

LIFE HISTORY OF JOSEPH ELIJAH FORDHAM
BY HIS DAUGHTER GRACE FORDHAM ALLEN OLSEN
OF SALINA, SEVIER CO., UTAH

PIONEER OF 1850

His parents were Elijah Fordham, born March 8, 1798, died September 17, 1879. His mother was Anna Bibbins Chaffee, born March 24, 1811. Joseph Elijah was born November 21, 1847 in Des Moines, Iowa. He died August 3, 1929 in Salina, Utah. He was the seventh child in a family of twelve. His people were among the first to join the Latter-day Saints Church in New York. I do not know much of their activities there nor when or where they moved to during the time they were in the early rise of the church until they went to Nauvoo, Illinois. While there, my grandfather carved the oxen which held up the Baptismal Font in the Nauvoo Temple. Joseph traveled across the plains in Captain Edward Hunter's Company, going strong through the trails those faithful pioneers were forced to endure and arrived in Utah November 30, 1850, settling in Salt Lake City, Utah. In 1861, President Brigham Young called them on a mission to help settle the Dixie Country and again many were the hardships they were forced to go through, traveling over the rough roads, or trails unbroken and very meager food supplies, but their leader had called them and they must obey. They arrived in St. George December 4, 1861, being the first wagon there to settle. The first night they were there, some people from the lower settlements brought them (the immigrants) up a wagon load of mellons and what a treat it was to them, as there had not been any frost yet. They got some cottonseed the next spring and the man told them to soak it over night, so they did and the next morning it had long sprouts on, but they planted it and raised a good crop as things grew so fast and they had been promised if they would keep the commandments of God and obey their leaders, they would be blessed, and they were. After a few years, my father's people returned to Salt Lake City. During this time, my father had grown to young manhood and was active in most kinds of work there in St. George and being a good carpenter and musician, he done much good. He was present when the first shovel full of dirt was raised and

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took part in the singing. His music, composed of violin, organ, and vocal. When President Young made his visit to St. George, my father and others would furnish the music for the dances and as Brigham was quite a dancer, he would always want a certain quadrill, but did not know the name of it, so he would say, "Brother Fordham, play Fordham." Now that tune has been handed down and my oldest son, Daniel B. Allen plays it in the old time dances now in Provo, Utah, but we don't know yet what the name of the tune is, only "Fordham". My father and mother became acquainted as young people in St. George and on July 10, 1870, Joseph Elijah Fordham and Mary Moore Bleak were married in the old Endowment House in Salt Lake City, Utah, traveling all the way by team over such rough roads as were in those days. They lived in St. George a short time where their first child was born. Then there was a new place forty miles up in the mountains, which was called Pine Valley being settled and as they were used to pioneer life, they went up there and established a home. My father being a good carpenter and farmer, soon made them a comfortable home as the timber was of a good quality and handy. He also took up a small farm. Then I, Grace, was born, and when I was four months old, one Sunday we went up about a mile above town to visit some friends and in some unknown way, our home and father's workshop which joined the house, was burned down leaving us without a home, clothes, or food, but our good friends and neighbors were very good to us. My father again went into the mountains and got timber and soon we had another home. He kept mostly to his carpenter trade and music. He taught music school, both instrumental and vocal. He would have them come to our house for practice. He would teach my sister the soprano and I the alto and when they came to practice, we would sing the songs and it would make it easier for them to learn, (she was about 6 and I about 4 years old). Pine Valley was a very cold place and the snow would completely cover the fences. So they decided to go to some warmer climate and by this time, two more girls, Emily and Nellie were born to them. They heard of a new place being settled by pioneers, which was called Potato Valley, in Garfield County which was afterward

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named Escalante after the great explorer. So they sold their home, farm and part of the furniture for another team and wagon and about thirty head of cattle and loaded the rest of our belongings in the wagons and we started for our new unknown home. The cattle were driven by a hired man and mother drove one team and father the other. The roads being so rough, and rocky, and with the cattle, it took us nearly two weeks to make the journey and we arrived in Potato Valley September 9, 1879. He traded one team and wagon to Jim Cunningham for some supplies and a yoke of oxen, but did not keep them long. We lived in a dugout that fall while he made us a house up the canyon. We had just moved into it when my mother had another baby girl "Lillie" but she only lived a month, being a premature baby.

The next year he purchased a lot in town from Edward Wilcock and got out some logs which he hewed and made us a good two-roomed house, the first wood house in Escalante. Going back to Pine Valley, while we moved there, he served in the Black Hawk War going through many privations and sometimes he would go at a moments notice to help protect their cattle and would be gone for days. I have heard him tell about once he was shaving and had only got half of his face shaved when the word came that the Indians were making a raid, so he jumped up and went without a hat or food and was gone nearly two weeks. This was before we left Pine Valley. Now back to Escalante and to his keen musical ear. Once some thieves broke into a house and stole a lot of things and among them was a cow bell. He had heard this man's cow go by many times with this bell on and knew just what key it was in, so they took him as a witness in court and he said if it was the one that was stolen from Wilcock, it was in the key of E flat, it proved to be the one and they convicted the men on this evidence. He worked mostly at the carpenter trade as there was a lot of building going on in the new settlement. My father helped erect the first wheat mill in Escalante. As they had no way of separating the wheat, it was all ground up together, sunflower and other weed seed making the bread very dark, sticky and bitter, but we were glad to get that as we had lived on corn for some time. Beside building houses and barns, he made lots of furniture such as

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bedsteads, tables, chairs, and many other useful things. In those days, caskets were all homemade and he made many and painted them black, and many a time in cold weather, he would bring them in the house before the fireplace to dry. During this time, there were two boys "Elijah and Amos" born. When the last baby, Amos, was born, my dear mother died on April 1, 1886. As he was not able to take care of we children, and make a living, he married a lady by the name of Emma B. Graff from Santa Clara, Utah. She was a very good step-mother to us and to this union there were three boys born, Karl, Eugene, and Albert. They were divorced in 1892. Later he married again, but they only lived together a short time and were divorced. Then he moved from Escalante to Grover in Wayne County but did not stay there long and moved to Salina, Sevier County, Utah where he married Susannah Deaton Durfee and to this union there were four girls and three boys born. Then they were divorced and he married another lady and on August 3, 1929, he died of cancer of the stomach and pneumonia.