Recollections of Past Days
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And with that, in the middle of a dangerous wintry trek down the mountainside in American Fork Canyon, Patience Loader Rozsa Archer abandons her readers and abruptly brings her autobiography to an end. Remarkably, her fascinating manuscript terminates at a point some fifty years before her life ended; she has shared only half of her wealth of knowledge and experience. But what a half!

Fortunately, we can pick up the threads of the story to at least get her down the mountain, and from that point on we can piece together bits of information from a few documents and several written remembrances of others who knew her.

Patience made the remainder of the trip down from the Miller mine on a bobsled, the horse using the railroad as a track. The following year, 1873, when she was forty-six years old, she took a position as cook for the Deer Creek Mine, also in the American Fork Canyon, where she provided meals for thirty men.1 This time she took her children with her, and each of them worked for a salary which she paid and which they saved, since there was no place to spend the money. They used their earnings to provide clothing for themselves the next fall. Her daughter Amy Rozsa recalled that Patience worked very hard to support her family, and often said that she did not feel poor so long as she had flour and wood.2 Certainly a survivor of the Martin handcart company would never again take for granted such fundamental staples.

Her years of hardship also prompted in her a determination to do the best she could to provide for her future and that of her children. In 1878 the American Fork Canyon Wagon Road Company sold five thousand shares of stock. Beth Olsen writes,

The only stock certificate that has turned-up out of the projected 5000 shares sold is this [photocopy attached to letter but not included here] to Mrs. John Roza, July 12, 1878 at the time of the road company’s reorganization when the railroad was taken out of the canyon. On the back of the certificate it is written that she paid
$17.50 and worked for the other $2.50 to finish paying the price of $20. It appears possible she may have again gone into the canyon to work, perhaps this time to cook for the road builders.\(^3\)

Through her thrift and industry, Patience accumulated several lots of property in Pleasant Grove, upon some of which she raised fruit to help support her family. When the city of Pleasant Grove decided to build a tabernacle, Patience sold to the church for four hundred dollars a piece of her property for the construction site. When the Grove Ward chapel cornerstone was opened in the fall of 2004, the deed for the tabernacle property from Patience to the church was discovered—and reinserted into the new cornerstone, where it will remain for perhaps another hundred years.

Sometime in about 1878, when she was fifty-one years old, Patience married John Archer, whom she had met many years before in England prior to her conversion.\(^4\) John’s first wife had emigrated to America but refused to continue on to Utah; Patience was to be his third wife. After her marriage to John Archer, Patience no longer had to work outside her home to support herself and family, and according to family tradition, she and John were happy companions until he died in 1909 at age eighty-six. He is buried beside Patience in the Pleasant Grove City Cemetery.

Patience also maintained lifelong close relationships with all her American siblings, visiting in their homes and they in hers. George Harris and John Jaques’ journals mention reciprocal visits, as well as cooperative business transactions between their families and Patience’s. Appendix 7 is a letter from Patience to her sister Tamar, in which she discussed her labors in researching family names for genealogical and temple work, mentions concerns about family situations, and in general demonstrates the closeness of the sisters even into their years of agedness.

As she had intimated in recounting her early experiences working in England where she left positions because they were “loansome,” Patience was always a social being and enjoyed filling her home with visitors. And she especially loved children. Amy wrote,

Our home was a place where children and young folks could come and have a good time. We used to have our parties and dances in our home. The halliday boys or Frank Fenton and Joseph Eaton would furnish the music and all the children in our neighborhood would be invited. They always asked some man to come and take charge when we had dances. The refreshments were popcorn, molasses candy, cookies, doughnuts, and apples.\(^5\)

Upon the death of her cousin Ellen Croxford, Patience took Ellen’s infant son Barton to raise. She also provided a home for a child named
George Hathaway). After her second marriage she assumed the loving care of her stepdaughter, Zilpah Rebecca Archer. Some years later she and John Archer also adopted another daughter, Ruth, who was born in 1901 and was left intentionally on Patience’s doorstep to be raised. Amy says of Ruth, her adopted sister,

She adopted a sweet little baby girl, Ruth, whom she raised to womanhood and dearly loved as her own. Ruth was active in school and church duties which was a great joy to Mother. . . . She said, “Ruth is a comfort to me and will be a blessing to you, Amy. You will both have to love and help each other["]. . . . Mother told Ruth if she got married, which she did, she was always to look out for me and Ruth said she would do so, and I can say she has kept her promise to Mother and we are happy together.

Annie Pearl Loader Davis, granddaughter of Patience’s brother John, also remembered her great-aunt with fondness. She wrote:

Aunt Patience was an ideal person. She would have me come from the school house to have lunch with her.

In the morning she would put her hair up in kid curlers or papers and after her work was done she would take a nap. Later she
would undo her hair and put on a lovely dress and sew quilt blocks. She made one[,] an old log cabin quilt[,] from men’s ties.

Sometimes after conference in the Tabernacle, she would have us over for dinner. She would have all of the food on the table and we would pass our plates to her. Aunt Patience would dish out the food. It was old English style. She would put the apple sauce on the meat and hand you back your plate. She would say the prayer over the food and then she would say, “I want you people to know that I’m the hostess today and whatever I do I want you to be sure and follow me.”

She made delicious root beer. She had heavy copper kettles.

(17)

In addition to a busy social life with family, friends, and neighbors, Patience also involved herself in church and civic affairs. She served as president of the ward Relief Society, the woman’s organization of the church, where she apparently put to use the considerable skills she had learned managing a boarding house and taking care of household expenses during John Rozsa’s absence and after his death. Her efficiency and organization, as well as her ability and confidence in financial transactions, are evident, as Beth Olsen writes

[Pleasant Grove Relief Society records indicate that on] June 17, 1892, Patience Archer, set apart as the new president that day, called Annie C. Anderson and Sarah Foutz as counselors, and retained Pauline E. Brown as secretary, and Purdence Halliday as treasurer. In the July meeting, [Patience appointed] Karen S. Heiselt . . . as president of the visiting teachers. Some back receipts show that the Society paid out $110 . . . for the immigration of two English sisters, and they committed to pay $6 monthly to the Deseret Hospital Association. They also owned $307 in United Order Granary stock.

December 20, 1892, under the new presidency, the Pleasant Grove Society began to take on a new, organized business-like structure. Amy Rozsa was appointed Secretary for the express purpose of drawing up bylaws for a charitable organization, governed by written rules and a board of directors who served terms of four years.10

In 1898 Patience was elected treasurer for the City of Pleasant Grove, a position she held for two years (she was then seventy-one), and her term of office was followed by a term in the same position served by her daughter Amy.11

Perhaps her own struggles and trials made her especially sensitive to the plights of the less fortunate; she was concerned for the welfare of any who were poor, ill, or in difficult circumstances. Margaret Hayes says she
was “spiritually minded and valiant in teaching the Gospel of Christ both by deed and words.”12 She kept in touch by mail with dozens of missionaries, and received classes of young people, children, and adults into her home, where she would relate her life experiences and teach them the doctrines of her religion.

Patience posed for a formal portrait with her sisters at the time of the dedication of the Salt Lake Temple in 1893.

She remained vital and active throughout her life. She learned to play the organ in her later years (some sources say she was eighty, others ninety) and achieved sufficient proficiency that neighborhood children would come and hang on the fence to listen to her play. As the years mounted, neighbors and friends celebrated her birthdays as events, bringing gifts and refreshments. She continued spry and enthusiastic—and she kept a picture of Queen Victoria on her wall until she died.

Patience Loader Rozsa Archer passed away on April 22, 1922, and is buried in the Pleasant Grove City Cemetery, Pleasant Grove, Utah. Recognized even in her own lifetime as an important figure in Mormon history, her trunk, used for clothing and essentials during her travels as a military wife, is maintained and on display at the Daughters of Utah
Pioneers Museum in Salt Lake City. In Pleasant Grove the Daughters of Utah Pioneers have a dress Patience wore.

But besides her posterity, her greatest legacy is this manuscript—her autobiography. In her characteristic frank and descriptive style, she has given rare glimpses into history—given, as it were, a vivid view of specific poignant moments in the feminine human experience. With her firsthand recollections of nineteenth-century Victorian England, experiences in the Martin handcart company, the life of a military wife at Camp Floyd and in Washington, D.C. during the Civil War years, and cooking in a nineteenth-century mining camp, Patience touches on a range of important historical moments. Because of her superb storytelling skills and the beautifully crafted details she presents, she has become among the most frequently quoted and best known of all Mormon women personal writers.

From humble beginnings in the gardener’s cottage in Aston Rowant, England, and using her minimal formal education, she lived an epic journey and has created a record that should have an honored place in the annals of American history.
Patience Loader Rozsa Archer in about 1922. Photo courtesy of Shannon Stearn.