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My Life On Mountain Railroads

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steeped in the folkways of the land and seemingly enslaved to the pits. Boys and girls alike would enter the mines at eleven or twelve years of age. The women left upon marriage or childbearing; usually only death or disease released the men.

A temporary respite occurred in the case of my grandfather, Richard John Goold (called “Dick the Devil”) who as a young man ran away to the army. After several years as a foot soldier in colonial India, he came back to the valleys to dig coal. Upon his return he married Sarah Perrin. They had two children, Ellen and Christina. But life in those mining towns overwhelmed Sarah Perrin Goold, and she died, leaving two tiny daughters in the care of Dick the Devil. Shortly thereafter Dick married my grandmother, Elizabeth Lewis, the daughter of William Lewis, who had relocated from his native Pembroke to work in the mines of Glamorgan.

Elizabeth Lewis Goold took Ellen and Christina as her own, and shortly thereafter Elizabeth, a determined woman who could read and write both English and Welsh, recorded the birth, in December 1888, of her first son in the registrar’s office in Merthyr. In a bold clear hand she wrote his name, William John Gilbert Goold (later changed to Gould). William was for her father; John was for his father; and Gilbert was from a source known only to the Lord and to Elizabeth Lewis. All his life the boy preferred to be known as Gilbert. It was the only name, except some nicknames he acquired on the railroad, I ever heard his mother or anyone else apply to him.

About the time Gilbert was born, a new influence was at work in the Goold family. This was the Mormon Church, more properly the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I do not know who was the first of the Goolds to join this church, but I do know that my great grandfather, John Gulliford Goold, was a member, as were his children, including Dick the Devil. I assume that Elizabeth Lewis Goold was converted by virtue of her marriage into the family because there is no record of her father, mother, or siblings joining. Nevertheless, she was to be among the most faithful of the Goold clan.

Mary Goold, my grandfather’s sister, was the first of the clan to respond to the Mormon call to “gather unto Zion.” Family tradition, oral history, says that she immigrated to Salt Lake City in the 1880s when she was in her late teens. There she found employment as a domestic in the home of President John Taylor, where she met George Reynolds, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy and secretary to the president of the church. Elder Reynolds was also something of a scholar and an early Mormon scriptionist. She subsequently became his wife in a polygamous