

# Billa Dickson and Mary Ann (Stoddard) Dickson



## A Family History

by Shelley Dawson Davies

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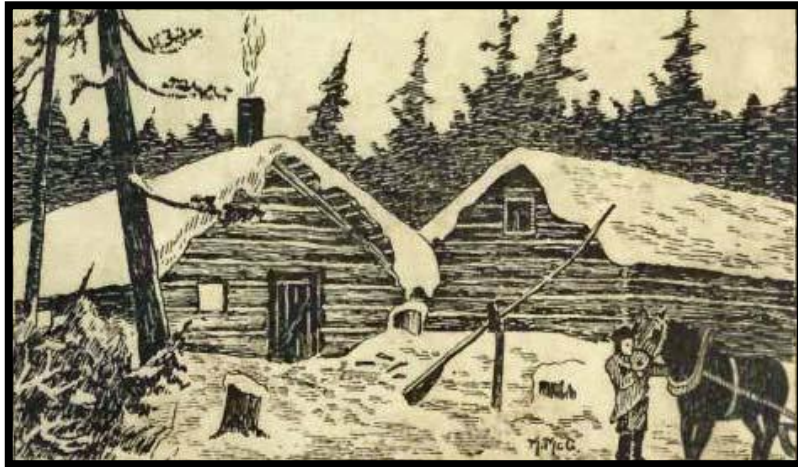
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# Chapter 1

## Frontier Families

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### Canadian Prospects



*Rough cabins, deep snow and thick forests awaited early pioneers in Ontario, Canada.*

Little more than a great wall of woods greeted Judson Stoddard<sup>1</sup> and his wife Samantha<sup>2</sup> when they arrived in Ontario, Canada, in 1818. Although thirty-four years had passed since lands were granted to Loyalists escaping America's revolution, the region was still so remote and inaccessible only a string of small settlements studded the shores of the St. Lawrence River. Offers of inexpensive land were attracting more than Loyalists to Ontario after the War of 1812, and now the Stoddards were among thousands of Americans willing to tame Canada's frontier.

It was not a trifling matter to leave home and family for a wilderness where bears were "almost as thick as blackberries"<sup>3</sup> and large wolf packs routinely threatened both farmers and their stock. Roads were little more than primitive paths through the bush, and foot travel was often along "blazed trails" marked by a series of axe slices on trees, but reports of fertile land and prospects of success were tempting. Judson's father, Ichabod,<sup>4</sup> had relocated to the Rideau Lakes area twelve years earlier, and Samantha's sister, Lucy Ann,<sup>5</sup> was teaching

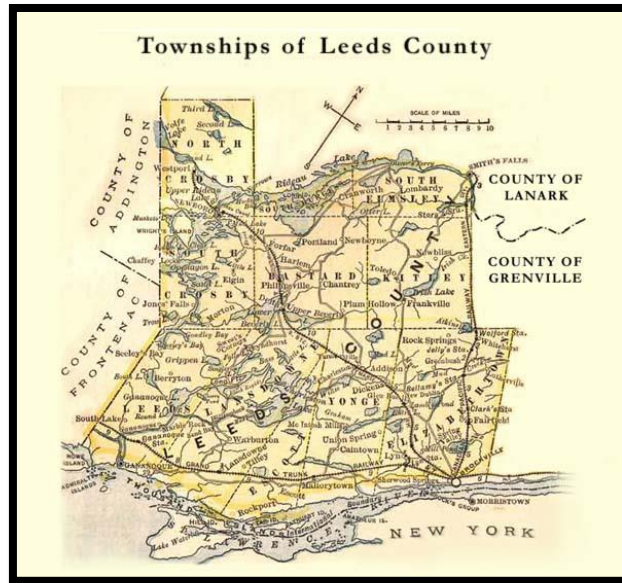
school in Bastard Township,<sup>6</sup> so the young couple would be welcomed by family. They packed up what belongings fit into a wagon bed and left Connecticut with high hopes and their one-year old daughter, Mary Ann.<sup>7</sup>

Mary Ann had no memory of her father, who died of an illness the next winter,<sup>8</sup> only months after baby Arelia<sup>9</sup> was added to the family. She grew up in the household of her mother's second husband, John Arvin,<sup>10</sup> along with her half siblings Brittanica,<sup>11</sup> Johnny,<sup>12</sup> and Philo,<sup>13</sup> where there was always plenty of work to be done. Daily duties in the kitchen and around the barnyard absorbed most of the morning and evening, with any leftover hours devoted to seasonal tasks such as cleaning wool, canning foods and caring for newborn animals.

The entire community gathered together to lighten the load of large tasks. A variety "bees" were held throughout the year, pooling efforts of friends and neighbors in raising barns, harvesting fields and preparing produce for winter. Apple bees were "much enjoyed by young and old," recalled early settler Walter Riddell. "The boys, with their home-made apple machines, peeled the apples, then tossed them to the girls, who, with their knives, would quarter and core them, while older women would string them with needle and thread and tie them so they could be hung up to dry." One of the most popular activities was the husking bee, where any young man finding a red ear of corn had the privilege of kissing the girl next to him. "It is surprising how many big red ears were found," said Mr. Riddell.<sup>14</sup> Every bee was followed by a supper and dance, accompanied by whistling boys or music made through paper-covered combs when a fiddler could not be found.

A lively group of friends formed across the county, but Mary Ann was particularly fond of the Chipman, Myers and Dickson families, all who had handsome and eligible sons near her age. She could have chosen any of the young men for her beau, but in the end she "set her cap" for Billa Dickson.<sup>15</sup>

Billa and his family lived nearby in Brockville, a town on the edge of the St. Lawrence, where the Dicksons had farmed a number of profitable acres since emigrating from New York at the beginning of the century. Billa not only knew how to manage the land, but was a skilled blacksmith who was often called on make tools and repair farm equipment. The Dicksons were a close-knit family; brothers John Junior,<sup>16</sup> Billa, David<sup>17</sup> and Albert<sup>18</sup> worked the farm as a team, gradually assuming their father's workload as he aged. Their mother, Mary,<sup>19</sup> saw to it her children were versed in the Bible, reading to them in the evenings by a flickering candle and welcoming itinerant preachers as they made their way through the countryside.



## The Good News

Even though there were small congregations of Baptists and Methodists in the area by 1836, the Dicksons were intrigued by news of American missionaries visiting nearby farms with a startling message: God had opened the heavens after centuries of silence, restoring the fullness of His gospel through a latter-day prophet. Traditional preachers were horrified, claiming only the “ignorant and poor” were being “led to believe that they would better their condition by becoming flowers of Joe Smith,”<sup>20</sup> but the Dicksons recognized the truth when they heard it. John Senior<sup>21</sup> was the first member of the family to accept baptism, followed quickly by Billa and David, who were ordained as priesthood holders at a church conference the following month.<sup>22</sup> The Spirit of the Lord spread like wildfire. In less than a year there were over three hundred converts to the Church of Jesus Christ in Leeds County, among them many members of the Chipman and Myers families, and almost all of the Dicksons.

Mary Ann’s family, however, was less accepting. Only Mary Ann, her uncle Lyman Stoddard<sup>23</sup> and his wife Ruth<sup>24</sup> were baptized. If 1836 had been a year of conversion among friends in Leeds, 1837 was a year of marriages. Billa and Mary Ann were the first to be wed, in April, 1837, followed by Mary Dickson’s<sup>25</sup> marriage to Harmon Chipman<sup>26</sup> in May and David Dickson’s June marriage to Nancy

Stevens.<sup>27</sup> Sarah Dickson<sup>28</sup> and John Myers<sup>29</sup> were wed seven months later in February, 1838. John had originally courted Sarah's older sister Mary, who declined his proposal since he had not yet been baptized into the church. John declared he would "not join the church to win a wife," but both he and his brother William<sup>30</sup> were soon converted "and left their folks, who were not members of the church, to go live among the Mormons."<sup>31</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Judson Stoddard (1792-1819), #L7B7-WMQ, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org), where verification of all vital dates can be found. Also see family group sheets at [www.DaviesDawsonHistory.weebly.com](http://www.DaviesDawsonHistory.weebly.com)

<sup>2</sup> Samantha (Hodge) Stoddard Arvin Williams (1795-1870), #LH1T-QZP, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>3</sup> W. L. Smith, "The Pioneers of Old Ontario," (Toronto: George N. Morang, 1932), [www.electriccanadian.com/history/ontario/ontario/ontario3.htm](http://www.electriccanadian.com/history/ontario/ontario/ontario3.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Ichabod Stoddard (1750-1821), #L8W9-8KJ, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) As a veteran of the Continental Army of 1776, Ichabod chose to settle in Loyalist Canada for financial, not political reasons.

<sup>5</sup> Lucy Ann (Hodge) Norton (1797-1876), #LHJ8-5XB, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Matthews, *Philo Hodge (1756-1842) of Roxbury, Connecticut* (Gateway Press, 1992) page 95-97.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Ann (Stoddard) Dickson (1817-1903), #KWJY-8VJ, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>8</sup> Matthews, *Philo Hodge (1756-1842) of Roxbury*, page 95.

<sup>9</sup> Arelia (Stoddard) Buel (1819-1890), #LHT3-7NB, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>10</sup> John Arvin (1791-1844), #KN6X-65R, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>11</sup> Britannia (Arvin) Windle (1828-1913), #LC33-TQB, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>12</sup> John Newton Arvin (1832-1911), #K2TJ-39Q, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>13</sup> Philo Denzil Arvin (1835-1864), #KZSX-KMP, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

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- 14 Smith, "The Pioneers of Old Ontario,"  
[www.electriccanadian.com/history/ontario/ontario/ontario3.htm](http://www.electriccanadian.com/history/ontario/ontario/ontario3.htm)
- 15 Billa Dickson (1815-1878), #KWJY-8VV, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) While some records show his name as Billy or William, George Kirkham who recorded his visit with the Dickson family in 1875, confirmed the correct name as Billa. "Many would think that was a nick name for William, but that was not, for they said it was Billa," George Kirkham, "Journals," 29 November, 1875, [www.georgekirkham.com/Journals/1863-1877.html](http://www.georgekirkham.com/Journals/1863-1877.html)
- 16 John Dickson (1811-1894), #2MB1-3JH, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- 17 David Dickson (1817-1903), #LC5L-T8X, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
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- 20 Thaddeus Leavitt, *The History of Leeds and Grenville Ontario from 1749 to 1879* (Brockville, Ontario: Recorder Press, 1879), page 122.  
<https://archive.org/details/leedsgrenville00leavuoft>
- 21 John Dickson (1761-1860), #KWJY-8RL, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- 22 *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, Vol. III, 4 Jan 1837,  
<http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/NCMP1820-1846/id/7468>
- 23 Lyman Stoddard (1795-1854), #KWVS-63M, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
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- 25 Mary (Dickson) Chipman (1813-1902), #L78X-H3X, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- 26 Harmon J. Chipman (1812-1892), #LFCG-5JZ, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- 27 Nancy (Stevens) Dickson (1813-), #LC5L-T6Y, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- 28 Sarah (Dickson) Myers (1822-1870), #KWJY-DRV, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- 29 John Myers (1814-1900), #KWJY-DRK, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- 30 William Myers (1809-1873), #K24B-6XH, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- 31 "The Life of Tyresha Mary Myers Woolsey," undated typescript. Copy held by Shelley Dawson Davies.



## Chapter 2

# Joining the Saints

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### An Act of Faith



*The first temple of this dispensation, in Kirtland, Ohio.*

The spirit of gathering was strong among Ontario's Mormons, who longed to join with other church members in Kirtland, Ohio, where a temple to the Lord had been completed in 1836. Accounts of visions and ministering of angels at its dedication inspired Billa, his brothers and his father to visit Kirtland themselves in the autumn of 1837, where John Sr. received a patriarchal blessing from the prophet's father.<sup>32</sup>

While Billa and his family were strengthened by their experiences in Kirtland, they also witnessed firsthand increasing persecutions against the church. Plans to consolidate members at the new headquarters in Far West, Missouri, were already underway when the Dicksons returned to Ontario, and by then faithful Canadian Mormons were making preparations to join their fellow Saints. Among the thirty wagons departing Leeds County with the Dicksons in mid-May, 1838,<sup>33</sup> were many members of the Chipman, Myers and Champlain families, all who were forced to leave behind loved ones who refused to accept the gospel message.

Companies of Saints were streaming toward Missouri from all points east with hopes of building Zion in Mormon settlements surrounding church headquarters in Far West, where Joseph Smith and other leaders had recently made their homes. While many newcomers were settling at Adam-ondi-Ahman, identified by the prophet as the site of Adam's blessing to his posterity, the Leeds County Saints were content to locate along the Missouri River at DeWitt, where a steamboat landing promised prosperity for their new community. Growth at DeWitt was so great there was an acute housing shortage by the time the Dicksons arrived in October, forcing them to live in a make-do tent city until more permanent homes could be built. However, no sooner than they arrived, DeWitt was surrounded and attacked by hostile mobs determined to drive the Mormons from Missouri. They remained under siege for several weeks, during which time Joseph Smith himself happened to slip secretly into DeWitt, witnessing the dire living conditions the people suffered under. Food was so scarce men were forced to shoot stray animals whenever they could. Billa was fortunate enough on one occasion to track a stray pig to the river bed, just as the Prophet was riding by. "That is a good one, Brother Dickson," Joseph called out. "Go and divide it among the camp," and Billa wasted no time in doing so.<sup>34</sup>

Conditions only worsened until the Saints were forced to evacuate DeWitt a few days later. Without hope of a peaceful solution and to avoid bloodshed, the church leadership finally surrendered to their enemies, who jailed them pending trial. All Mormon owned properties were seized by the state of Missouri and the Saints were once again compelled to move on, this time across the river to Quincy, Illinois.

It was in early November when thousands of destitute people straggled into Quincy seeking shelter. Mary Ann was fearful her eight month old baby Samantha Jane<sup>35</sup> would not survive exposure to such extreme weather with what little she had to wrap the child in, but fortunately the Dicksons were taken in by sympathetic townspeople, who provided items of food and clothing.

## Second Thoughts

*Intense persecutions increased the faith of some, while undermining it in others. Ami Chipman, one of Billa's brother-in-laws, and his friend William Dickson, were among those who left Leeds County to settle their families with the Saints, but had a change of heart soon after arriving in Missouri. Caught in the siege of DeWitt and threatened by mobs on their way back to Canada, the Chipman party accepted an escort to Far West, where they hoped to find protection with a larger group of church members. Instead, they were driven from the state under Governor Boggs extermination order. There seemed to be no possibility for peaceful existence and Ami lost all hope. Determined to return to the safety of his old life, he loaded his wife and children into a log canoe under the cover of darkness and floated three hundred miles downriver to St. Louis, where he made his way back to Canada. Thaddeus Leavitt, *The History of Leeds and Grenville Ontario from 1749 to 1879* (Brockville, Ontario: Recorder Press, 1879), page 124-125.*

<https://archive.org/details/leedsgrenville00leavuoft>



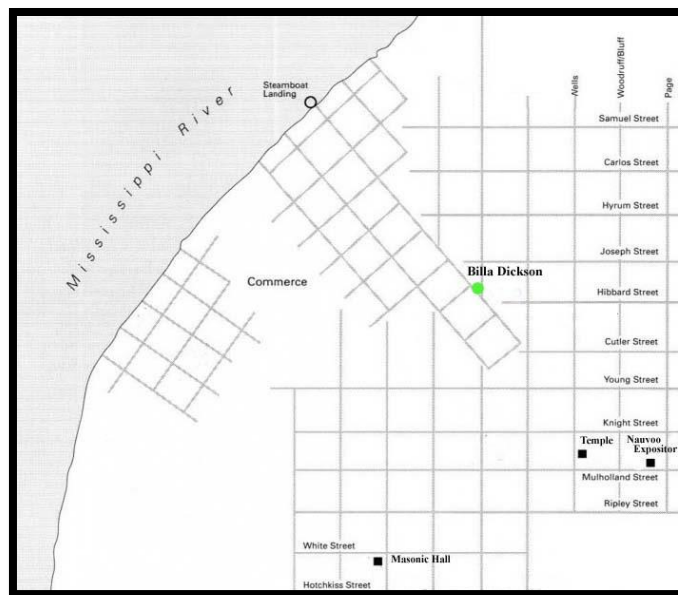
***Mobs attacked the Mormons with impunity under Governor Bogg's extermination order.***

# Nauvoo

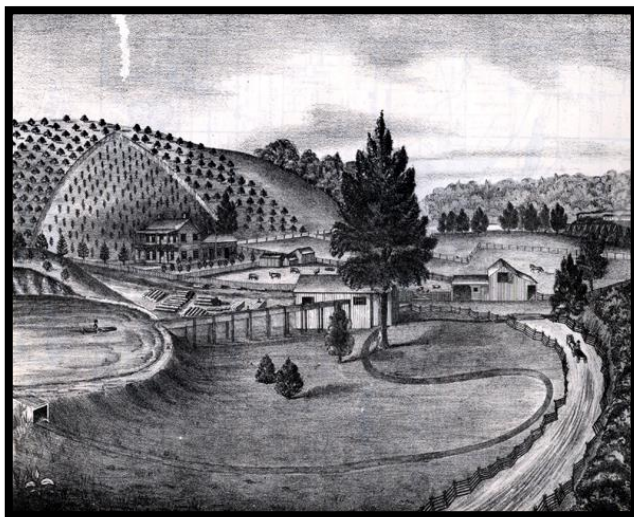
The Saints suffered through the winter of 1838-39 wondering what the future held with nowhere to go and their leaders confined to jail, but by spring, the Prophet had been allowed to escape from prison. He and other church officials made their way to Quincy, arranging for the purchase of lands on both banks of the Mississippi River where the Saints could begin again.

Joseph imposed a new city plat over the small town of Commerce, renaming it Nauvoo in the spring of 1839, issuing an invitation for members to gather both in the new church headquarters as well as the surrounding farming communities. Billa managed to claim a prime city lot in Nauvoo at the corner of Partridge and Hibbard Streets<sup>36</sup> where he built a log home and set up his forge. Blacksmithing proved to be a solid business in such a growing town, and Billa was kept busy making small household items and repairing wagons and tools.

Billa and Mary Ann demonstrated their commitment to the Lord by attending services every Sunday and serving the community during the week. Like the other men of Nauvoo, Billa worked one day in ten on the construction of the Nauvoo temple. Mary Ann joined the Nauvoo Relief Society, contributing her time and talents toward supporting the needy.<sup>37</sup>



***Billa Dickson's lot in Nauvoo was only a few blocks from the Mississippi River.***



*A prosperous farm near Pleasant, Indiana.*

## Visiting the Arvins

Mormons were not the only people leaving Leeds County in the late 1830s. When long-term political grievances in Upper Canada exploded into an open revolt, many residents chose to relocate in the United States. John and Samantha Arvin were among those who left Ontario in June, 1839, travelling to Pleasant, Indiana, a small farming community forty miles south east of Lake Michigan's shores.<sup>38</sup> Mary Ann was thrilled to learn her family was only two hundred miles away from Nauvoo, and she convinced Billa to visit the Arvins as soon as his harvest was in that year.

It was a joyous reunion. Samantha was delighted to spoil her little granddaughter, and looked forward to the upcoming birth of Mary Ann's second child, due sometime after Christmas. Billa and Mary Ann lingered in Indiana for several months after Albert's<sup>39</sup> birth, but with spring planting coming on, the Dickson's finally left for home at the beginning of March.<sup>40</sup> Months of consistent and gentle persuasion had failed to convince the Arvins to accept the Book of Mormon, and Mary Ann left her family with a heavy heart.

## Troubling Events

Like many Nauvoo families, Billa and Mary Ann farmed property outside the city limits, alternating their residence between the two as needed. Mary Ann enjoyed life on the Dickson farm ten miles away in Camp Creek, where she spent much of her time helping Billa's parents run the place. It was on the farm where Mary Ann gave birth to Judson,<sup>41</sup> in 1843, and Alvira Aurelia<sup>42</sup> three years later, assisted by her mother-in-law.

Unfortunately, living outside of Nauvoo became increasingly dangerous as anti-Mormon sentiments increased with the church's rapid growth. Threatened by a surge of converts arriving from missionary efforts in England and Wales, the old settlers of Illinois banded together against the Saints both in the press and in scattered attacks on outlying settlements.

Billa was one of Nauvoo's men-at-arms who helped guard the Prophet from his enemies,<sup>43</sup> but in the end opposition was too great. Joseph Smith, his brother Hyrum and several other church leaders were ordered to stand trial in nearby Carthage, where they were jailed in June, 1844. Four-year old Albert remembered being told by his father to "look at the Prophet's face and never forget it" as Joseph and Hyrum rode out of Nauvoo, a story he recounted for the rest of his life.<sup>44</sup>

The martyrdom of Joseph Smith on 27 June, 1844, plunged Nauvoo into deep depression as the Saints struggled to understand how they could carry on without their beloved leader. To make matters worse, a power struggle arose as several men tried to assume the role of prophet on their own, including one of Joseph's counselors, Sidney Rigdon. Billa was present during a prayer meeting when, as Brigham Young addressed the congregation, his voice was miraculously transformed into that of Joseph Smith's. Bill related this witness of the Lord's blessing on Brother Brigham as prophet many times to his children.<sup>45</sup>

There had been talk for some time among church leaders about the wisdom of leaving Nauvoo for points farther west where the Saints might finally find peace. Now, with ever escalating hostiles being visited upon members across Illinois and Iowa, preparations for departure were made in earnest. President Young promised to begin the evacuation in April, 1846, but continued threats finally forced the first group of refugees to leave Nauvoo in February.

Billa had no choice but to abandon his home and property, leaving him with few options to support Mary Ann and the children. He joined with his father and brothers, who all found work and lodging several hundred miles north in the lead mines of New Diggins, Wisconsin. Two years of work in the mines coupled with strict saving resulted in Billa having enough cash to purchase a wagon, a team and a flock of sheep,<sup>46</sup> resources he used to begin the move west.

The Dickson's first stop was on rented property half way between Wisconsin and church headquarters at Kanesville in Monroe County, Iowa, where their fifth child, William,<sup>47</sup> was born in the spring of 1850. The family then moved on to Big Pigeon, one of the many farming communities surrounding Kanesville, where Billa bought a farm the next year and successfully raised three crops of corn.<sup>48</sup> Profits from the crop and the eventual sale of the farm resulted allowed Billa and Mary Ann to join other members of the Dickson clan in Kanesville for the final push to Utah in 1852.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>32</sup> Herbert Dickson, "Autobiography of Albert Douglas Dickson," undated typescript prepared from Albert's 1911 dictation to his son, Able Dickson. Copy held by Shelley Dawson Davies.

<sup>33</sup> "John Dickson (1781-1860)," undated typescript, Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, Salt Lake City, Utah. Copy held by Shelley Dawson Davies.

<sup>34</sup> Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, *Morgan Pioneer History Binds Us Together* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Documart Printing, 2007), page 56, 58. , Utah. Copy held by Shelley Dawson Davies.

<sup>34</sup> Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, *Morgan Pioneer History Binds Us Together* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Documart Printing, 2007), page 56, 58.

<sup>35</sup> Samantha Jane (Dickson) Van Orden Farrell Hanley (1838-1916), #KWVC-9XQ, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>36</sup> Nauvoo Land and Records Office, Nauvoo, Illinois, 8 May, 2014.

<sup>37</sup> "Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book," 27 May, 1842, page 56, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/nauvoo-relief-society-minute-book#!/paperSummary/nauvoo-relief-society-minute-book&p=53>

<sup>38</sup> Narlynn Nielsen Dickson, *Dicksons of the Scottish Diaspora: Notes on the Ancestry of John Dickson 1781-1860* (South Ogden, Utah: self-published, 1998), page 7.

<sup>39</sup> Albert Douglas Dickson (1840-1923), #KWZM-FDK, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

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<sup>40</sup> Dickson, editor, *Dicksons of the Scottish Disposia: Notes on the Ancestry of John Dickson 1781-1860*, page 7.

<sup>41</sup> Judson Stoddard Dickson (1843-1910), #KWVC-9XH, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>42</sup> Alvira Aurelia (Dickson) Henderson (1846-1924), #KWJY-8NR, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>43</sup> Lois Dickson Anderson, "John Myers: Blacksmith and Pioneer of 1852,"  
<http://www.meredithroots.org/Documents/0048-0002.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, *Morgan Pioneer History Binds Us Together*, page 59.

<sup>45</sup> "Short History of William Henderson Dickson,"  
<http://dwjacobson.org/showmedia.php?mediaID=198>

<sup>46</sup> Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, *Morgan Pioneer History Binds Us Together*, page 59.

<sup>47</sup> William Stuart Dickson (1827-1911), #KWVS-DB3, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>48</sup> Albert Douglas Dickson, "Autobiography of Albert Douglas Dickson,"  
<http://www.dwjacobson.org/getperson.php?personID=I153&tree=Jacobson>



## Chapter 3

# Pilgrimage Road

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### Bound for Zion



*Moving a wagon train across rivers was always time consuming and often dangerous.*

**B**illa, Mary Ann and their five children were in good company under Captain John B. Walker's direction: they were travelling to Zion as a family.<sup>49</sup> Billa's mother had died the previous year, but his father John was willing to walk the thousand mile trail west along with his children and their families. John Myers, chosen as sub-captain, was travelling with his wife, Sarah, and two-year old daughter, Tyresha.<sup>50</sup> John's sister Sarah Myers Lindsay<sup>51</sup> and the extended Lindsay clan added another seventeen family members to the wagon train.

The Walker Company pulled out of Kanesville on the last day of June, 1852, one hundred wagons strong, accompanied by numerous milk cows, horses and the Dickson's herd of sheep. Their first challenge on the trail was ferrying people, wagons and animals across the Elkhorn River, a process which took most of the day using an abandoned flat boat discovered at the river's edge. Only two wagons

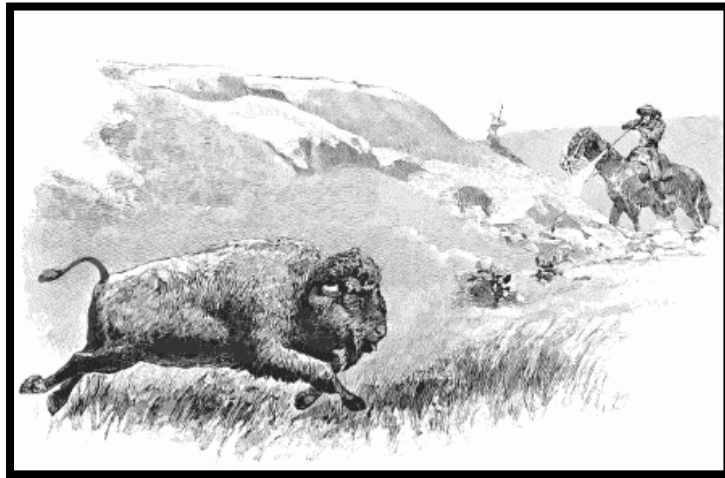
could be loaded at a time, and with each crossing the flat boat was carried downriver a quarter of a mile, forcing men to pull it back to the starting point with ropes.<sup>52</sup> Smaller streams were crossed by lashing together willows to form makeshift bridges for the wagons.<sup>53</sup>

Men shouldered the work of moving the company forward every day, rounding up cattle and circling the wagons at night for protection against Indians, who at one point “set fires all around us,” according to immigrant Chester Southworth. “They were so close our faces and clothing were black from flying ash.”<sup>54</sup> The women prepared breakfast, lunch and dinner over open fires fueled by buffalo chips, washing dishes and packing up supplies after each meal. At every stream, wives and daughters scrubbed dirty clothing, lining the banks with laundry to dry in the sun. Keeping track of the smallest children was a constant challenge, one which Mary Ann partially solved by corralling two-year old Willie in an upside down table stashed in back of the family’s wagon.<sup>55</sup>

Among the many hardships and risks to be faced on the trail, the most dreaded was disease. Two weeks into the Dickson’s journey cholera overtook the group, eventually claiming thirteen lives. “The wayside was marked by graves—more frequent than milestone in the old States,” recalled George Hicks. “We hurried along as fast as our ox teams could be made to travel so that we could get out of the stricken district.”<sup>56</sup> Loved ones were buried in soon to be forgotten graves as the company was forced to move on.

It wasn’t long before buffalo appeared on the horizon. There were only a few animals at first, but even one kill would feed the company for days. Billa joined a group of men who rode out on the hunt, taking with him the beloved family dog. “The men...shot and crippled one bull and our dog took up the chase of the injured buffalo and melted itself and died,” said Albert. “We children mourned the loss of our noble dog, and the hunt was unsuccessful for we got no buffalo.”<sup>57</sup> Several days later the men successfully brought down an animal, which was equally divided among the company. “After this we saw them every day and got one any time we needed meat for there were thousands of them and we would stop the train and watch the vast herds passed,” said Albert, who recalled how dangerous hunting could be for man as well as beast when his father and several other men failed to return to camp one night. “This greatly alarmed the rest of the company and I never expected to see my father again. The next morning a search party was organized, but before they could get ready to start, the men came into sight carrying all the best meat they could.”<sup>58</sup>

Several weeks later, twelve-year old Albert joined Billa on a hunt that nearly killed them both when they were charged by a herd that “came straight toward us up a hill for we were on top. When within fifty yards of us, Father shot and killed one and the others came on in their mad rush, not seeing us ‘till their hoofs were nearly on us. They just parted enough to keep from killing us. We went down to the buffalo which Father had shot and found that he was not dead and Father had to finish him with a butcher knife... We got back to camp after dark.”<sup>59</sup>



***Billa was skilled at hunting buffalo on horseback, providing the wagon train with enough meat to survive the trek.***

When Billa wasn't hunting, driving his team or keep track of the sheep herd, he was often found helping others with repairs. Blacksmithing on the plains wasn't easy, but could be accomplished by digging out an earthen anvil and making do with tools on hand. When the company ran out of tar used to grease wooden axles, enough sap was extracted from pine logs to last the rest of the way. Billa often set tires, replaced oxen shoes and patched up broken wheels, even for those who belonged to other wagon trains. On one occasion he “took a piece of wagon tire and a drill and with four rivets made the mend and then made a fire and set the tire and it came through to the valley,” said Albert.<sup>60</sup>

After fourteen weeks of walking, the company finally travelled through Emigration Canyon in the late afternoon of 3 October, the setting sun flashing across the Great Salt Lake in the distance. The city itself was little more than “a few houses scattered around,” said

Albert, whose first thought at the sight of the settlement was, “Great Heavens, do I have to live here the rest of my days?”<sup>61</sup> Whatever doubts Billa and Mary Ann may have had about their new home, they were grateful to be in Zion at last.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>49</sup> John B. Walker Company, Kanesville, Iowa to Salt Lake City, Utah, 26 June-2 October, 1852,. Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel Index, 1847-1868,

<http://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/companyDetail?lang=eng&companyId=309>

<sup>50</sup> Tyresha Mary (Myers) Woolsey (1822-1870), #KW83-YBL, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>51</sup> Sarah Hancock (Myers) Lindsey (1800-1852), #LH8W-H32, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>52</sup> Lois Dickson Anderson, “John Myers: Blacksmith and Pioneer of 1852,”

<http://www.meredithroots.org/Documents/0048-0002.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> Sarah Southworth Burbank, “Autobiographical Sketch,” 1924,

<http://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/trailExcerptMulti?lang=eng&companyId=309&sourceId=6226>

<sup>54</sup> Chester Southworth, “Autobiography,”

<http://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/trailExcerptMulti?lang=eng&companyId=309&sourceId=2218>

<sup>55</sup> “Short History of William Henderson Dickson,”

<http://dwjacobson.org/showmedia.php?mediaID=198>

<sup>56</sup> George Armstrong Hicks, “Family Record and History of George A. Hicks,”

<http://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/trailExcerptMulti?lang=eng&companyId=309&sourceId=12163>

<sup>57</sup> Herbert Dickson, “Autobiography of Albert Douglas Dickson,” undated typescript prepared from Albert’s 1911 dictation to his son, Able Dickson. Copy held by Shelley Dawson Davies.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

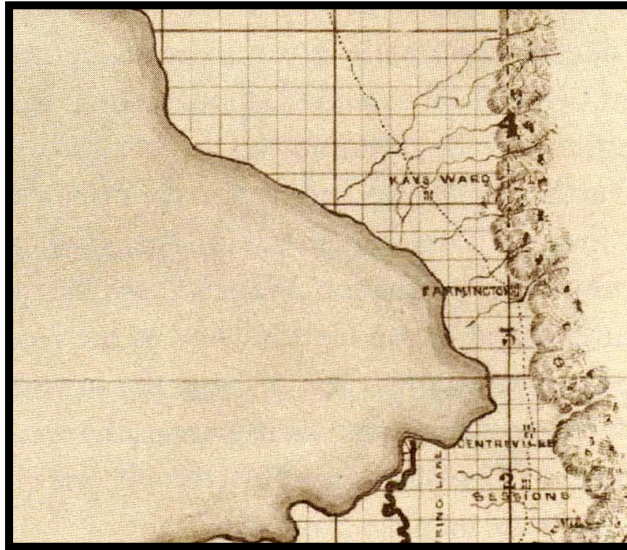
<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter 4

# Strength of the Hills

## Home in Utah



*Early Davis County, Utah, showing Kays Ward, which later became the towns of Kaysville and Layton.*

It was only natural for Billa and John Myers to pool their skills and resources in this new land. The men built a pair of log homes and a blacksmith shop in America Fork, where they supported their families by working iron that first winter, followed by farming the next spring. Billa and John, noticing the lack of farming equipment in Utah, constructed their own thrashing machine in 1854, and moved to the more established agricultural areas north of Salt Lake City the same year. The thresher was in demand all during harvest season in Centerville, after which the men found work removing snow from grain and hay stacks during the winter.<sup>62</sup>

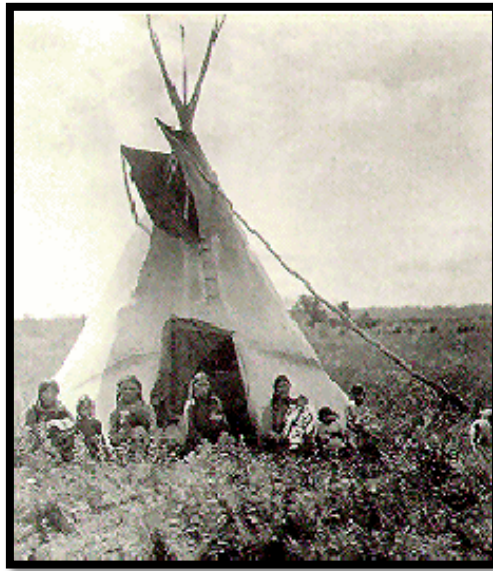
While haystacks meant work for men, they were a child's playground, and the Dickson boys spent many happy hours clamoring up and down the stacks. One day when his parents were away from home, five-year old Willie and his friend were playing on a haystack propped up with two-tined pitchforks. "After playing some time, we

became tired and decided to get down,” said William. “I, boy-like, thought I would jump off, but in so doing I fell directly on one of the upturned tines. It pierced my body just above the left hip. I hung suspended while my companion ran for help. . . Of course I was very ill for several days, and nothing it seemed could be done for me. I was just gradually wasting away and everyone said that it was impossible for me to live. One day I had been much more restless than usual and had been carried from room to room several times. Turning on my bed, I saw a man standing in the middle of the room. He was talking to Mother and asking the privilege of administering to me. Mother gladly consented and offered to go for someone to assist him, but he said he needed no assistance. He came over and knelt down by my bed and placed his hands on my head and blessed me.

“Though the words have gone from my memory, I shall never forget the feeling that came over me. It was the most blessed, holy feeling I have ever experienced. When he took his hands from my head, I was instantly healed. There were no days or even hours of waiting, for I was entirely well from that time on. In appearance the man was just ordinary, neatly dressed and a little above the average in height. We do not know where he came from, no one saw him come or go, but we do know that he was sent by the Lord to head me.”<sup>63</sup>



*Billa and Mary Ann Dickson*



*A family of Shoshone Indians outside their dwelling in northern Utah.*

## Indian Peacemaker

Not long after Willie's miraculous recovery, Billa moved his wife and children farther north to a barely settled area near Kays Creek Hollow, where the Dicksons were one of only six pioneer families living in what is now Layton. Although the Indians growing melons along Kays Creek seemed peaceful, the settlers took the precaution of protecting their log cabins with a wall of rock, dried mud and mortar, just in case. This "Little Fort" was built on a rise and near the only tree large enough to serve as a lookout in case of trouble.<sup>64</sup>

The first sign of unrest began when a "sham battle" of flying mud daubs erupted between a group of boys from both camps. When it ended in bloody noses for the Indian boys, the incident threatened to escalate into a conflict between adults. When Billa was chosen to make peace with the Indians, he took with him little Willie as a gesture of good will. The longer the negotiations dragged on, the drowsier Willie became, until he finally curled up and went to sleep right next to the chief. "Leave papoose here," said the chief when Billa bent down to retrieve his little boy. "He'll be alright until morning. Come back in the morning and get him." The longer Billa tried to persuade the chief to let him take the child home, the more determined the chief was to keep Willie all night.

Mary Ann was beside herself when Billa returned without Willie, and as soon as daylight broke the next day she woke her husband and sent him down to the Indian village. Billa arrived at the chief's teepee so early he had to wait outside for the chief to wake up. "Papoose is still asleep. You'll have to wait until he wakes up," insisted the chief, so Billa was forced to be patient for a while longer. Finally, the teepee flap opened and Willie came running out. "Now we know we can trust you because you leave your papoose in our camp all night," said the chief, satisfied the conflict between the two settlements was resolved.<sup>65</sup>

Billa's harvest during his first year in Layton was encouraging enough for him to buy eighty acres of property near the Wasatch foothills where he built a cabin in 1856.<sup>66</sup> Willie, in the meantime, continued his childhood adventures. One day after somehow managing to tie a rope around a skunk, he brought it home, explaining he had found a pretty black and white cat. He spent the next several night sleeping in the granary. On another occasion he caught a fox, which he placed in his mother's cellar along with a dog and cat to see the fur fly.<sup>67</sup>



*Billa and Mary Ann Dickson*





*Morgan County is still a beautiful rural area even today.*

## High Mountain Home

The Dickson farm in east Layton turned out to be on prime property where both grain and fruit trees flourished, the perfect place to finally settle after so many years on the move. Mary Ann busied herself with caring for her home and children as they grew and Billa earned extra cash with his threshing machine, the first one in Layton. With the oldest children married and living nearby, the Dicksons might have remained content on their farm, but by 1863, opportunities in Morgan County were tempting. Albert, who had moved his new wife to Richville the previous year, encouraged his parents to join him.<sup>68</sup> Not only were the high valleys well-watered and fertile, but the thick forests and rushing Weber River in Hardscrabble Canyon made lumbering a profitable venture. Rail crews laying track across Utah required thousands of ties, keeping lumber men busy, and during winter farmers like Billa could find work harvesting trees.

Billa and Mary Ann moved one last time to Richville, where their productive fields surrounded the cabin and blacksmith shop Billa built himself. He also had a hand in constructing the town's first school, boarding teachers in turn with neighboring families.<sup>69</sup> Billa's blacksmith skills were always in demand, and he eventually served as both water master and justice of the peace over the years.<sup>70</sup>

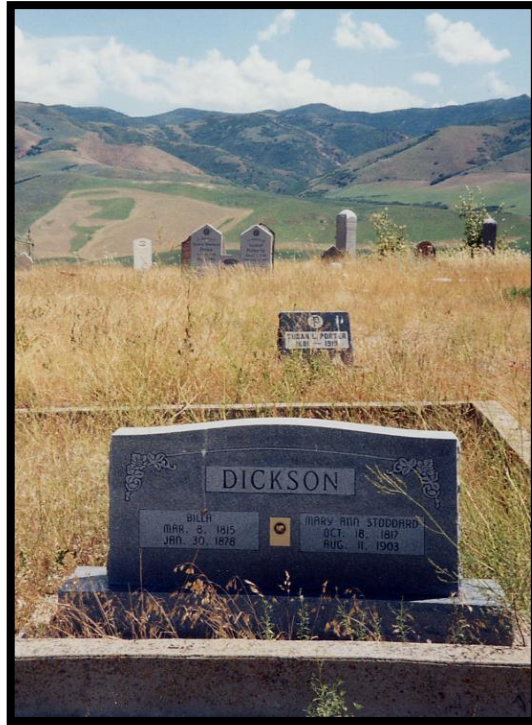
Commerce in Morgan County continued to boom, and with the transcontinental railroad's completion in 1869, exporting farm produce and importing manufactured items made for good business.

Billa and Samantha Jane's husband William Farrell<sup>71</sup> teamed up the next year to capitalize on the situation, building what became the largest of nine sawmills in Hardscrabble Canyon, where much of the county's lumber was processed.<sup>72</sup>

Mary Ann's days remained filled with cooking and caring for her home, with the added pleasure of acting as midwife as grandchildren were added to the family. Samantha became the mother of six, Albert and his wife Nancy<sup>73</sup> had nine children. Alvira gave birth four girls and two boys before she and her husband William Henderson<sup>74</sup> left for southern Utah. Mary Ann also attended other young mothers throughout Morgan County, and was long remembered "with high regard" for her skills.<sup>75</sup>

Willie and John eventually married local girls, and Mary Ann was on hand to help plan their wedding celebrations 1872 and 1877. Billa was slowing down by then, but he still made his morning rounds in the barnyard and walked his property checking fences. Occasionally he dropped by the mercantile store to play a game of checkers and swap news with old friends. The winter of 1877-78 was particularly difficult for him, and his health failed as the snows deepened until he could no longer rise from his bed. Billa died at the age of sixty-four on the last day of January, 1878.

Mary Ann, who had spent her entire adult life at Billa's side, was lost without her husband and companion. She took great comfort in her children and grandchildren, especially Albert and his family, who lived on the neighboring farm. She remained in her humble valley home for the next twenty-five years, serving family and friends as she always had, with her hearty cooking and unconditional love. She died content in her greatest contribution to God's kingdom: six children and fifty grandchildren, who mourned her passing on 11 August, 1903. Mary Ann was buried next to Billa in the Porterville cemetery.<sup>76</sup>



*Bill and Mary Ann's grave in Porterville.*

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>62</sup> Herbert Dickson, "Autobiography of Albert Douglas Dickson," undated typescript prepared from Albert's 1911 dictation to his son, Able Dickson. Copy held by Shelley Dawson Davies.
- <sup>63</sup> Reta Davis Baldwin and Laura Jane Davis Auble, compilers, *Davis Family History, 1831-1947* (self-published, Ogden, Utah, 1982), page 200.
- <sup>64</sup> Dan and Eva Carlsruh, editors, *Layton, Utah: Historic Viewpoints* (Salt Lake City: Moench Printing, 1985), page 36.
- <sup>65</sup> Forde Dickson, "Billa Dickson, Indian Peacemaker," from *Morgan Pioneer History Binds Us Together* (Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, Salt Lake City, Utah, undated), <http://dwjacobson.org/showmedia.php?mediaID=197>
- <sup>66</sup> Near 1363 North Highway 89, in East Layton. Interview with Harris Adams, 26 June, 2001. Transcript held by interviewer Shelley Dawson Davies.
- <sup>67</sup> Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, *Morgan Pioneer History Binds Us Together* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Documart Printing, 2007), page 63.
- <sup>68</sup> Dickson, "Autobiography of Albert Douglas Dickson," undated typescript. Copy held by Shelley Dawson Davies.
- <sup>69</sup> Mrs. William Chadwick, "History of Morgan County: Richville," Utah Centennial Commission, 1947. <http://dwjacobson.org/histories/article%20of%20history%20pg%201.pdf>
- <sup>70</sup> Baldwin and Auble, compilers, *Davis Family History 1831-1947*, page 190.
- <sup>71</sup> William Farrell (1838-1895).
- <sup>72</sup> "Short History of William Henderson Dickson," <http://dwjacobson.org/showmedia.php?mediaID=198>
- <sup>73</sup> Nancy Elizabeth (Shipley) Dickson (1840-1927), #KWN2-ZYN, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>74</sup> William Jasper Henderson (1840-1919), #KW81-S95, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>75</sup> Baldwin and Auble, compilers, *Davis Family History 1831-1947*, page 184.
- <sup>76</sup> Grave N-10, Porterville, Utah, cemetery. Phyllis J. Martin, *Death Record: Morgan County Cemetery-Burial Records*, (self-published, 1984) page 52.

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supplied 1997 by Monte J. Davies.

Stoddard, Mary Ann. "Judson Stoddard-Samantha Martha Hodge family group sheet,"  
supplied 1997 by Monte J. Davies.

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