



John Rudolph Itten and Magdalena Schneider Itten

John Rudolph Itten

John R. Itten was born in Switzerland. He married Magdalena Schneider and came to Santa Clara with the original Swiss settlers. They had no children and their marriage was dissolved after a short time.

As part of an inheritance of his estate in the old, John R. Itten was given ten wind instruments valued at \$80. He made a gift of the set to the town of Santa Clara and with them the first band was organized under the able leadership of George Staheli who had a gift and training in music which few persons at that time possessed.

After his marriage to Magdalena ended, he married Madeline Justet in 1868, They had four children, three of whom lived to be adults.

John died in 1875 in Panguitch, Utah.

Magdalena Schneider

Taken from the history written by LaVerna Laub Bringhurst Johnson in April of 1995.

Magdalena Schneider was born 6 December 1838 in Utendorf, Bern, Switzerland. Her parents were Elizabeth Pfister or Phister and Fredrich Schneider.

Magdalena's mother Elizabeth Pfister previously married Christian Schiffman December 14, 1827, but he died in December of 1834, the same year her son Peter was born. Apparently she lost her first three baby girls also. In 1838 this sweet mother who had suffered so much sorrow married Frederick Schneider, father to Magdalena. Although we have no death date for Frederick, we are told that both of Magdalena's parents died. Her mother died 25 March 1841

when Magdalena was just three months past her second birthday. Family lore tells us that she and her brother Peter who was four years older were raised by Peter's paternal Schiffman family.

Magdalena was baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1857 at the age of nineteen.

In April of 1861 she came with a company of Saints led by Jabez Woodward from Bern, Switzerland to Liverpool, England. On 16 May 1861 Magdalena sailed for America with the first group of Saints to sail aboard the three decker clipper ship "Monarch of the Sea.

Their company, led by Jabez Woodward (or Woodard) was one of the two largest groups of saints to travel together to Zion. During the passage the 955 Saints were organized into eleven wards and lived together harmoniously. They came from many nations including England, Wales, Ireland, Scotland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, France, and Switzerland. There were eleven weddings, nine deaths, four births during the 34 days on shipboard. They arrived in New York on 19 June 1861.

Magdalena traveled by train to Florence, Nebraska, and then on to Utah with her group of adventurous friends. She walked much of the way across the plains when she came to Utah. They averaged fifteen to twenty miles a day, traveling six days a week and stopping to rest and worship on Sunday. Her brother Peter Schiffman traveled with her. They arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in September of 1861.

Peter had married in Switzerland. He and his family settled in the Logan, Utah area.

Magdalena married John R. Itten of Bern Switzerland shortly before they emigrated from Salt Lake City with the Swiss saints called on a mission to settle Santa Clara, arriving there in November 28, 1861. She was almost twenty-three years old.

John Itten had been gifted with a number of musical brass instruments as part of his inheritance from Switzerland. These instruments were shared with the community. They became a great blessing to the Santa Clara people.

The marriage to John Itten was not a happy one, and the couple divorced after a very short time.

Magdalena had a lovely singing voice, and sang in the choir that Harrison Pearce directed. Perhaps this is how they met prior to their marriage October 3, 1863 – just two months before her twenty-fifth birthday.

Six months later, on April 17, 1864 Harrison's faithful first wife, Henrietta Cromeans died, probably from the plague of fever that was such a terror to so many families in early Washington. Their youngest child, Henrietta, was twelve years old.

In 1865 Harrison was called to go with Henry Miller to the Beaver Dams to locate land and make it possible for others to come later to raise cotton and grapes. Eight other families followed Harrison and Magdalena's next lonely leap into isolation at the call of Brigham Young. Like the Muddy Mission forty miles further on, the impossibility of controlling the wild waters of the Virgin made the project short lived, and they were all honorably released.

Magdalena and Harrison Pearce's first child, Magdalena Elizabeth was born January 26, 1867 in St. George, Utah. On October 5, 1870 their second child Mary Abigail joined their family.

Harrison's oldest son, John David Lafayette Pearce became Colonel of the Iron and Washington Counties Militia in 1865. He established Fort Pearce about sixteen miles south east from St. George.

January 29, 1871 Magdalena Schneider Itten Pearce's first child, little four year old Magdalena Elizabeth, died, leaving her with baby Mary, just three months old, to comfort her.

Two years later on July 22, 1873 a son, Fredrick Harrison, was born. Grandma named her sweet baby boy after her father who died in her native Switzerland when she was just two years old.

But there were other family sorrows in Harrison's life. In 1872 his daughter Henrietta Pearce Hall had awakened to find her two week old baby dead in her arms. In 1873 Thomas Hall, her husband, died despite prayer and supplication. Harrison was there to comfort, and grieve with her.

The beautiful St. George Temple was completed in 1877. Harrison loved his carpentry work on these buildings that housed the gospel he and Magdalena had given their lives for.

Harrison left some evidence of his personality behind as he finished the Tabernacle staircase. This was recently discovered when workmen remodeling the Tabernacle found several scraps of wood with his good natured rhymes penciled on them:

"Today I close this little place
And throw this in to leave a trace
of me, the boy that done it.

Today is February the 26
Few to work, but they are all bricks.
This ends my little sonnet."

H. Pearce 1874

The second note read:

"The neatest thing I've seen today
Some little thing to lay away
In memory of this present day. . .
Come now, good fellow, what do you say?"

February 28, 1874

Harrison Pearce

This “boy” was 56 years of age, a musician – school teacher working as he felt the Lord would have him do in whatever capacity his skills might bless. These scraps of lumber with his rhymes can be seen today in a framed showcase in the St. George Tabernacle.

On April 18, 1875, just a year following these beautifully penned whimsical notes, Grandpa Harrison and Grandma Magdalena lost their darling two year old son, Fredrick Harrison.

Three months later, my grandmother, Mabel Lucy Pearce, was born July 12, 1875. That same year Brigham Young sent Magdalena’s husband on yet another pioneering adventure. He was assigned the task of finding a place along the Colorado River near where it converged with the Virgin River to develop a ferry site. The ferry was to be used to aid colonizers sent to develop areas of Arizona.

Harrison left his wife and family at home in St. George.

In late December of 1875 Harrison, along with 37 year old son James and 31 year old son Thomas, began this mission of finding a usable passage across land and river. They camped at Tasha Springs at an Indian Village. They were welcomed by many who had been converted to the church earlier by son James. All three were conversant in several native American dialects.

They traveled on, selecting a site that was within the Bentley Mining District, one mile from the Nevada border and two miles from the mouth of Grand Wash, the entrance to Grand Canyon. It was here that Harrison celebrated his 59th birthday on December 17, 1876 with friendly Indians, traveling prospectors, his two sons, and the road survey crew led by Jacob Hamblin that had arrived that day.

Jacob Hamblin wrote in his journal that they remained at the river two days and “assisted Brother Harrison Pearce to construct a skiff with which we conveyed our luggage across while we forded our animals.”

This small skiff was sealed with pine pitch supplied by the Indians from Tasha. This first of various boats used to ferry passengers was navigated with hand hewn oars. As time went on Indians and miners were drawn to the site.

Magdalena and the family came to stay for long periods at a time from their Utah home. Their "Pearce's Ferry" home was a dugout, dug into the side of a sandy hill with rock walls and a wooden ceiling holding up heavy roof beams. On either side of the door were slit windows that made it possible to fire a rifle in case of attack. The room had a rock fireplace built into one wall. During the hot months cooking took place outside under a shaded camp site.

Harrison and Magdalena's daughter Mary Abigail (who became the wife of John Henry Miller) was there from ages five to twelve and remembered the area with fondness. She wrote: "There were quail everywhere. My father would call them like chickens. I used to go everywhere with him. He went out on a hill north of the ferry and got sand and washed out gold. The Indians had a farm on the Grand Wash and raised vegetables. They would bring vegetables and take back fish."

What comfort this darling daughter must have brought this father who loved music and civilized arts as they were together in the wilderness. They spent many hours exploring together.

Mary describes what they found: "Just back a little way there was a rock, had a flat top and there was marked on top like three men lying down with their arms and legs stretched out. We used to go up there and find all kinds of petrified things. We got rocks there to build a room."

Occasional small and large groups arriving to be ferried across the sometimes wild river kept Harrison at his post. He stayed there six years. Brigham Young died in 1877, and during 1878 Harrison's son James was called to another Arizona mission. He helped establish the town of Taylor, Arizona. Thomas left the ferry to become a rancher on the Arizona Strip at Mount Trumbull. He was killed at age 36 by a shooting accident on the strip.

Without his sons to help, aging Harrison Pearce found it difficult to stay on. When he came to town for supplies and to visit Magdalena and their family it left the ferry without a master. These were difficult days for him, and difficult for his sweet Swiss wife also. She gave birth to their last child, Emily Minerva April 12, 1880.

As Harrison's 64th birthday approached in December of 1882 he asked to be released from his "call" at Pearce's Ferry. Harrison gathered his family from St. George and his son James helped them make the twenty one day move to Taylor, hoping to make his declining years more comfortable.

Harrison and Magdalena had sacrificed many isolated years at primitive outposts as they did their part in "helping to build Zion". Even in Taylor they farmed hard and lived with scant provisions to survive. Here, Mary writes, Harrison served as Choir Leader, and taught Singing School.

Grandmother Magdalena served as Primary President while in Taylor. It has been difficult to learn more about the achievements of this musically gifted grandmother, but through the writings of her children we learn that she was brave, kind, and patient.

The Apaches were on the warpath around Taylor, and white men would give them anything they pointed at rather than fight them.

My grandmother, Mabel Lucy Pearce, told of two tall Indians coming to their home as their mother Magdalena was baking yeast bread. The Indians pointed at the bread and were given all of it, although it left the family very hungry.

Grandma Mabel hid under the bed, and said she could have reached out to touch their moccasins. They feared for their lives. And yet, Harrison had spent so many years among the Indians that his native friends had considered him a friend also, and came to him in time of hunger or illness.

Grandma Mabel told me that the only time she could ever remember of having a spanking from her kind father was when she refused to share a swing with some of the Indian children. She was scolded severely on another occasion when they made faces in tin cans and lit them with candles. . . which

terrorized the Indian children on Halloween. Harrison had great respect for the Indian people and would not tolerate an unkindness to them.

She told me that she could remember the time when the Indians of the area were gathered together and sent to a reservation. The Indians would pass their home in long lines and the women and children were weeping and wailing as they walked. It was a terrible sound to hear all the day long and into the evening. She called it "the trail of tears."

On May 29, 1887 Harrison Pearce died and was buried in St. George, Utah, leaving our Swiss Grandmother Magdalena widowed again at the age of forty-nine. Her three living daughters were seventeen, fourteen, and seven years of age at the time of his death.

Mary Married John Henry Miller September 16, 1893, raised a good family. She died 19 February 1965.

Mabel Lucy married handsome Minor Laub when she was 19, April 23, 1894. They had ten children. She died in 1952.

Emily married Heber Charles Atkin in 1897 when she was seventeen. She died 3 July 1901, four years after her marriage, and five years after the death of her mother Magdalena.

Magdalena Schneider (Schiffman) Itten Pearce died June 6, 1896 at the age of 55. She spent her last years in a wheel chair.

Harrison and Magdalena Pearce contributed their faith, intelligence, energy, ingenuity, and foresight to the colonization of southern Utah. They are buried in the St. George cemetery. We owe them a great debt of gratitude; however their names are lost as most map references have been incorrectly spelled "Pierce".

When Harrison's winsome verse was found under the Tabernacle stairs where he tossed them in 1874, no one could guess who H. Pearce might be. When the dedication stone was engraved in Santa Clara to those first settlers, no

one recognized the name Magdalena Schneider Itten and no photograph could be found.