

Chapter 9

Maria Louise Saunders Bell

MARIA LOUISE SAUNDERS trudged up the St. Peter's Catholic Church steps feeling weary beyond her twenty-one years. She was filled with such unwelcome sadness. The sultry air at the end of June 1864 hinted that the Missouri summer had started in earnest.² How cruel and unpredictable life was! Louise's dear friend Mary Alice had just died on the 27th during a fruitless labor to bear her second son, Robert. The effort ended in an untimely death for the young mother and the baby boy, an all too common result of childbirth in the 1800's. Her obituary is still touching, well over a century later:

Died, in Shelby county, on the 27th ultimo, Mrs. Mary Alice Bell, wife of John T. Bell, in the 21st year of her age. Her sickness was violent from the first, and soon developed fatal symptoms, from which the best attentions could not alleviate. In a few days, those who loved her best were gathered around her grave to witness the sad rites of a christian burial. From which we turn with a sorrowing heart to view the past. It is at this moment we view the closing scenes of this life - it is at this moment we realize the hour of parting - it is at this moment we feel the great blank left us by death! Ah! that blank is now seriously felt, but we have a hope beyond the grave. Yes, friends, Allie has left us, and gently, yielded her soul to the God that gave it. Thus has passed from time into eternal life, one who in the full bloom of womanhood feared not to bid a christian's farewell to this world; but entered with a full hope of a life immortal in the next. She left a kind husband, one child, disconsolate parents and numerous friends, to weep over her early demise. She was in life an obedient daughter, an affectionate wife and indulgent mother, and beloved by all that knew her. In our hearts we mourn our departed friend; but why should we weep when we believe that she has gone to receive that promised reward offered by the Saviour of mankind: "come ye blessed of my Father, possess the

kingdom prepared for you." Yes she has only gone to receive that crown her christian virtues so justly merits. For she can smile upon earth and in triumph proclaim -

Oh, heartless storm, I smile on thee,
Thus beating on my withered breast -
To death I meekly bend my knee.
For I am now by heaven's jewel's dress'd.
And yet, dearest sister; from those splendors there,
Wilt thou not sometimes lean,
And for us waft some Eden air,
On earth's dark lonely scene.
And wilt thou not when we must wing
Away from time's sad Isle,
Meet us with a kind ministering -
A sweet and tender smile?
And on thy struggling brothers here,
Send such sweet influence down,
That we can surely see thy sphere,
And bless thy fadeless crown.
That we may bravely meet each peal
Of life's war on this sod,
And 'mid the deepest agony,
Feel that trust in God

In fact, there is no hard evidence that Mary Alice Bell died in childbirth. There is no tombstone for the baby and the obituary doesn't mention anything about a child. Family tradition maintains that she had a baby boy named Robert who died the same day and was buried with her in the same casket.

It was just a scant three years before that Louise served as the bridesmaid for Mary Alice Eddings as she married John Thomas Bell. Tom and Allie had their first child in October 1862; a fine son named William Robert. Willie, as he was called, was named for Tom's brother William Robert Bell, who had joined or been forced into Quantrill's Raiders and was never heard from again. (Or was he the one buried in 1871?) Poor Willie was not yet two years old and already motherless.

² The weather on the day of the funeral of Mary Alice Eddings Bell is unknown. A typical day in June has been assumed for the purpose of story telling.

The church was filled with family and friends as the Catholic Mass brought to a close the brief life of Mary Alice Eddings Bell. Mother and child were gently sent to their eternal rest in St. Peter's Catholic Cemetery in Old Clinton, near the grave of Tom Bell's mother Mary Pulliam Bell. She had died just a few months before in April 1864. In short order, Tom had lost his mother, his wife, infant son and had grave concerns about the life of his brother William Robert who had disappeared into the Civil War conflict.

.....Tombstones

After the sad burial, the twenty-four year old widower, Tom Bell, tried to make the best of things and raise his small son. Even though he had family and friends around to help, it was surely a struggle to make a home for the boy while making a living as a farmer. By early 1865, Tom realized that he must have a solution. According to family oral history, he approached Maria Louise Saunders and said, "I'm not a man to beat around the bush. I need a wife and a mother for my son. Will you marry me?" Louise, who had been considering a vocation in the convent, quickly decided that her duty and future was with Tom Bell and his young son. Louise and Tom were married September 20, 1865, when Louise was 22 and Tom was 25.³

..... Tom Bell's family background

..... Maria Saunder's family background

..... The Civil War had just ended; the death of Abraham Lincoln.

Tom and Louise lived in the Lakenan, Missouri area for about eighteen months. Their first child Joseph Emory was born September 6, 1866. Tom's father had remarried in 1865 to Mary C. Worland Combs. Mary Worland was a sister to Lewellen Worland Jarboe. She had several children from her first marriage; reducing the inheritance Tom could expect to receive. In 1867 news came about the opening of lands held by the Osage Indians in Southeast Kansas. The Catholic mission there had existed since 1854 and was strongly established.

.....Osage Indian history and Osage Mission history

With the dimmed prospects of any inheritance in Missouri and the information about the new land in Kansas, Tom and Louise quickly decided to move west.

³ No record of this wedding has been found in Monroe County or Shelby County courthouses, but this is the commonly accepted date of their wedding.

The Catholic community was strongly in place in Osage Mission and they expected to find a supportive new life.

In 1867 Tom took the train from Missouri to Kansas City and then south to Osage Mission to scout out a new home for the family. On his first day, Tom met several citizens who would become leaders in the community. Tom learned the lay of the land and the process for staking a claim on one of the 160-acre tracts southeast of the settlement, near the Neosho River. He returned to Missouri to bring his family to their new home by covered wagon. A favorite family story is that the young Willie dropped the silverware out of the wagon piece by piece as they made their trip so they could find their way home! With the assistance of neighbors, Tom constructed a two-story cabin for his growing family. On June 28, 1868, Tom and Louise had their first daughter. She was named Mary Alice Bell in honor of Tom's first wife and Louise's best friend, Mary Alice Eddings.

On August 15, 1870, Tom Bell made his application to purchase his homestead for \$1.25 an acre. By now, there was a second daughter, Rose May, born April 29, 1870.

The purchase was final in October 1871 when Osage Land Certificate Number 998 was issued. In 1872, a third daughter, Susan Agnes was born on February 19th. The challenge to the purchase of the Osage Ceded Lands was settled and their lock on the land was secure.

Life on the farm was nevertheless precarious and a variety of threats, not least of which was the nearby Neosho River, was ever at hand. Drought, hail, floods and pestilence alternated in their destruction of the crops. Livestock suffered from these fluctuations as well. Infectious diseases were common and epidemic for humans: diphtheria, small pox and tuberculosis were just a few of the plagues that could wipe out whole families in a matter of days or years.

Father died in 1867

Section on Grasshoppers, 1874

Mother died in 1877

Her sisters and brothers in Monroe: Sally Taylor, Ella nurse, ...

His sisters Susanna and Mollie

His first cousins, the Doctors

Births of Loutie, Nora, Anna Laura, Tommy

1885 big flood – Willie and Emory

Willie goes to Republic MO for railroad

1887 Wedding of Willie and Mattie

1891 wedding of Mary Alice

1892 sending of Gertrude to Monroe

Prairie Queens photo

Homestead photos

St. Paul photos and history

1894 wedding of Emory

1897 wedding of Gertrude

1897 birth of Bernadette

1900 photo of Willie at Republic MO

1900 photo of horseback riding

Tommy is in California

1902 wedding of Rose May

1902 death of Angie Elliott Kendrick

1904 wedding of Agnes and Albert

1904 birth of Anna Lou

1906 Wedding of Nora and Bernard Cavanaugh

1910 wedding of Loutie

4-generation photo

1914 death of Maria Louise

... Shackleton trip in 1914, World War I summary

1917 move to town with Loutie

1918 death of John McAndrew

192? Wedding of Beatrice to Roy Greenwell

1926 death of Mary Alice

1926 death of Emory

1929 death of Tom Bell

Obituaries for Maria and JT Bell

1937 marriage of Loutie to Joe Volmer

1940 letter of Willie to Gertie about race

1941 sale to Ethel Volmer Grillot

World war stories

Daughters moved to California: Anna Laura, Nora, and Agnes

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Nine children blessed the union, and all of these were present at the funeral except T. R. Bell who resides in Oakland, California, and could not get home in time for the funeral.

The children present were: Mrs. Alice Beechwood, of Coffeyville; Mrs. Rose Bowles, of Liberal, Kas.; Mrs. Agnes Kendrick, Shelbina, Mo.; Mrs. Gertrude Jarboe, of Lakenan, Mo.; Miss Anna Bell of Kansas City; J.E. Bell, Mrs. Louise McAndrew and Mrs. Nora Cavanaugh of St. Paul.

The funeral services were held at St. Francis' church at a Requiem High Mass at 9 a.m. Sunday and was one of the most largely attended funerals held there in many days. Interment was made in the Catholic cemetery.

The bereaved relatives have the deepest sympathy of all the people hereabout.

(St. Paul Journal, November 26, 1914, microfilm roll S95, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.)

Oddly, her step-son W.R. Bell was not listed but he would almost certainly have attended and considered her as his mother since he was not yet three when Louise married his father.

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Deaths

Mrs. J.T. Bell was found dead in the poultry house at the Bell home southeast of this city Thursday evening. She had gone out to care for the poultry when she was stricken with heart failure and no doubt died instantly. She had not said anything about being sick and to all appearances was in her usual good health when she left the house.

Maria L. Saunders was born in Shelby county, Mo., in 1843. She was therefore 71 years old at the time of her death. She was united in marriage to J. T. Bell in 1865, at the Catholic church in Old Clinton, Mo., and came here with him in 1867 and settled on the farm southeast of this city where she still resided at the time of her death.

Mr. and Mrs. Bell were pioneers in this section. They endured all the hardships of pioneer life, but lived to see their labors bear fruit in many fold. The Bell family, since the early days, has been regarded as one of the best and most substantial families in this section, and Mrs. Bell did her full share in acquiring that splendid reputation.

J. T. Bell Dead

J. T. Bell, aged 89 years, one of the oldest settlers of this community, died at the home of his daughter Mrs. L. McAndrew, in St. Paul, Sunday evening, December 22, and was buried from St. Francis Church Tuesday morning, December 24, interment being made in the Catholic cemetery.

J. T. Bell was born June 1, 1840, at Lakenan, Mo., where he grew to young manhood, and on January 29, 1861, was married to Mary Alice Eddings. To this union was born one son, W. R. Bell, of Greenfield, Mo., who still survives. The first Mrs. Bell died in 1864. On September 19, 1865, he was again married to Louise Sanders [sic], who died on November 19, 1914. To this union nine children were born, those living are: Mrs. Rose Boles [sic], of Liberal, Kas.; Mrs. Agnes Kendrick, of Shelbina, Mo.; Mrs. Gertrude Jarboe, of Monroe City, Mo.; Mrs. Louise McAndrew, of St. Paul; Thomas L. Bell, of Berkley, Calif.; Mrs. Nora Cavanaugh, of San Francisco, Calif. And Miss Anna Bell, of San Francisco, Calif. Two of his children preceeded him to the Great Beyond, J. Emory Bell, of St. Paul and Mrs. Mary Beechwood, of Coffeyville.

Mr. Bell came to Kansas in 1867 preempted and proved a claim south and east of St. Paul which he owned at the time of his death, and where he lived until 1917, when he moved to town and made his home for the balance of his life with his daughter Mrs. McAndrew.

"Tom" Bell, as he was affectionately called by his many old neighbors and friends was one of the oldest settlers of this community and his memory was a storehouse of historical facts of this part of the country. In an interview with him printed in the Journal in 1922 he told of many interesting old time affairs. Of how he ate his first meal in Osage Mission at the same table with C. H. Howard, the first editor of the Journal, together with S. S. Warner, who had just arrived here by stage coach; of how he became acquainted with Capt. And Mrs. Ogeese and how they advised him how to go about securing a farm and of following their advise in the securing of his homestead; of how he freighted from Kansas City and Lawrence to this place, and of going to Uniontown to buy corn to feed his stock. Indeed Mr. Bell was one of the pioneers of this section and knew the hardships of the early days and of what efforts were put forth to develop this country to its present prosperous conditions.

T. J. [sic] Bell was one of our finest citizens, a God fearing gentleman, a contentious [sic] Christian, a man who made the world better by his living here. He is mourned by a host of loyal friends who are indeed saddened at this holiday season by his passing and who extend to the bereaved relatives their deepest sympathy.

(St. Paul Journal, December 26, 1929, microfilm roll S100, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.)

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