

Bernard & Louise Knapp
Family History

Little Mabel Hale

FROM THE FILES OF BERNARD ELDEN KNAPP

It was mid-March and much of the winter had passed. It had seemed long to little Mabel Hale. Most of the wood piled for winter use by her father and uncles had been carried into the house and burned. So now when she and her little brother, Joseph, went to carry wood after school to fill the big wooden box by her mother's kitchen stove they had to dig down below the crusted snow drifts to find the remaining blocks of wood. Now that the snow was crusted the trails to the sheds and corrals were easier to follow than earlier in the winter. They could even walk over the drifts without falling through. It was fun.

March seemed a nice month. There were still cold nights and winds blew over the snow covered hills turning their cheeks and noses red. They were thankful for the warm mittens and warm head coverings that Mama had knitted. The days were getting longer. After the chores were finished they had more daylight in which to play. Sometimes they would climb the hill behind their house and ride down on their wooden sled. From the hilltop they could see to the north and to the east to the pine covered mountains. Below were several dozen houses, a small church, and a store and post office. This little town of Marysville was nestled between some low hills in the rolling countryside not far from Yellowstone Park in southeastern Idaho.

Sometimes Mabel would ride to school in a wagon box that had been placed on a bob sleigh. The children enjoyed riding to school together as a father or an uncle of one of the children would drive the team of horses pulling the sleigh. Mabel's father owned the store. Children would sometimes gather eggs from their family's chicken coop and take them to the store and trade for candy. Other times their mothers would send them to the store to trade eggs for things they needed at home such as a spool of thread or perhaps a can of pepper. These were fun times for the children.

March was the month in which Mabel was born. This year she would be eight years old. A few houses away lived her cousin who would also be eight years old this month. One day after school instead of going home they went to the meeting house. This house was made of lumber. The men had hauled logs from the nearby mountains to a sawmill. Here the logs were sawn into lumber and everyone in the community had helped to build this meeting house where they went to worship. On this particular afternoon they went to attend a meeting just for boys and girls. Some were a little older than Mabel and some were younger. It was called a primary meeting. The teacher this day talked about Mabel and her birthday. She also talked about her cousin and his birthday. Then many of the children began talking about their birthdays. Did they talk about a birthday party? No. They talked about being baptized to become members of their church.

One evening Papa came home earlier than usual from the store. He and Mama talked to the children as they sat around the round stove in the front room of their house. They told the children that Mabel and her cousin would be baptized on Saturday. They talked about getting some white clothing to fit Mabel. They listened to Papa tell about when he was baptized. Papa told some other stories about pioneers and Indians. He told of catching wild horses and breaking them. Joseph loved these stories. They all listened carefully and quietly. They were very much interested. But the favorite stories to Mabel were the ones about Papa when he had been a missionary to Ireland. It sounded so far away and after all, it was clear across the ocean. And the ships were so big.

The Saturday came when Mabel was to be baptized. How excited she was! She thought about the trip to the river. She had never been to the river in winter time. She had gone there in the summer with Papa and watched him catch many many trout with a willow he had cut from the bank of the stream. She remembered how good they tasted when Mama cooked them in butter in the frying pan on the stove. How they sizzled in the pan. She learned that fish have many tiny bones and you must be careful to pick the bones out as you eat them.

After the sun had come up over the mountains to the east and the icicles began to drip along the edge of the roof, a sleigh stopped by their front gate. Mama hurriedly dressed Mabel in a long white dress and a heavy coat. Then Mama and Papa and Mabel went to the sleigh. There Mabel sat down on the floor of the sleigh box on a large warm quilt. She was also given a sleigh robe to put around her. Then the driver spoke to the team and they were off, trotting down the snowy road. At her cousin's house they stopped briefly where another sleigh was waiting. Soon her cousin and others came out and got into that sleigh and they were off again. It was a merry time with sleigh bells ringing and tug chains jingling on the harnesses. They left the little town climbing southward over a large gently rolling hill.

From the top of this hill it looked like they could see the whole wide world. It was all covered with white. To the east a high bank of mountains extended as far as she could see from the tree covered mountains to the north to where the mountains disappeared on the horizon to the south. Tallest among all these mountains were three majestic peaks. Standing quiet and cold were the Grand Tetons. As the teams trotted along their breath shot out from their nostrils like the steam from Mama's tea kettle at home on the hot stove. The river was still a mile away.

Soon the team slowed and began to pick their way carefully down a steep dugway to the Fall River. Mabel could see the river below as it wound its way around a hill and ran directly below them. Steam appeared to be rising from the river. Could it be warm? As the team was driven next to the river bank all could see hundreds of pieces of broken ice floating along like large flat pan cakes. Papa called it mush ice. Suddenly the river looked cold. A few clouds crossing the sky hid the sun for a moment. It seemed colder than ever.

Some men shoveled the snow from the river bank next to the sleighs and Papa stepped down into the river. Then one of the men lifted Mabel from the sleigh into Papa's waiting arms. She was no longer wearing a coat, only the long white dress.

Papa gently lowered her into the water. By the time her feet touched the bottom the water was above her waist. The cold water nearly took her breath away. Papa said a short prayer. Then he cradled her in his arms and laid her under the water. As soon as she was completely immersed in the water he brought her up out of the water and carried her to the river bank where eager hands took her and lifted her into the sleigh. Here Mama and her aunt surrounded her with a quilt and quickly removed her wet clothing and replaced it with dry. Then she was wrapped in a warm quilt. Her hair was dried with a towel and a sleigh robe placed about her.

Next her cousin was lifted out of the river into the sleigh following his baptism. She could hear his teeth chattering and see him shivering. His clothes too were quickly changed and he was wrapped in a sleigh robe. Papa was soon into the sleigh and the teams moved quickly to the road and climbed the dugway toward home. As they trotted along she noticed the clouds had now drifted far away and the sun seemed to warm them again.

Inside the sleigh box below the seats where the grown-ups were seated, Mabel sat tucked in the warm robes. She began to feel warm again, especially inside. When they came into town the sleigh stopped in front of the tallest house in the town. It was Grandma's house. How happy Mabel was! She always loved to go to Grandma's.

When she went inside Grandma was waiting with a big hug for her. Many of her other cousins were there and her big sister, Elizabeth, who was glad to see her. And Joseph with so many questions. Then Grandma told them all to take off their coats and sit down. She came out of her kitchen a few minutes later with a cup of warm cocoa and a cookie for everyone. How Mabel loved Grandma's treats. And these were her absolute favorites. Now all the cold was forgotten. She felt warm inside and outside too. It seemed like a birthday present to her.