

LIFE HISTORY OF MARY MOORE BLEAK FORDHAM
BY HER DAUGHTER GRACE FORDHAM ALLEN OLSEN
OF SALINA, SEVIER CO., UTAH

PIONEER OF 1856

My Grandfather was James Godson Bleak, born November 15, 1829, died January 29, 1918. My Grandmother was Elizabeth Moore Bleak, born March 6, 1828, died December 19, 1899. My mother was born in London, England on June 22, 1855. Mother was the fourth child in a family of ten children. The family of six sailed on May 21, 1856 for Boston in the United States of America on the ship "Harison." They landed there in time to join the Saints in crossing the plains. They came across the plains in Captain Edward Martin's Handcart Company and arrived in Utah November 30, 1856. Untold hardships were theirs while trekking along the trails of privations and were caught in the heavy storms of the winter where many died and many badly frozen. Grandfather suffered along with many others pulling the handcarts with his family and meager belongings; his feet were badly frozen and his toes and one heel dropped off which made it worse for grandmother and the children as her and the little boys had to pull the cart, but God was with those faithful saints and they were blessed to reach their destination in Utah. They lived in Salt Lake City and Ogden and vicinity about six years. Then they were called by their noble leader, President Brigham Young on a mission to southern Utah to help build up St. George. Grandfather was a good clerk, but was not strong enough to do very much manual labor. They left Salt Lake City, November 1, 1861 and arrived in St. George December 1, 1861, traveling over very rough roads and in winter weather and very scant supply of food. There were yet many hardships to endure as there were not very much raised as yet. I well remember my mother telling how, "We little children would go out and dig sego and other kinds of roots; also gather tender pig weeds and lucern and other kinds of plants and corn or cotton seed meal for bread and were thankful for it." She grew to womanhood and met her future husband and on July 10, 1870 she married Joseph Elijah Fordham in the Endowment House in Salt Lake City, traveling by team and over terrible roads but they were

happy. They returned to St. George where they lived until 1872. They then moved to a new place which was being built forty miles up in the mountains which was called Pine Valley where they lived and had many more hardships incident to Pioneer Life. In February 1874 their home, workshop and all belongings burned down, leaving them very destitute, but the good people of the town were very good to them and gave them food, shelter and clothing until they could make another home. I well remember my mother telling how Sister Whipple took a red flannel petticoat of hers and made me and my sister a dress and making me some stockings out of a pair of mittens of hers. My father, being a good carpenter and musician soon built another house as timber was handy and a good quality. Pine Valley was a very cold place and the snow would fall very deep and would completely cover the stake and rider fences. They decided to go to some warmer climate so in 1879 they sold their home, little farm and most of the household goods, they got two teams and some cattle they started for another new home, and as they were real pioneers, were not afraid to work. On their way they heard of a new place being built up and wanted settlers which was called Potato Valley, and afterwards named Escalante (after the great explorer) in Garfield County, Utah. They arrived there in the canyon above town where they thought they could take up a farm, and we lived in a dugout while father built us a house, and they had just lived in a dugout a while and moved into our new home when my mother gave birth to a premature baby, which only lived a month. There were no doctors or nurses so she had to just depend on neighbors, and while she was down we four children had whopping cough. The next year, father bought a lot in town and soon made us a good two-roomed hewed log house, the first wood house in Escalante, as there were only four adobe houses and the rest dugouts.

When the first Relief Society was organized my mother was chosen as a teacher and served many years, then as treasurer, which she held until her death. During this time, she was chosen first counselor to Mary Ann Schow in Primary. She had a lovable disposition and was so kind and thoughtful of the poor, needy and sick and would always take them many little dainties such as

PAGE 3
MARY MOORE BLEAK FORDHAM

raisin pie, cookies, doughnuts, a piece of pork, beef or venison, currant loaf, or whatever she could in the line of clothing, contributed freely to all the church organizations.

She was also a beautiful figure on the dance floor, being almost a perfect stature, 5 feet 6 inches tall and weighing about 160 pounds. I am proud to say I had a devoted and kind mother and never complained about the hardships she was forced to endure, both physically and mentally; she was very industrious, making all our clothes, bedding and in spinning yarn for our stockings and mittens and hoods. She was also a beautiful alto singer, taking part in the choir and other gatherings.

To the union of Joseph Elijah Fordham and Mary Moore Bleak, there were born seven children, whose names follow: Mary Bleak Fordham, born March 23, 1871; Grace Fordham, born October 21, 1873; Emily Adelia Fordham, born December 18, 1875; Nellie Fordham, born January 19, 1877; Lillie Fordham, born February 29, 1879; Joseph Elijah, born October 2, 1882; Amos Pierre Fordham, born March 11, 1886.

When the last child, Amos, was born and was three weeks old, my beloved mother died on April 1, 1886, in Escalante, Utah. She was buried April 3, 1886 in a homemade casket, painted black as was the custom in those days.

FOOTNOTE***As told to Ruth Allen Coleman by Joseph Schow of Escalante, Utah in the year of 1964:

Grace and Mary (Minnie) Fordham carried shingles up on the old Fordham barn and as they would go up the ladder to take them to Grandpa Fordham, the water from the soaked shingles would freeze their denim dresses stiff. This old barn was still standing in the year 1964 and belonged to Joe Schow and Leatha Porter Schow of Escalante, Utah.