

LIFE STORY OF RICHMOND ISON

by

Louie May Savage Ison

Richmond was the sixth child of Doctor and Elizabeth Fraley Ison. He was born 28 Feb. 1859 in what was then called Newcomb though the post office has now been changed to Isonville (Newcomb was in Morgan Co. until 1869 when Elliott Co. was formed) Elliott County, Kentucky. He married Martha Rice, the daughter of George Rice and Ester Hurst, on 13 Feb. 1879. Martha Rice was living with the Kitchen family when she married Richmond. In expressing his lonesomeness for Martha after she left, Mr. Kitchen would say: "When you take 90lbs. of Rice out of the Kitchen you leave a big hole." Martha Rice weighed 90lbs when she married.

When Richmond married, his father gave him 75 acres of land on Rocky Branch, a tributary of the Newcomb River. His land was located about four miles from the old home. That summer he farmed some of his father's cleared land and spent all the time that he could, while not working at his crop, clearing his own land, building a little log cabin which he and Martha moved into that fall. Many nights he worked by the light of burning limbs until well after midnight, cutting and felling timber. While he was chopping the timber, Martha did sewing and knitting for everything was done by hand those days. One night when Richmond was returning to his little home from his father's farm he was followed by a panther. The night was dark so all he could see was the two round eyes glowing at him through the darkness. He could hear the small limbs crash as it leaped from tree to tree and several time it dropped to the ground and he could hear the tread of it's feet like great cat paws. He finally secured a large hickory stick with an iron-like knot on the end and when the panther came too the close he would face around quickly wave his club towards it and then the bright eyes would go back into the darkness. In this manner he covered the four miles to his home. When he was within hearing distance he called his own large dog, Sheap, who came running and drove the panther far into the woods. In those days life was a constant struggle for mere existence.

Richmond and Martha were the parents of ten children. Walter was the first baby. He died when only a few hours old and was buried high on the hillside north of their little home, under a small hickory tree. The next child was Robert Lee who was born 9 June 1881. Then came Zebedee in 1883, followed by Hulda Jane. Just before Hulda's birth, Father Richmond decided to build a larger home of logs for his growing family. This home was on the hillside directly west of the first cabin. It had three lower rooms and two on the upper floor. The family moved into this house the night before baby Hulda Jane came. The next children

were David Franklin, Edward and Lucy who died in infancy and was buried by the side of Walter under the hickory tree. Then came Eva and Janetta.

About the time of Eva's birth a great change came into the Ison family. For several generations their kinfolk had all be staunch Methodist. Richmond was a steward of the church and Martha a very devote member. At this time two missionaries came to town preaching a strange new doctrine. Richmond went with his oldest brother, Anderson, to their meeting. They were sent by agreement of the town to mob the missionaries. "What right and those two men to come into their peaceful little mountain home and draw away their good church members into a strange doctrine that was ill-spoken of? Better tell them to get out of here and stay." But there was no mobbing that night for the words that Richmond heard sank deep into his heart, and he went home to think. The words of truth found fertile soil in the heart of an honest man and while "he went to mock, he returned to pray." The words they heard were the Gospel of Christ as taught by the Latter Day Saints.

Soon he and his wife were attending those Mormon meeting regularly, studying their literature and bringing the Elders to their home for entertainment. Richmond, Martha and their older children were baptized by Elders Judson I. Toleman and Matthew Spears on 16 May 1896, into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Yes, they were "in the Gospel net" and with all their kinfolk opposing them very bitterly.

It was hard for this family to live their new religion among their many relatives who felt that they were surely in the wrong, so Richmond began plans for coming West to be with those who believed as he did. But this was not an easy or quick thing to do. He was a poor man with a large family and it was more than two thousand miles to either Utah or Arizona. True, he owned 75 acres of hilly farm land in the mountains of Northeastern Kentucky. On this he could make a living for his family, but to sell it for cash was different matter. It took him almost two years to sell the land and get ready to leave, but he was a sincere, faithful Latter-Day Saint and during this time he worked as a teacher in the little Branch, called Ison Branch, of the church that was there. Its members were few and very scattered, so to make his ward teaching visits, he had to be gone overnight--his visits taking two days.

At last the home was sold to a neighbor, James Henderson Fraley, and his wife, Sarah J. Tucker. The cows, mules and scanty pieces of household furniture were disposed of. The saddest part of leaving was to go away from the two little graves under the hickory tree on the hillside. Yes, they must leave Walter and Lucy. On 5 Nov. 1899, they said goodbye to their two mothers, who still lived, their Aunts, Uncles and Cousins and started for Thatcher, Arizona. It was a tearful for although ridiculed by their relatives for the religion they defended,

still all hated to see them go. It was the first one of the Ison family to leave the old homeland since great grandfather, Archibald Ison, walked from Scott County, Virginia to settle on the Newcomb River in Elliott County, Kentucky in 1820, (Elliott Co. was not formed until 1869). But the scriptures tell us that "there shall be one of a family and two of a city gathered into the Gospel Net."

Richmond Ison had gone and he never saw Kentucky again in this life. "All men have the God-given right to think and believe as they will and all men have the responsibility to render an accounting sometime, somewhere, for those things which they chose to think and to believe." Richmond has made his choice. To the Ison Family Tree he was a broken branch who had purposely cast himself off to destruction, but who has the power to judge, or who knows that Richmond was not chosen in his pre-existent life to be like Joseph of old, a Savior to his father's family.

Life wasn't a bed of roses nor was the path easy for the Ison family who came to Arizona. Everything was so different-- climate, housing, friends, no relatives and above all, the methods of making a living for a large family were different. It took courage to stay and build anew. And wasn't this Zion? where all were your brothers and sisters. Sorry to say, Richmond and Martha found some who were the opposite. In April 1980, just two years after leaving Kentucky, a baby boy came to Richmond's home and they named him Lovall Allen.

At one time Father Ison was a very heavy man. He weighed better than 300 pounds. His health started to fail him a few years after coming West, so the two older boys, Robert and Zebedee, went to the nearby mining camps and worked to support the family. Both boys attended the LDS Academy at Thatcher, but neither of them finished their course because they worked away from home so much. Robert seemed more interested in the principles of the new gospel than any of the other children. He worked in several of the auxiliary organizations and was a Sunday School teacher for several years.

Richmond Ison was a very good gardener and on his small tract of five acres, lying just East of Thatcher, Arizona, he raised the best that could be had of sweet potatoes, melons and all kinds of garden produce. He had a few choice fruit trees and a good grape arbor which supplied their needs. I lived in their home during the month of August 1913 and here I learned to love Grand father Ison very much. He was so kind. I never heard him say an ill word about anyone. His neighbors loved him. He was honest and would not misrepresent and matter.

Robert and I spent the holiday week of 1916 at his home, coming from Miami, Arizona, by rail, a distance of some eighty miles. Each day while I was there, Richmond would say, "Louie have you the time now to write more of my family history?" I

wrote all that he could tell me of his kinfolk, how his grandfather Archibald Ison came to settle Kentucky early in the eighteenth century, names of his Uncles and Aunts and who they married and the same for his brother and sisters and their families. He had no written record, but his memory was wonderful. When we visited Kentucky in 1940, I checked all the names and dates that he gave to me in 1916, finding not one mistake. To Grandfather Richmond goes the honor of giving the first information to begin our Ison Record.

After our visit in 1916, I never saw Richmond again until he was on his death bed. He soon developed dropsy and in October 1925, we got a letter from Grandmother saying that "Father was very ill." Robert and I were living in Woodruff, Arizona then, and we had six children. We had no car but we started for Thatcher in our old truck with five of our children. We left Bob to care for the home and livestock. Highway 60 was not then made, so we went by White and Black Rivers, thru Rice to San Carlos and on the Gila Valley. It rained a lot and made it very uncomfortable for us as the only way we had to keep dry was to crowd into the cab of our truck.

We arrived at Thatcher after dark on 23rd of October. When Grandfather saw his son he said, "Oh, Robert I'm so glad that you have come." And so were we. Grandpa talked a lot to Robert the next day, then the following morning, Thursday, October 25, 1925, about 10 o'clock a.m. while Robert was standing by his bedside, Richmond closed his eyes and folded his arms across his chest and very peacefully went to his Heavenly Home.

His funeral was beautiful. Grandmother and all their children except Hulda, who was too sick to come, were there, Hundreds of his friends and neighbors were there too. W.W. Pace, a well known and well liked merchant and a prominent citizen, was the main speaker. Among the fine things that he said of Grandfather was: "There lies AN HONEST MAN." To me this is the very highest recommendation that could have been given to any man. Then Brother Pace appealed to Richmond's five grown sons who were sitting around their father's casket to let honesty be their motto also. It is coincidental that Mr. Pace would give Richmond the title of an honest man, for on the Ison coat of arms granted to John Ison 11 May 1613, at Troutsdale, Yorkshire, England, the motto was: "For all men to be honest is glory." Grandpa never read this motto on the arms, but honesty was in his blood. Grandfather's grave is in the Thatcher cemetery.

Richmond's patriarchal blessing said, "You will do a good work for your Father's family," and he truly did, for had it not been for the data he gave me in 1916, and his insistent urging me to write, we may not have had our Ison book as it is today. How hundreds of his kin have had their temple work done and death was his mission call to the spirit world where untold kinfolk can be taught the Gospel.

Grandmother Martha lived on in the little home which stood on the five acres near the railroad tracks in Thatcher for a few years and then she sold it to buy a small white frame house on Maine Street.

March 18, 1939 was Grandma's 80th birthday and all the children came home for it. Robert was the farthest away. We traveled 500 miles to be with her and what a lovely reunion we had. The day was beautiful, Grandma looked so pretty with her white hair curled and a flower pinned on her dress. All of the children remembered her with presents. Dinner was very good and was fixed by Nile and a hired lady. Zebb had worked cleaning the yard, cutting the hedge and trimming the rose bushes for two days before the reunion. After dinner we went in cars to the old Ison home where Grandpa Richmond died. From there we went to Thatcher cemetery and visited his grave. We visited with Grandma until a late hour, then some stayed overnight while others went home to Safford, Pima, Globe and Phoenix.

The last few years of Grandma's life found her very feeble and her daughter Hulda cared for her. She passed away in 1943. At her death the home was given to Hulda who lives there today. (1959)

A patriarchal blessing by Samuel Claridge on the head of RICHMOND ISON, son of Doctor Ison and Elizabeth Fraley, Born 28 Feb. 1856, in Newcomb, Morgan County, (Now Elliott County,) Kentucky.

Brother Ison I place my hands upon thy head and I do so in the name of Jesus Christ and I bless you as a father and Patriarch, that your faith may increase and your heart be prepared to receive all the blessings pertaining to the new and everlasting covenant. You little realize the greatness of the blessing there is for the faithful. You have done well as far as you have gone you will gain a victory and a crown, that will never fade away. The angels of God have watched over you and it was through their intervention that led you to the servants of the Lord. You did well in believing their testimony. You are of the chosen seed and you were so before you came to the earth and it was known to your kindred before you came to this earth that you would be the one to stand at the head of your father's house and be a leading spirit among them. And I say unto you, brother Ison, seek the Lord with all your heart and his Holy Spirit will guide and direct you and open up your way before you.

You will have your trials and disappointments at times but all the trials you will have to pass through will all be sanctified for your good. You will see great changes in your day and you will hear the great changes and calamities from the place where you came from and you will thank the Lord that you are with

the saints in Zion. The Lord will bless you and your family and they will be brought up in the spirit of the gospel, and you will have great joy and satisfaction wherein you have defended the servants of the Lord when danger has threatened them.

The Lord is pleased with the integrity of your heart you will receive your washings and annointings in the house of the Lord and you will do a good work for your father's family. I bless you that you may have health and strength in your body and that you may be comforted in your spirit and be not discouraged. I bless you that you may have power to discriminate between the truth and the error, between the good and the bad spirits that will surround you. You will do a good work in your day and you will have joy and satisfaction in your labors and you will receive all the revelations that will be given through his prophet and you will see the redemption of Zion and take a part therein. And all these blessing I seal upon you in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen (Recorded in book B)

MARTHA RICE ISON
(22 March 1859-7 May 1944)

Compiled Dec. 1989 by
Joseph R. Ison (grand son)



There seems to be no personal journal of Martha Rice Ison but from some of the histories written by my mother, Louie S. Ison, I have the following information.

Martha was born March 22, 1859 at Moon, Morgan County, Kentucky. Her parents are George Rice and Ester Hurst. However a note says that she was raised by William Kitchen and Nancy Bays. Many of the pioneers living in this area at this time had been given grants of land for their service in the Revolutionary War. There were no conveniences as we know them today. This was on the western frontier and there was still concern about Indian troubles. With their own ingenuity they cleared the land, grew some basic crops, kept a few domestic animals, hunted game from the forests and sustained themselves.

She married Richmond Ison on Feb. 23, 1879. At this time his father, Doctor Ison, gave them some seventy five acres of uncleared land on the rocky branch of the Newcomb River. This was about four miles from the Ison home place located at what is now called Isonville, Ky. The following summer they farmed part of his father's place and cleared the bottoms or flat places on their own place. They tell of him spending time late into the night burning brush and stumps while Martha sat patiently doing needle work by hand on items they would need in the little log cabin constructed the same summer.

They moved into this modest cabin and on June 24, 1880 their first child, a son Walter was born. He only lived a few hours and was buried on the hillside a short distance from the cabin. Their next child, Robert Lee (my own father), was born June 9, 1881. Next came brother, Zebedee June 29, 1883, and sister, Hulda Jane Sept. 23, 1885.

The family was growing and a new much larger house was built. This was a two story building with an extended covered porch on the south side that made it possible to draw water from the well without going out in the rain. Hulda Jane was born the very night they moved into the new house. Four year old Robert wondered how some one knew which house to bring the baby to. Other children came, David Franklin on Nov. 21, 1887, Edward Reese on Dec. 22, 1889, Lucy on Aug. 26, 1892, (she too died in infancy and was buried beside her

the Isons were different, there were strange customs, There was not a new language but it was different. They purchased a little five acre tract of land with a modest house. It was on the outskirts of town. They did have a good garden, a few fruit trees, and a grape arbor. Resources were limited and Richmond's health started to fail. The older boys worked on the various farms and soon found employment in the copper mines some ninety miles away at Globe and Miami. There was another son to come, Lovel Allen born May 15, 1900.

Richmond and Martha remained true to the faith they had embraced in Kentucky. Their eldest son, Robert, filled a mission to the Southern States from 1910 to 1912. Richmond passed away there in Thatcher on Oct. 24, 1925. Soon after the completion of the Arizona temple Martha was able to receive her own endowment, Sept. 13, 1928. On this same date she was sealed to Richmond and three of the children were sealed to them.

After Richmond's death Martha was married twice, first to Joseph McFate Sept. 8, 1928 and after his death, to Daniel Angle. The five acre tract was disposed of and she lived in a little white frame house on the main street there in Thatcher, Arizona. She passed away on May 7, 1944 and was buried beside her husband, Richmond, in Thatcher cemetery.

I never knew my grandmother. I saw her twice. We were at their home in October 1925 when grandfather Richmond passed away. I was a nine year old boy at that time and I remember the trip but not much about grandmother. In the spring of 1937 while I was a student at the University of Arizona in Tucson I made a trip to the Gila Valley. At that time I called on grandmother but I can recall very little of that visit. She would have been seventy eight years old at that time. She was a gracious lady who was glad to see me.

As I reflect on the life of Martha I am glad that she had the courage to embrace the restored gospel. I am thankful for her devotion to her family. I marvel at the hardships she must have endured to nurture a large family in primitive circumstances most of her life. I am looking forward to an eternal meeting with her and hope that I can live worthy of such a family reunion.

Robert Lee Scott
~~Richard Scott~~
~~Martha Rice~~
~~Martha Rice~~

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