

History of Susannah Thompson Clark

Susannah Thompson was born September 30, 1836 at Birmingham, Warwickshire, England, to Joseph Lewis and Penelope Thompson. She was the eldest child in a family of twelve children.

At age 10 or 11 she moved with her parents to London. Her father was a silversmith. Susannah was a cute little girl with dark hair and fair skin.

One day when Susannah went to visit her aunt who was a Quaker, she helped wash and dry the dishes, she put them in the cupboard, then she went up stairs to make beds. Soon she heard, "Susannah! Susannah!" The voice was shrill. Susannah ran down into the kitchen as fast as she could, thinking something awful had happened. Her auntie ask, "Hast thou ever seen little birds flying on their head?"

"What?" asked Susannah, perplexed by the question.

"Hast thou ever seen little birds flying on their head?" Her auntie pointed to the plates standing in the plate rail. They were decorated with little birds. When

Susannah had placed them, she had not noticed that the birds were upside down. "Turn the dishes around," said her Auntie, so Susannah arranged the plates in their proper order.

As a young girl Susannah and her family knew all about the dreaded diseases Diphtheria and Small Pox. The people of the day thought that the diseases were air born, they also thought that the pure night air cleansed the air born disease; it was at night that the bodies of the dead were removed. Susannah used to lie in bed at night and listen for the sound of the horses' hooves and the wagon wheels, taking the bodies of those who had died that day to their resting place. To Susannah this was a terrible memory and it stayed with her all her life. No wonder when her little son James was suffering from Diphtheria, she just carefully put her fingers down the child's throat and tore out the false membrane, even so she injured the tissue. James was always of a tenderness, but to Susannah, she had saved his life. A doctor's book was her prized possession. It went everywhere with her. She studied it very carefully; she watched for signs of ailing or sickness; a disorder was her cue. She began treatment.

Her father was chosen by Aines and Cater Silversmiths to go to Providence, Rhode Island to install and operate the machines. He left his family and brought four workmen with him.

It was on the 21st May 1855 that four of the children came to America, on a ship named *Robena*. The ship's skipper was Charles Bartlett; they arrived at New York Harbor the 21st May 1855.

From the passengers list:

#	Name	Age	Sex	Profession
126	Susannah Thompson	19	F	Dressmaker
127	William Thompson	17	M	Brother
128	Jane Thompson	9	F	Sister
129	Ann Thompson	7	F	Sister

Michael & Susannah Clark



After landing, the small children along with Susannah and William went to Providence, Rhode Island, the date being 24th November 1855. Her mother, along with the rest of the children, arrived at New York Harbor 24th December 1855. Susannah told her daughter the following story: When Mother Penelope's 11th child Benjamin was born the 27th August 1859 "A cat smelled milk on the child and sucked his breath away." Penelope saw the cat jump off the bed just minutes after and Baby Bennie was dead. He was buried the 8th May 1860 in the Providence Cemetery, Rhode Island.

From a daughter-in-law, Sarah Clark, we learn this delightful story about how Michael and Susannah meet. "Susannah's father owned a hotel and rooming house in Providence, Rhode Island. Sometimes Susannah would dance to entertain the guests. She danced in the town Opera House the night her husband-to-be first saw her and fell in love with her. Michael Joseph Clark, who played at the Opera House, went to her dressing room after her ballet number to meet her; but was astonished to see her father sitting by her door. The father informed Michael J. that his daughter was no cheap girl and if he wanted to meet her, he would have to be presented in a proper introduction. Two weeks later this was arranged."

On the 16th August 1857, Susannah married Michael Joseph Clark. He was the son of Patrick and Mary Ward Clark. Both Irish, and both Catholic. Susannah's family was LDS. "Mike" was a musician with good training. His ability and technique were considered excellent. Six weeks after the marriage Michael's mother, Mary, died from the effects of a chill taken while bathing, leaving his father Patrick alone. Patrick took his wife Mary's death very hard to bear; he was left with just two children Michael and Peter. Peter went to the Civil War and was never heard of again. Patrick's young daughter Margaret had preceded her mother in death.

Now, left with just one son, father and son became known as Pat and Mike. Susannah did everything to keep this good relationship going.

On the 12th of June 1858 Susannah's first child Mary Susan was born. 28th of April her second child Alfred Joseph was born. In June 1860, at age 2, little Mary Susan died with pneumonia following whooping cough. She was buried in the same grave of the Pawtucket cemetery with her Grandmother Mary Clark.

In 1860 Erastus Snow and Parley P. Pratt were missionaries in Providence, and it was these two Elders who first explained Mormonism to Michael Joseph Clark. He was baptized in September 1860 by John Crompton, according to his daughter-in-law Sarah Clark.

On the 10th of June 1861 the exodus to Utah began. Leaving Providence, Rhode Island were Susannah, Michael, their son Alfred Joseph and Grandfather Patrick Clark. Along with some of Susannah's family they went by rail to St. Joseph, Missouri, and by steamer to Florence, Nebraska; it was there that the emigrant train started for the west. The Clark family joined the "Independent Company under Captain Wooley. Patrick refused to travel with the Mormons. The Thompsons came with the church train under the direction of Ira Eldredge. The Clarks left July 1, 1861; by October 1, 1861, they had arrived in Logan, Cache County, Utah.

While crossing the plains, about one month into the journey, Susannah and Michael were walking about a block behind the company. They were weary of the journey but "Mike" urged his wife on, as they were getting too far behind. Susannah said that she didn't care. "But," said Mike, "there may be Indians lurking about near."

"I'm not afraid of Indians," she answered.

"Then look behind you," said Mike. When she turned to look she saw an Indian coming up close behind them. With a scream she ran until she was safe with the wagon train again.

Susannah walked most of the way, carrying her young son Alfred. She gathered “buffalo chips” to make camp fires and did other chores that the pioneers had to do. They gathered food along the way. Things that were eaten were Yampa, a root like parsnips; Sego lilies, a bulb like an onion; silvery green thistle cut and peeled, a stalk like celery; dandelion greens, leaves like spinach; fruits were elderberries and chokecherries, native black currants and wild strawberries. Their meat consisted of bison, fish and other big game. Grandfather Patrick once shoot a crow which tasted very good.

After arriving in Logan, they lived in a dugout which was scantily furnished and located west of Main Street on Center. This is where Susannah gave birth to her son John Peter.

In 1862 her father and mother were making arrangements to come west and bring the rest of the family. They journeyed to Logan to be with their daughter Susannah. By 1862 this became home for the Thompsons. Here they lived for two years.

By 1863 Susannah’s brother Henry had left home and gone to the mining towns of Montana. Susannah and Michael also decided to travel to the mining towns of Montana. With gold being discovered in Virginia City, Montana, Michael, thinking to better their conditions, moved his family to there. Traveling north at this time he found only a wagon track to mark the way. The Bear River, the Snake, as well as other streams had to be forded. It took faith to ford these rivers as there were five in their wagon, none of whom could swim. However, no accident happened; and after six weeks of travel, they arrived at the mines. Upon arriving there they made contact with Susannah’s brother Henry.

Before leaving Logan, Susannah gave her father the family cows and other household comforts. She also had him move into her dugout home. Here the Thompsons lived for about a year, before moving to Clarkston, founded in 1864. Grandfather Thompson considered this a debt, and later gave Susannah and Mike the city lot in Clarkston where the John P. Clark Home stands (now owned by John Clark, a grandson). He did this ten years later when Susannah and her family returned to Clarkston from Montana.

While in Virginia City, Mike and Susannah’s fourth child was born. They named him James Michael Clark. He was the first white child to be born in Virginia City, Montana.

Michael didn’t like to work in the mines, so he pursued his musical ability. He played for the Catholic Church, and he taught music lessons.

The next move the Clark family made was to Helena (Last Chance Gulch), Montana. Here on 1st May 1870 their fifth child, Laura Penelope, was born. By this time their eldest son Alfred was proficient enough in his music to play leading cornet in the Helena Band. About now disaster hit. The sudden unexpected misfortune of fire destroyed Mike’s place of business. Here is what daughter Laura relates: “The flames were big. The fire started in the Chinese section and the wind spread the holocaust to my father’s theater and dance hall which adjoined Mr. White’s tavern (My father and Mr. White had a partnership arrangement). Burned was our beautiful piano, valued at \$700.00 even in those days. My parents were discouraged.” When Joseph Lewis Thompson learned of his daughter’s fate, he sent word to her and told her to come to Clarkston. “This is a pretty spot. Come make it your home. I’m getting old and I want to see you again.”

As they left the mining towns, Mike and Susannah packed their wagon with their remaining luxuries. These were used to brighten the family’s dwelling; also, the folks traded them for necessary items. Stage scenery from their theater and a piece of linoleum under the stove’s legs decorated Susannah’s kitchen. Silk dresses and a parlor stove were exchanged for a

cow, some chickens, a pig, some farming tools or whatever. Susanna loved to fix up a trade; Mike did not.

She taught folk dancing as well as other forms of dancing; the Sailor's Horn Pipe, Highland Fling and Irish Lilt were three. Susanna could step dance well. Some of the young ladies who were her pupils were: Mary Anne and Laura Shumway, Catherine Heggie and Susannah's own daughter Laura. Susannah was stage make up and costume mistress for the Clarkston Dramatic Association. At times, she was coach and assistant stage manager. Her experience in the mining towns of Montana had qualified her for this. She sang well and knew many ballads by heart. These she taught her children. A quote from John J. Shumway; "Jimmy and Dolly impressed me with their duets, especially 'Scotch Lassie Jean.'"

When they first came to Clarkston they lived in a dugout on the lot given to her by her father (When Maynard Clark, a grandson dug his basement for his home, he found the old dugout there). They also lived on two different ranches. One was at the head of Birch Creek, where they built a home; to this home they added a lean-to for Grandfather Patrick so he could have his own room private room. The other was a few miles north and west of the Clarkston Cemetery, at a place called "Up the Creek." The last one was where she was living at the time of her death. Again a quote from Brother Shumway, "I was a small boy. I was impressed with her hospitality and her recognition of me -- just a child."

Daughter-in-law Sarah Clark quotes the following: Shortly after returning to Clarkston, because this couple had been away from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints so long in Montana, and Michael Joseph had been playing in the Catholic Church, they decided to be re-baptized. This took place on 1 August 1875, which is the first baptism date for their son John Peter. The family believes that the boys and Susannah and Michael were all baptized the same day. Laura was not because she was age 5 years old.

Susannah was a good nurse, mid-wife, and helped care for the dead.

Susannah was said to have long beautiful black hair. She was a sweet and kind person; it was a pleasure to be in her company.

Shortly after visiting her new granddaughter, Laura Susannah Griffiths born 28 May 1899, she took ill with "Tick Fever." It is also called Rocky Mountain Fever. She died 13 June 1899. Her daughter Laura Penelope could not attend her funeral because in those days ladies, recovering from childbirth, were kept down at least three weeks. So the attending mid-wife made a prop in bed. Laura was supported by this and looked out of the window to watch as the funeral procession went by. This was always a sad experience to recall. Susannah's grave is in the Clarkston Cemetery. Son John Peter made the original headstone. He also wrote the epitaph. (The weather wore out the writing on the stone and a new stone was placed there.) It read:

In Loving Remembrance of Susannah Clark.

Oh let us think of all she said
and all the kind advice she gave,
and let us do it now she's dead
and sleeping in her lonely grave.

Her husband Mike lived to be an old man. Like his father Patrick he never re-married. He died April 30, 1927 at Clarkston. He was laid to rest by her and his father Patrick Clark.



Susannah Thompson Clark

