

Caroline Amelia Owens  
9 July 1821 - 1 September 1895  
by Elaine Johnson

Amelia was the fourth child of James Clark Owens and Abigail Cordelia Burr. She was born at Warren, Trumbull, Ohio, just over forty miles southeast of the little town of Kirtland. Both of her parents were from New York state but had come to Ohio by way of Pennsylvania. As a child she moved with her family one county westward to Portage.

In 1831 her parents heard the gospel and were baptized that June. They moved their family to a farm outside Independence, Missouri, in the spring of 1832. In 1833 Amelia's family moved into town. That November mob violence forced the Saints out of Independence and across the river into Clay county. The Owens family was forced to remain behind for sixteen months. A powerful man and a mob leader wanted her father to finish building his store first. Amelia wrote an account of these times. They took place when she was thirteen years old.

Many of the Saints, it seems, are giving sketches of the experiences they passed through in common with the Church of Jesus Christ while in the state of Missouri, and each one published adds one more testimony to the sincerity and undying faith of that persecuted band of humble followers of Christ, who like their Master and Redeemer endured their sufferings patiently and were true to their God. Some even to death and others sacrificing all their earthly possessions over and over again, believing Jesus' words that nothing was gained if they would receive the whole world and lose their own souls.

Jesus asked, 'What will a man give in exchange for his soul?' We answer, the Saints in Missouri gave all they possessed several times over. Some their precious lives, others their liberty while others passed through untold sufferings and privations and are still living to sacrifice more if needs be for the Gospel's sake and are still bearing their testimony that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God and that Mormonism, so called, is the Gospel of Christ.

I was an eye witness to many of the hardships endured by the Saints and to the persecutions heaped upon them by their countrymen because they believed in a personal God and that He had spoken again from the heaven and had chosen us as his people.

I will never forget the terrible excitement when the mobbers came--about 400 or 500 men, all with guns. My father had just finished building our two story house near the printing press and the scaffolding had not yet been taken down. We went upon the house and could see all that took place but was not close enough to hear what was said. I saw W.W. Phelps' wife and baby thrust out doors and her house, together with the printing press, which was directly over her room, torn down. Her furniture and goods were scattered to the four winds. Every child in town had printing material to play with.

A few nights after that they went to William McLellan's house while they were away from home, and threw rocks at the house, broke windows and doors, tore open a feather bed scattered the feathers and all the clothing they could find, out in the street; then they tried to set the house on fire but got frightened and ran away before it got to burning good. It was put out by friends.

Soon after this the mob took father Brace, a revolutionary soldier, from his home and formed a ring of seven men around him and whipped him unmercifully with hickory switches. When they could not make him deny the truth they said that they couldn't kill a G-d Mormon so they let him go. He soon died after this beating.

When they tarred and feathered brother Partridge and Allen and dragged them past our house, I was frightened and took my youngest brother and ran to the nearest neighbor. The neighbor was one of the mob and the family seemed to think that they, the mob, was doing something to be proud of--that one hundred men had tarred and feathered two men." Afterward Bishop Partridge called to Amelia and another girl to bring them blankets to ward off the shock and cold.

About the same time some of the mob tried to set the Committee Store on fire. They tried it three times in one night but it did not burn. I remember that they passed by our house when they were going to the Temple Lot where they met brother Lyman Wight and the rest of the brethren and took their arms and ammunition away from them. One of the mob asked my mother to keep his coat while [he] was gone. She told him that she would not touch a thing that belonged to any of them. He swore, 'Then you're a G-d damn Mormon bitch.'

There was a man by the name of Brazeale who swore that he would wade in blood to his knees but what he would drive the Mormons from the country. He was shot and killed the same day that brother Dibble was wounded. The mob went to get his body and it was past twelve o'clock when they came back. They stopped in front of our house and cursed and swore that they would kill Owens and all his family, but they finally went on.

Zion's Camp was about to arrive from Kirtland bringing relief supplies and men to aid the Saints. "The mobocrats declared that the Mormons (Zion's Camp) were crossing the river at the upper ferry by the thousands and their intention was to kill every man, woman, and child in the country. But they, the mob said, intended to be the first at this and commenced their work by throwing rocks at our house. Our door was a very heavy one and was both locked and bolted. As they crashed it in, it fell on my mother and knocked her unconscious." They were favorite targets from then on.

Not long after this Amelia and her brother crossed the river to Liberty to visit friends. Those living in Liberty had heard the Owens family had been killed and were very surprised to see them walking around. When their mother made a similar trip, it enraged the mob to such a degree they forced the family from their home. They sent a note threatening to burn the house and kill her father if they didn't leave. Amelia and her family went to Liberty and lived there about a year. Then they moved to Caldwell county and helped build Far West. In the spring of

1834 Caroline Amelia was baptized by Brother Hinkle, the same Colonel Hinkle who later surrendered Far West and the Prophet to the mob.

Amelia wrote, "I witnessed the outrages of Far West and saw the army of thousands of mobbers surrounding the city. I saw the brethren give up their arms the second time and the horrid sight of dragging men from their weeping wives and children, and all because they believed in new revelation. We shared the common fate of all the Saints in being driven from the state. And oh! the destitution and sufferings endured by us in leaving Missouri! It beggars description-- no pen can ever write it!! I witnessed much sorrow on my weary way." She was eighteen when the rampaging mob overran Far West. Several hundred armed men ransacked the town, raping, whipping, and destroying everything in their path.

The Owens family found refuge in Quincy. Amelia was dancing on a stump during a gathering when two brothers from the Webb family saw her and began courting her. She chose to marry Edward Milo Webb in December 1839 when she was eighteen. The ceremony was conducted by Joseph Smith. In 1842 they moved to Payson, Illinois. Later they moved to Nauvoo and were members of the Nauvoo first ward. Among others in the ward were Alexander McRae, his wife and family, Sidney Rigdon, Orson Pratt, and their families.

During these years her husband served more than one mission in Michigan. Amelia's third child died as an infant in 1845. Caroline Amelia received her endowments in the Nauvoo Temple 21 Jan 1846, and was sealed to her husband the same day by Brigham Young.

When the Saints were driven from Nauvoo, the Webbs stopped first in Winter Quarters. Then Milo and Amelia went to Missouri where her husband worked to earn money for the trek into the wilderness. Amelia gave birth to two of her children in Linden, Clay, Missouri.

They began the trip west with two wagons made by Milo and a hired man to drive the second one. They were in the last company to leave Council Bluffs in 1852. Their captain was Uriah Curtis. Cholera raced through the wagon train. Milo was called upon to administer to a young woman and Amelia pleaded with him not to go. She said in later years it was the only time she ever asked him not to do his duty. Milo died that night and was buried in a rough coffin near the Platte river, Nebraska. He appeared to her in a dream not long afterward and comforted her. She was told the baby boy she carried would be a great comfort and joy to her. He was born seven months and seventeen days later in the Salt Lake Valley.

Thirty-six years later she wrote the following in a letter to him. "Delly, I can hardly realize that you are the little babe that came to me in my loneliness now that you are grown . . . and have such a big family . . . when your father died the spirit whispered that you would be a boy and a great blessing to me." The hired man deserted them when her husband died so Amelia and her oldest son, Marcellus, drove the wagons. He was only nine years old. Five year old Eddie drove the twenty-three head of sheep. Her oldest daughter Cordelia, only eleven years old, was probably charged with her three year old sister Caroline.

Upon reaching the Valley she settled in Cottonwood for the first winter. They moved to Fillmore in 1853. To care for her children she worked as a tailor and seamstress, raised a garden and made butter and cheese. She was also one of the first teachers in Fillmore. Prices were high and goods scarce but she was able to support her young family without any help. She was living in Fillmore 25 August 1855 when she signed her property over to the church to follow the United Order. Her property comprised ten acres, a yoke of oxen, two cows, twenty sheep, one wagon, a rifle, her house and lot, and furniture. The total was valued at \$362.00.

During the winter of 1856 she married Bishop Alexander McRae. It was a plural marriage. At some point his first wife became so jealous and enraged he asked his councilors to stand guard over Amelia's house to protect her life. She gave him two children. They lived briefly in Salt Lake City, but fled back to Fillmore when Johnston's Army came. She bought land near Kanosh and she and her brother Horace moved there. She lived in Millard county at the time of the 1856 territorial census. Later, when she sold the land, the man who bought it never bothered to pay her. She lived briefly in the town of Deseret until it broke up and then moved to Fillmore for the remainder of her life. Francis Adelbert "Delly" Webb wrote his memories of his mother.

Mother was a cultured and refined woman of stately carriage and pleasing personality; a woman who never uttered words of discouragement or complained of her lot, or talked about her sorrows though she passed through terrible trials in the Missouri persecutions. In her widowhood and pioneering of Utah, mother endured many privations and hardships. In all her work in earning the living and taking care of her family she was always clean and neatly dressed and always wore a white collar of some sort. Her house, too, was orderly and clean even though at first she cooked over a fireplace. (Later she sold two cows for money to send across the plains for a cook stove, then when it arrived it wouldn't bake.) In Fillmore she was known by all as, 'Aunt Amelia McRae' and because of her pleasing, agreeable ways she had many friends.

I can never remember of seeing my mother idle or despondent. She was always cheerful, hopeful and happy. She loved a good joke and liked to talk with people who had something worthwhile to talk about. And, because she read and studied much, she was an excellent conversationist. Whenever one of the family obtained a new book or magazine all her children in town would gather at her home where they kept reading it until it was finished.

How I loved to hear my mother sing! and with what inspiration she used to read to us children from the Book of Mormon, and how understandingly she could explain it to us!. Is it any wonder that I idolize my mother and reverence all women for her sake?

I never saw my mother angry but twice. One time was when two Indians came to the house and asked for something to eat. She gave them all she had then when one of them raised a bow to shoot her because she didn't get more, though she had explained over and over that there was no more, it so aggravated her that she grabbed the broom and pounded him good. The other Indians called him a "sqawman" for letting her do this to him, but fearing the same treatment,

themselves, they quickly ran away. The next day the three returned and demanded a shirt to compensate the Indian for the beating mother had given him. This time Uncle Jim was there and he drove them away with threats that he would 'skin them alive' if they ever came back. And they never did.

The territorial capital building in Fillmore is now a museum. One exhibit is a portrait of Caroline Amelia and a display of her needlework. She was known as an artist whose canvas was her needlework. She also did some painting.

The funeral of Sister Caroline Amelia Webb McRae was held at the meeting house in Fillmore, Utah on Tuesday Sept. 3, 1895 at 11a.m. Bishop Calister presiding. The procession from the dwelling: First, the Fillmore Band, next, the sisters of the Fillmore Relief Society,-- the hearse with the body,-- the family and friends in carriages. The house was crowded.

Services opened by the Quire singing, "Morn Not For Thee". Prayer by Josiah Greenwood. Singing by the quire. Elder Joseph Robison was requested to speak. He had been acquainted with sister McRae for 41 years. Was married at eighteen years to Brother Webb who died on the plains and whose body lies near the Platt River. She came to the 'Valleys' with her little ones and has gone through the hardships of settling up a new country.

Brother Callister then spoke and read from Doc. and Cov. what the Lord said of those who were driven and remain faithful. That promise was hers.

Singing, 'Farewell all Earthly Pleasures, I want no more of Thee'.  
Benediction by John Powell.

Nelson S. Bishop clerk