those who will not serve God acceptable will meet with a very unhealthy climate, that will soon wear out their existance, for the time has come all that iniquity must be cleansed out of Israel. I pray, dear Samuel, that you and I may ever be found among those that walk uprightly, that we may have a name and a place with the chosen of God, for what would it do us to suffer all that we have suffered should we for a moment turn aside from the path of our duty."

Mary experienced physical hardships, a wide range of emotions, and spiritual growth, as did the other women in Winter Quarters. In this respect, she is not unique. What sets her apart is her writings. They are the only daily account of life in Winter Quarters written by a young woman. She recorded life as she felt it and saw it.

She added personalities to countless names found in other written accounts. Her writings are a wonderful contribution to those who study the Latter-day Saint sojourn at the Missouri River and for those who study women's writings.

NOTES

1. Mary's writings contained in this paper are taken from her letters (Samuel Whitney Richards Collection) and her journals, located in the LDS Church Historical Department, Archives Division.

2. Franklin Dewey Richards, Journal, Richards Family Papers, LDS Church Historical Department, Archives Division.

3. Eliza Roxcy Snow, Diary, 1 June 1847, holograph, Huntington Libraries, San Marino, California.

4. Amelia Elizabeth Peirson Richards to Nancy Richards Peirson and Susan Peirson, 1847 and 1848, typescript, in possession of Patricia Jorgenson, Payson, Utah. Amelia, a niece and plural wife of Willard Richards, was also first cousin to Samuel Whitney Richards.

5. Bathsheba W. Smith, Autobiography, LDS Church Historical Department, Archives Division.

6. Sarah Colburn to Daniel Browers, LDS Church Historical Department, Archives Division.

7. Ursalia B. Hastings Hascall to Col. Wilson Andrews, 19 September 1846, Utah State Historical Society.

8. Juanita Brooks, ed., On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout 1844-1861 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, Utah State Historical Society, 1964), 229.

9. Documentation showing the degree of Muscular Dystrophy found in the descendants of John Parker, Sr. is located in the Muscular Dystrophy Clinic with headquarters at the University of Utah Medical Center, Salt Lake City, Utah, copy in possession of Rose Adele Gwynn, Centerville, Utah.

10. Amelia Elizabeth Peirson Richards, Letters.

11. Snow, Journal, 1 January 1847.
12. Helen Mar Kimball Whitney to Horace K. Whitney, 4 June 1847, Utah State University Special Collections.
13. Naamah Kendel Jenkins Twiss to Mrs. Thomas Nichols, 29 December 1846, LDS Church Historical Department, Archives Division.
14. Eliza Beebe Cheney to Charles Beebe, 18 January 1848, LDS Church Historical Department, Archives Division.
15. Ursalia B. Hastings Hascall, Letters.
16. Amelia Elizabeth Peirson Richards, Letters.
17. Sarah Colburn, Letter.
18. Samuel Whitney Richards to Mary Haskin Parker Richards, Samuel Whitney Richards Collection, LDS Church Historical Department, Archives Division.
19. Rebecca Burton Jones to Mary Haskin Parker Richards, 12 May 1847, Samuel Whitney Richards Collection, LDS Church Historical Department, Archives Division.
20. Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, Letter.
21. Wealthy Dewey Richards to Samuel Whitney Richards, 13 July 1846, Samuel Whitney Richards Collection, LDS Church Historical Department, Archives Division.

HEDRICK CEMETERY

A recently discovered affidavit by William C. H. Carr of the Hedrick family lineage has added a few additional facts to the previous record by the D.A.R. (1934). The well-known Hedrick Cemetery is still very visible at the southwest corner of Highway 24 and Salisbury Road, in Section 35, 50 x 32. It is a portion of the lands originally settled by John H. Hedrick, who lies in the grounds with his wife. John and Elizabeth had 5 children: George F. Hedrick; Amanda J. Hedrick (Carr); James C. Hedrick; Ira J. Hedrick, and Harvey A. Hedrick. John was the son of Granville and Eliza Ann Hedrick, who also are buried there.

George Hedrick married Hannah Elizabeth _____. Harvey died unmarried. Amanda married John E. Carr (who died Oct. 19, 1916 and is buried in the Lee's Summit Cemetery) and they had the following children: James E. Carr (died Jackson Co. 1898 unmarried); Matilda E. Carr (who married _____ Hook and lived in Long Beach, Calif.); Cora E. Carr, who married first _____ McCarrell then _____ Heiny, and lived at Glendale, Calif.); William C. H. Carr (an attorney in Lee's Summit); and two daughters who died in infancy, Adelle Carr and Nellie Carr.

Buried in the Hedrick Cemetery are:

- Hedrick, Andrew E., b. Apr. 7, 1876 -- d. May 14, 1903.
- Hedrick, George F., d. May 13, 1927, aged 81 years.
- Hedrick, Hannah Elizabeth, b. Apr. 26, 1857 -- d. Mar. 31, 1907.
- Hedrick, Harvey A., d. Apr. 6, 1875, aged 22 y, 3 m, 22 d.
- Hedrick, Granville, d. Aug. 22, 1881, aged 66 y, 11 m, 20 d.
- Hedrick, Eliza Ann, b. Sept. 8, 1833 -- d. Apr. 6, 1910.
- Hedrick, John H., d. May 11, 1872, aged 52 y, 7 m, 13 d.
- Hedrick, Elizabeth A. (wife of John Hedrick), b. 1825 -- d. Nov. 1, 1885.

This grave not marked:

- Hedrick, Amanda J. (Carr), d. 1878 Dauphin Co., PA.

Read by Victor P. Meador, Nov., 1991.

Recent Readings of Jackson County Cemeteries with Jackson County Death Records 1883-1895 by Jackson County Genealogical Society, Independence, MO 1992