

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MARY GIBBS BIGELOW
Maurine Carr Ward

Mary Gibbs was born on June 26, 1809, in Lisle, Broome, New York, to Benjamin Gibbs and Ann Hubbard. Her autobiography is filled with childhood memories, such as watching her father making maple syrup underneath the maple trees; being frightened so badly by wolves and a porcupine while on her way to school, that afterwards, she was terrified of going to school alone; her grandmother Gibbs' wonderful pies, cucumbers, bread and butter.

She recalled moving down the Ohio River on a large lumber raft to an area below Pittsburg, Ohio. When she was seven, the Ohio River raised above its banks. Her father pulled a canoe into the door of the house, loaded up the family and floated them out of the flooded house to high ground. He worked as a cooper, making barrels at \$1.25 a barrel. Later, Mr. Gibbs moved the family to Lawrence County, Illinois, obtained land, and built a log cabin, as he continued his trade.

The first winter in Illinois was hard for the little family. Benjamin Gibbs went out each morning to hunt deer. Corn bread and potatoes supplemented the venison meat, but there was no milk or butter. Snow was melted for water.

By the time Mary was ten, her mother was boarding in another home for weeks at a time, doing weaving for others. This left Mary to care for the chores around the house, such as cooking all the meals, watering the stock in the winter, dipping tallow candles, washing the clothes, planting and caring for the garden, making preserves, and caring for her baby brother, age one and one-half.

Mary's story continues in her words as she tells of meeting her husband, Nahum Bigelow. Nahum was born February 9, 1785 at Brandon, Rutland, Vermont to Simeon Bigelow and Sarah Foster.

When I was thirteen, Nahum Bigelow, my future husband came to see us and I got acquainted with him. He was thirty-seven. My parents sent me to school. Nahum took me on a horse behind him, and went that day to a village to school in another county. I was away three months to this school. I boarded with Brother Levi Joy the school teacher, and his wife, and paid my board by spinning nights and mornings to make three day's work. . . . In the spring my father came and took me home. I was happy to go home and see my folks again.

The summer that I was fifteen I was taken sick with the chills and fever, whooping cough and scarlet fever, and couldn't do much. Father took the whooping cough the second time, having had it when a boy sixteen. This was the first spell of sickness since I had the long siege of bilious fever which I had in the Ohio State. Nahum came once a month to visit us. . . . Nahum continued to visit me from time to time and when I was nearly sixteen proffered marriage, asking my parents. He then boarded at Uncle Clark's and worked at his perpetual motion machine. He was very ingenious.

Uncle Henry Bigelow, his oldest brother owned some land in Shelby County, joining Lawrence County. Nahum and one of

MAURINE CARR WARD is editor of *The Nauvoo Journal*. The above autobiography was obtained from a typescript photocopy in the Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah. Additional information on Mary is found in Black, Susan Easton: *Membership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: 1830-1848; Utah Pioneer Biographies*, vol 2, pp. 141-156. Records of Camp Creek, Illinois LDS Branch.

my uncles bought up cattle, and drove cattle, but didn't make anything by it, but lost.

While my uncle and Nahum were away I was at home making my wedding dress in the fall. I carded and spun the cotton and my mother and I wove it in an 800 or so reed very fine. It looked beautiful. I then bleached it a pure white. I made it plain with no flounces. It was woven so that half way to my knees it was corded and raised in diamonds. The cords were picked up with an awl ten threads between every cord. Sister and I raised the cotton and picked it out of the beautiful white balls. I then ginned it in a hand gin, feeding the cotton and turning the handle. I had picked the long, beautiful first-ripe cotton. The waist of my wedding dress was plain with a band around it, common straight sleeves just large enough to be comfortable. I had a bobinet ruffle in the neck of the dress. I was preparing to keep house. I had home-made shoes that my father made for me.

We were married in December at my father's house, on a Sabbath Day. My Uncle Clark, who was a Baptist Elder, married us. Nahum was dressed in home-made cloth blue jeans. We had just a common supper. Uncle, Aunt and family were the company. We had chicken boiled, pot pie, all kinds of fruit that was wild. Crab apple preserves, cheese, butter biscuits and light bread. No dance at any time. It was a good social evening. Retired to bed at the usual time.

Next day my husband made a log stable for his horses. He had one span of horses and I had a cow and a calf given me by my parents. I had a feather bed that I had picked from the geese.

Mary gave birth to her first baby, Mary Jane, on October 15, 1827. Hyrum was born next, on May 20, 1829. Mary and Nahum were living with her parents in Lawrenceville, Lawrence, Illinois during this time.

However, they had moved into Coles County, Illinois, forty miles away, by the time Lucy was born on October 3, 1830. Asa Elijah was also born here on February 2, 1832. The family lived in a hewn log cabin with puncheon floor, split from big trees and hewn off.

They owned sheep, oxen, cows and horses, and as Mary recorded, were very comfortable.

An accident occurred when Nahum was trimming limbs off a tree, causing him to fall on his ax blade, severing the main artery to the hand and the cords of the two little fingers. He was still able to work, and grew hay, wheat, corn, potatoes and melons on his land, besides harvesting sugar from the trees, raising chickens and storing one hundred pounds of butter for the winter.

Three more children were born in Coles County, Lavina on March 24, 1834, Liola on October 4, 1835, and Sariah on January 29, 1838.

When Sariah was a baby the first Mormon Elders visited us.--Brother Coombs [Libbeus T. Coons], Dibbins and David Gamett. I believe it right off and obeyed it in the spring. Sariah was about six weeks old. We began to prepare to move, on to the missouri, but instead of going to Missouri we made preparations and moved to Nauvoo, as the Saints were driven out of Missouri.

We moved to Nauvoo in the fall of 1843. We went to Brother Matthews, and then down by the levee. Bought land and began to farm. were all taken sick, had a terrible sickness--fever and ague. We lived there through the massacre and I had a son born on the 4 of July [1844], a week after the Prophet was slain. We called his name Joseph Smith Bigelow. He lived nine months and sixteen days and died.

Mary was baptized on April 1, 1838 by Libbeous T. Coons. Brother Coons, an elder in the Church, became the presiding elder of the branch at Camp Creek on May 1, 1842. Elder David M. Gamet was sustained as the clerk of the branch. It is uncertain who Mary is referring to when she wrote about the missionary Brother Dibbins.

Records of the Camp Creek Branch when it was organized show Nahum (holding the office of a teacher), Mary, Mary Jane, Hyrum, Lucy, and Ada [Asa]. At Camp Creek, Mercer, Illinois, Mary gave birth to Moroni on September 1, 1840 and Daniel on May 18, 1842, followed by Joseph Smith on July 4, 1844.

The fall after he was born, at conference time, I was taken very very sick. All were

very sick. We had sickness from the time we lived there until we left. While I was so very sick and was given up by everybody, and was thought to be dying even by myself, I sent to the field for my husband to come and put down the dates of the births of my children. He came in haste and taking the Record Book put down the names and dates of some whose record had not been made.

Then afterwards I had a vision. The Savior came to me and told me that I would get well. What about my baby, I asked, for he was also very sick. He answered me, Your babe is in mine own hands. With it I will do as seemeth me good. He then told me again that I would get well, for I had a work to do. Again I asked about my baby and received the same answer. The third time he promised me that I would get well, and again I asked about my baby. and again he gave me the same answer.

The baby got well and fat. This was in the fall. I got well also. But when the baby was so lovable in the spring it took the water on the brain and died suddenly. The same spirit rested on me as it did when I had the vision. I dedicated him to the Lord, and I never shed a tear until I had been to the grave and came back.

When we came back into the house Daniel stepped into the house first and clasping his hands said, O my little Dafie is gone, is gone. He was too little to speak plain. Whereupon we all burst into tears and lamentations. My sympathy was aroused, although I felt resigned to the will of the Lord, feeling it was all right.

My little Liola had the black canker which took his under jaw bone out and five teeth. I went the same summer to see my parents. Liola died while I was gone. He was so bad that the neighbors came in and sat up with him, and were also there after he died. He had spasms. When I came back I felt lonesome indeed. We had our blessings by President Young.

The next fall after the mob commenced to mob and burn houses, we were advised to move into Nauvoo from Camp Creek. We took

all the honey we could and everything that we could, leaving the corn in the field. we took our cows, our horses and wagon and oxen and wagon and went into Nauvoo. We afterwards gathered corn and squashes.

We were in Nauvoo at the October conference held in the Temple in 1845.

Brother Young spoke that now the excitement and mobbing was allayed for the brethren to go back and secure their crops. My husband was not well when we moved back. He had the chills. We were among the first that moved back and being on a public road the mob noticed us.

On Monday evening after dark a posse of the mob came. They came and knocked on the door. Father [Nahum] was on the bed with a chill. The man said that he had orders to notify us to leave immediately. Father asked him, leaning on his elbow, "By what authority do you order peaceable citizens to leave."

He stuttered, "By orders of the Governor and other officers."

It is not likely," Father said, "that the Governor will be giving orders for peaceable citizens to leave their homes. What is your name? Where do you live?"

He stuttered, "I live, live, all over--everywhere. I was from Carthage yesterday."

They made a big noise out doors and voices called. "Come out, don't be jawing with no woman," as I had told him that I wasn't going to go. If I wasn't a Mormon they wouldn't order me out. If you want to murder us, take us all out and leave us all together.

A young man that had been to school with one of my boys came in and said that, "We have not come down to parley with the women. We want to know if you are going to leave immediately." He spoke in a mad, savage and determined manner.

Father said, "No, we are not going."

Then he said, "If you are not going, you will be tumbled out and burnt up."

Voices out doors said, "Stick a brand of fire in the house and that will start them." He started for the fireplace and I started for him with the shovel or tongs. They called him out for another consultation. He came in again a second time, just inside of the door and said, "We will give you until Thursday night to leave or you will be tumbled out and burned up." They then rode off.

The next morning we started Hyrum off to Nauvoo to let President Young and Cot Markham know of the threats of the mob. while Hyrum made the statement about the mob President Young sat with his head in his hands and then rose up and said,

"If the mob should come to burn my house I would defend it to the last. Go home and tell your father to make an affidavit and have it sworn to, and then send it to Carthage to Major Warren. He is stationed at Carthage to prevent mob violence, so it is right for your father to send a written statement to him, and if he won't do anything, come to Nauvoo and you shall have all the help that you need." Joseph Young gave a pistol to Hyrum and told him to give it to his father to defend himself.

Hyrum did as he was told. When he got to the court house, Major Warren informed him that because the court was in session, and because some of his troops had been sent to Lima, he couldn't spare any to protect the Bigelow family and their neighbors until the next day. Hyrum then exclaimed that by the next day their house would be burned. Major Warren asked him where he lived.

When Hyrum returned to the horses and his companions, he felt very despondent and anxious, so he turned around and went back to Major Warren, asking if four men could be spared to come and protect the home. Again the Major replied that there were no men to spare. Dejected, Hyrum left Nauvoo where he stopped to tell Brigham Young of his failure to obtain help.

Meanwhile, Major Warren worried about the situation, so he called in Captain Morgan to discuss it

with him. Captain Morgan agreed that the situation was critical. He sent a Lieutenant and three men to the Bigelow house, arriving there about nine o'clock in the evening.

When the troops were within a mile of our house they got a jack Mormon, Mr. Dickson, to pilot them. Asked first for Squire Logan and then for Mr. Bigelow. He was friendly and came to the yard, saying, "They live in here," and then turned back.

When Mary Jane and I saw some one coming, I said, "Here they come!" Mary Jane came running in and said, "Four are coming, and I don't think Hyrum is with them." Father was in bed with his night cap on.

One of them outside said, "You stay here and I will go and see." Father said, "That's not Hyrum," took his gun, expecting the mob and went to the door.

One stepped to the door asking, "Does Mr. Bigelow live here?"

"Yes that's my name," answered he, "What do you want?"

"Let me in and I'll tell you," said the outsider.

"In the name of common sense, what do you want?" asked Father.

"What's the use to be so particular," said the one on the outside.

Then my husband, as he was pushing his way in, shot off his pistol and shot him in the left breast. And as he turned he said, "Boys, come to my assistance, I'm shot." Then he shot him again in the right side and cut his sword belt.

The men cried out, "We are from Carthage, we came to protect you;" and then one caught his foot in the stirrup and fell. One came running and fell over the sawhorse.

Father said, Why didn't you tell me so before, I wouldn't have shot you any sooner

than I would my wife or children. . . . His coat was thickly padded and was smoking, but the pistol was too near, too much lead and too little powder so that he lived. He soon became so faint and exhausted that we got him on the bed and he bled profusely. All were alarmed lest he should die. The three men came in and readily understood that it was owing to his stupidity that he was shot.

Then Dickson came back, came into the house and got excited. One of the soldiers was dispatched to Carthage for Dr. Barnes and the Lieutenant's brother.

The Lieutenant said, "It is my own fault. I ought to have told him, but I did not think the old man was so smart, so courageous. But I will make an affidavit that whether I live or die, it will clear your father.

The firing of the gun was a signal for the mob to gather. Mr. Dickson stepped out the back door and calmed the excited mob, informing them that the soldiers were there. When that didn't calm the men, the soldiers each took up a position outside the house to protect it and its occupants. Nahum, still extremely weak and sick, went back to bed. Hyrum and Mary sat up with the Lieutenant.

A little before daylight the doctor came with the Lieutenant's brother. Dr. Barnes talked to Father in a wicked way and said, "Such a man as you ought not to be at large." But the wounded Lieutenant Everett said, when the children felt bad, "Don't feel bad for my statement will clear your father." The names of the soldiers were Bush and Hedges. . .

A school teacher, Mr. Caldwell, came that morning and talked with the doctor and found out the truth, but being bitter against the Mormons he went away and raised a great excitement against Mr. Bigelow all over the country.

I got breakfast and after breakfast Hyrum hitched up the team, putting in a straw bed and bedding and a buffalo robe, and Mr. Bigelow got in to go off to trial. The Lieutenant

was comfortably fixed in the doctor's carriage and went to Pontusic, where he made out an affidavit that Mr. Bigelow was not to blame, and then took a steamboat to his parent's home in Warsaw, Illinois. . . . One soldier remained with us, knowing that danger threatened Mr. Bigelow.

I heard parties passing, looking at Mr. Bigelow laying sick in the wagon and saying, "Let's take him out a flay him alive. This is the old codger that did the deed. Let's take him out and tie a stone around his neck and throw him into the river."

The soldier, Mr. Hedges, stayed close to the wagon, protecting Nahum, Mary and Hyrum. Upon arriving at Carthage, they were taken to the Hamilton Hotel, where Mary and Nahum were given a bedroom upstairs. At ten the next morning they were taken to the courthouse. There, thankfully, statements from Major Warren and Captain Morgan, plus the affidavit written by Lieutenant Everett acquitted Nahum, allowing him to return home again.

We got home a little before night and I was so glad to see my lonesome little children who had been tormented with fear on our account and who were glad that we got home safe and alive. We had samp mush for supper.

James Porter who was living on my husband's farm and another man from Musgusto Creek came and told us that the mob was coming to burn the house and had threatened to kill old Bigelow and all his family. We did not feel safe, so one of the boys took Lavinia to Sister Gunsleys, as she coughed so bad, and we hid everything that was valuable and took our bedding and went and made our beds in the corn, near the bean patch where we had pulled up the beans. We took all of the children in bed with us, never undressing them, and having everything dark about the bed so that the mob wouldn't see us. It was cloudy. I was very sick with the sun pain. My husband administered to me and I felt better. After prayers we laid down but had but little sleep as we felt like watching. In a very little while we heard firing and whooping at the house and were glad that we were hid.

My husband said, "Lay still and pray, children." We all prayed silently.

They yelled and set the bloodhounds on our track but the Lord preserved us from them. We could see them loping around, and heard the mob racing through the corn field in search of us. The corn was hardly ripe and was not gathered.

We got up in the night and moved our bed in the hollow, and then my husband and Hyrum went and leaned on the fence and watched proceedings. When the mob dispersed they came back and went to bed.

The mob came about 10 p.m. and went away at 3 a.m. They had ranted around until then. We were the only family in Camp Creek that was molested, which we wondered at.

At last daylight came and my husband got up, bidding us to lie quietly until he came back and he would see if the mob was completely gone. The November night was gone and the sun was up before he got back. He found the house still standing but the windows were broken. The tracks of horses feet were all around the house. He came back and told us we could get up and come to the house. We went back and my grown daughters commenced picking up the hidden things.

I wanted to get breakfast and sent my fourth child, my second son Asa, to the beautiful large spring that was under the porch of the milk house. The spring ran off into the milk house, where we kept milk and butter pans, churn, etc.

Asa went down for water. He brought the water to the house but said he believed the spring was poisoned as there was a glistening green scum on the water. He poked it away and got another pail full and it was the same. I felt that the child was inspired by God, and as the water stood the scum rose again.

Mary sent one of the children to another home to obtain water. Nahum then put some of the first water into a bottle so that Doctor Willard Richards and others in Nauvoo could analyze it. They later said that it contained four ounces of arsenic and would have killed ten men.

After this much persecution, Nahum loaded up his family and possessions and moved them into Nauvoo for protection. Hyrum occasionally returned to his former home in Camp Creek to get stock and crops. While there, he boarded with the James Porter family. Later, after the fear of being ambushed subsided, Nahum went with Hyrum, also.

One morning James Porter invited Nahum to eat breakfast with him. Nahum had his own provisions, and tried to refuse, but Mr. Porter was insistent. Upon arriving at the Porter home, Nahum noticed that his children were still sleeping. This was very unusual, because Mr. Porter always insisted that his children have breakfast with him.

At breakfast, Nahum was offered coffee, which he felt inclined not to drink, but on being asked again, drank it. It was poisoned with white vitriol, which was slow to take effect. Later, Mr. Porter admitted that he had been bribed to poison Nahum.

Nahum didn't feel anything until shortly after breakfast. That afternoon while fixing a wagon tongue he began to tremble and turned pale. Hyrum, realizing what had happened rode off for help, returning with an Elder Patten to administer to Nahum. By then he was screaming with pain. Nahum was sick for two or three weeks.

Elder Patten promised Nahum that he would not only get well, but that he would live to take his family to the Rocky Mountains. The Bigelow family emigrated with the William Snow oxteam company. Upon arriving in the Great Salt Lake valley, they moved north to the settlement of Farmington, Davis County. They were living there when Nahum died on January 28, 1851. Mary later shows up in the Provo, Utah County, Second Ward records. She died on April 19, 1888.