Eliza Frances Keys Jackson
Her Years Until 1881
As told to her daughter, Wilma Josephine Jackson Bates

This is a story of my mother's life retold much as she gave it to me in December 1935 and 1936.[*] I am recording it because I wish my children and theirs to know these incidents which she has so often related to us, her children. In this age of planned amusements and easy living any story of a generation ago is startlingly refreshing, but this the more so because the narrator was a regular girl, abounding in energy and good feelings, with an unfailing sense of humor. Her twelve brothers and sisters, too, were bright and lively young people of these early days.

Asking her first for the "family tree", I learned these "connections" on both sides of the family.

Paphiras Beebe married Lucy Day. They lived near Rutland,[†] Vermont until three babies had come to them, Huron, Aram and little Alethea. They then started westward leaving the nine months baby girl[‡] who was ill with whooping cough with the grandparents to bring out in an ox cart a year later. She was to be my grandmother.

Nine more babies arrived in this new home at Holley, N.Y.; these were their names — Eleanor and Stally, who died when young ladies, Sylvia, Polly, Luna, Flora, Hardin, Lucy and Marietta. The mother, Lucy Day, was like most of the Day family, a good natured, easy-going soul who retired in middle life to take her ease, smoke her pipe and let her children support her.

Son Huron came out to Racine, Wisconsin, married a literary and superior girl, Nancy, and lived next neighbor to the Jackson family Chester and Charles, the sons. We shall pick up this thread later in a bit of romance.

Justin Bennett came from Ypsilanti, Michigan to claim Luna and bring her later to a farm home near St. Johns, Michigan. We girls knew Aunt Luna well and enjoyed visiting her.

Flora married a Webster and was a typical Day in her lazy disposition. Her farm home near Holley was a spot all young people loved to visit. Martin, Lucy and Huron were her three children and a jolly trio. They owned both a dulcimer and a melodeon, often playing the two instruments in duet. There was no end to good times in this household.

Hardin lived near Holley. I remember him. His sons were Edson and Selden.

Lucy, mother of Cora (Belden), Jennie (Hurd), Ori (McCargo) and Byron, married Alvah Morgan and lived down by the Erie Canal in the edge of the village. This home provided for the Keys children, especially little Eliza, many good times, which in later years have become the happiest of memories.

Marietta, the youngest daughter married Horatio Nelson Keys, but after bearing him two children, Daniel and Alma, died in her third childbirth. This husband sought her older sister Alethea in marriage and here begins the life history of our branch of the family. Her sister's two babies were brought up as her own. Eleven others arrived, among them my mother. Here are their names - Daniel Hutchins and Alma Spalding of the first marriage, Paphiras Beebe, Marietta, Ezra, Harlan, Berton, Clarissa, Lomyra, Silas Day, Eliza Frances, Horace Nelson, Willie Aram. Clara died with typhus July 22nd, 1862 at the age of fifteen. Ezra was shot down in the battle of Fredericksburg, Dec. 13th, 1862, in his twenty-second year and was buried on the battlefield. The others lived to good ages, the father and mother being eighty one and seventy eight respectively when they passed away at Holley, N.Y. I dimly remember grandmother, who was very stout in later years and lame so that she had to use a cane. This she would poke out at us and laugh as we played on the floor at the farm home about a mile distant from Holley.

Grandmother was a very sensible and forceful person. Women often came to her for advice, especially in the

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[*] - SLH Note: photos have been added to this edition, found in Emily Josephine (Bates) Haynes's effects.

† - SLH Note: inserted: "at Winhall."

[‡] - SLH Note: written in margin: "This is wrong. Alethea was a little older. Aram was a baby in arms on the trip.'

feeding of their little babies. She was resourceful and calm in cases of illness.

Grandfather was a thin, quiet, kind and intellectual man, always standing for the right, disciplining rarely but effectively. One quiet word from him completely quelled his children and made them feel so ashamed of guilt. Uncle Horace tells me that one day when he flew into a temper as a little boy, his father called him to his side and said: "He that ruleth and governeth his temper is greater than he that taketh a city". Horace never forgot the admonition. Little is known of his forebears except that his parents came from Killingly, Connecticut, their names Ezra Keys and Almy Spalding. He had a half brother, Elisha.

Baby Eliza Frances, the ninth child, was born, as were the others, in a small frame house in Holley, New York, next to the white stone district school which stood on the corner, A white picket fence, with a chain and weight on its gate enclosed the front yard. A walk led to the house, bordered on either side with flowers. These the busy mother of thirteen found time to care for and enjoy.

The house was painted white with green blinds. Mother says she can see every room and its furnishings just as it was in those impressionable years. A sitting room with a "recess", a parlor also with a recess, closed except on rare occasions, a kitchen, a pantry and an "entry way", were the downstairs rooms. Upstairs were three bedrooms.

The "recess" off the sitting room was only large enough to accommodate a bed. Here grandmother slept for years with a baby on one arm, not daring to turn for fear grandfather would harm it.

One or two babies slept near by in the trundle bed which in the daytime was pushed under the large bed. Under these conditions, well nigh unendurable to the modern mother, my grandmother reared her large brood. She was always happy. My mother says she never recalls any complaints.

In the parlor, on the melodeon were placed the wax flowers with their glass shades and, very sacred to the children, the candy ornaments that were gifts of every Christmas time. Eliza would steal into this cold and clammy parlor to "lick" the base of these figures. As summer came she would suggest to her mother that the ants might find these sweets - and mother consented to her finishing them up.

There was an upstairs to the woodshed. Here was an old stove and an abandoned spinning wheel and here Harlan used to assemble the younger children on Sunday afternoons or rainy days for all sorts of antics. He would build a fire in the stove and perhaps make a cake, putting in the bowl an egg, a lump of butter, some sour milk, soda, flour and spices. While this was baking they played church. Harlan would mount a chair and preach while the others listened respectfully and provided the singing. As an older boy he delighted in making harnesses and hitching up the dog and cat, much to the delight of the small "fry".

When the snow was deep they built snowhouses in the yard and carpeted them.

"Remembering the Sabbath day to keep it holy" meant that this seventh day was devoted to church going and quiet reflection. Eliza sometimes walked with her father to the cemetery. The afternoons were long. Reading material was scarce and the few books which included "The Rise and Fall of the Dutch Empire", rather dry. Sometimes the children would place apples out in the snow on Saturday nights to eat when frozen, the next day. They would make hard-packed snowballs and suck these until their lips would swell. Perhaps, with a sly wink, two would steal out into the kitchen to mix up ice cream, consisting of snow and cream flavored with sugar and vanilla. In the summer Eliza would roam the garden and eat everything she could find, including "smellage" the parent of our celery, pieplant, green currants, green apples. Is it any wonder she suffered frequent sick headaches (which were called hereditary)?

There were always animals in the barn and yard. Harlan delighted in trading these and adding to the assortment, much to his mother's annoyance. There was an old horse, a colt which he trained, a cow, sheep, turkeys and chickens, often a little pig. Uncle Horace recalls an incident that features this last named animal. He told me the story in October 1938.

It seems he had a maple sugar "bush" of one hundred fifty nice maple trees which, with Willie's help, he tapped every spring. They worked on Saturdays gathering sap and boiling down. When the sap became syrupy it was brought to the house to further boil in a big brass kettle.

They had worked hard this day. It was nine o'clock in the evening and their father said "Now go to bed, boys. You're tired. I'll finish the job." The boys were

willing so father boiled down the syrup, set it out by the woodshed door to cool and promptly forgot it. Along came the little pet pig and sniffed around until he tipped over the kettle and spilled all the syrup! A day's work gone for naught.

Eliza always admired Harlan's feats and, wishing to appear brave before him, would do anything he told her especially if he "dared" her.

So one day she chopped off a chicken's head, because he thought she didn't dare, and again, when they were hunting together and spied a hawk's nest in McCarty's woods he said, "Don't you want to fire my gun?" She did and brought down the hawk!

The Erie Canal ran opposite to the home of Uncle Alvah and Aunt Lucy in the northeast corner of the village. Here the children congregated for many a good time. Of course, it was a dangerous playground for the little ones but as they grew older they could enjoy the fishing and swimming in the summer time and skating in the winter when the water was not let out to a low level. Some skated to Brockport, five miles distant and the more adventurous often skating together and using "sails", went as far as Albion, ten miles away, then took the train home.

Uncle Alvah was an easy going soul and loved children. He had horses and mules, always, in his old barn, the harnesses for which were concocted out of all sorts of materials and half put together.

Their daughter Ori and her cousin Lizzie one day hitched an old horse to a cutter, behind which, attached by a rope, they dragged an old silver serving tray. This, they took turns riding in, and called it great sport. Uncle Alvah enjoyed seeing them have good times and helped out in every way possible.

The old Canal was fenced off near the house and called "The Duck's Pond". Here alone one day Eliza sat fishing when she overheard two boys talking. One boy went away in a few moments, taking the boat with him. This made the other chap angry so he threatened, "If you don't bring back that boat, I'll tell who pulled up those McCarty apple trees."

The case later came to trial and Lizzie had to appear in Justice court and tell what she knew.

I asked mother how she spent Christmas when a girl. She said she always hung up her stocking. In it was placed a candy ornament, bought at a store, sometimes a figure of a child or an animal, colored and sparkling with sugar crystals. This she always put in the cold parlor after Christmas where it remained until summer.

And there was a toy of some sort, often, too, an article of clothing. Maybe her mother finished a dress for her, in the pocket of which her father dropped a penny or two.

There were five or six of the children home when she was small. She remembers Silas getting a toy donkey with wagging head for a Christmas gift. This was all he saw, all he cared for. He held it close and said over and over "My little Jackie, My little Jackie."

There was always a special dinner. The day was a very happy one, though there was no elaborate celebration as we have today.

.The following incident of mother's childhood days I think we enjoyed most hearing her tell.

The occasion was her twelfth birthday, April 27th, 1865. The setting was the Morgan home down by the canal. Her older sister, Myra, had spanked her the twelve times and "one to grow on". Jennie Morgan, her cousin two years older, chased her and was able to get the twelve hits but not the extra one, so Myra was trying to help her. Cousin Ori, one year to a day older, took Lizzie's part. The foes chased her toward Aunt Lucy's out house - a big square structure having four seats for grown-ups and four little ones for children! Ori called out "Run in and bolt the door" which Lizzie did, Ori following her.

Now Jennie and Myra baffled, went to the barn, took the reins from an old harness, fastened them together and wound them around the "little house", tying the two girls inside. Then they said, "Goodbye. We're going downtown."

No sooner were they gone, than Ori clambered down the seat and under the out house, unfastened the straps and let Lizzie out just as the pursuers returned. "Run", she said, as Jennie started to chase. Together they ran to the Keys house, a few blocks away and then north toward the country. Lizzie kept thinking, "Where shall I go? Night is coming on." But run she did for a mile to the school house. Here she spied Nell Onderdonk approaching on horseback and recognized an old friend. Nell said,

"Run up to the fence and get on behind." Then with her whip, she slashed at Jen to keep her away, and galloped her horse into town and Lizzie's home. Ori and Lizzie ran up to the spare room, locked the door and stayed there all night. Jennie never did get that thirteenth whack!

Grandfather was a tailor by trade. He also ran the general store and the postoffice. He took measurements for clothes and cut them out, hiring them made by women who sewed by hand before the era of the sewing machine. Grandmother did some of this handwork for the store. Her own sewing these early days was practically all done in the evening by candlelight

A Mrs. Russell had the first sewing machine in town and was hired by grandma Keys to put white stitching on a Red-Riding-Hood cape of broadcloth for little Eliza. The hood was lined with white and fastened with a white cord and tassel. Mrs. Russell stitched the separate pieces as Eliza brought them down, and charged by the yard.

Grandma Keys always had a black taffeta dress "for best". In later years she had a light gray Alpaca and a wine colored rep for winter dresses. These were fixed over again and again and made to last for years. She had a winter bonnet of black velvet and a summer one of black Neapolitan braid much like our horsehair, remodeled many times. She had an "Ashes of roses" silk shawl with heavy fringe which my mother now owns, and a black grenadine shawl. Women of those days always wore a shawl or wrap to church.

Eliza at 13

The church and school were centers of community life but not in the social way that we know. Grandfather was a deacon in the Presbyterian church. To the morning service Lizzie went and to Sunday School following, also to the evening service. The sermon by Elder Toof often lasted an hour and a half to two hours. Lizzie wondered if her father understood it all. She didn't. And being too young to comprehend, she entertained herself watching the members of the congregation and noting their idiosyncrasies. At Wednesday evening prayer meeting there was Mr. Milne, the Scotch Miller, who took his snuff and pulled out his red bandana after each sneeze. There was Brother Cady, a dirty old fellow,

who always flopped down on his knees to pray, starting out in a loud voice which gradually died away as his breath left him. Then he would gasp and start all over again.

Mr. Stoddard, the rich man who lived diagonally across the corner, wore a wig which failed to conceal his gray hair beneath. His prayer always the same, ran - "Our father and our God - We come before thee on the bended knees of our heart, acknowledging our faults and confessing our sins, etc." (Sister Myra learned it all.)

Deacon Bushnell was Superintendent of the Sunday School for years, Every scholar was presented by him with his picture. He started the songs so high that others couldn't follow and with a very red face he would squeak out the notes alone. Lizzie knew that her chum Hattie could sing a high soprano so when the deacon called for the next song this Sunday, she persuaded Hattie to keep pace with him. Together they sang the highest notes of "We'll all meet there" and deacon didn't like the competition.

There were galleries at each side of the church and another at the rear where the choir sat. Lizzie begged one Sunday to sit there with Kate Cramer. But she knew better than to ask again because she found too much to laugh at. She said to Kate "Now when the minister pauses, you say 'before' and I'll say 'behind'." The result was too amusing.

And all the time that Lizzie was noting the eccentricities of these elders, she was wondering whether others were saying things about her father.

School days came for little Eliza and she entered the two room district school next door to her home, on the corner. She was named "Eliza" by her grandfather Keys who gave the parents a bright gold dollar at the time to keep for her. But she never liked the name because of a little Irish girl, Eliza Kelly. One day Maggie Milne, sister of the boy who was to write in later years the famous Milne arithmetics, said, "I'm going to call you "Liz", and from that day she was Lizzie

At the age of ten, she went to the Academy which was later called the Union School.

Her best friend lived a few houses down the street. by name Hattie Harwood. She was a very bright girl, an only child, who found great pleasure in visiting the Keys household where there was so much going on. Her mother was almost jealous.

These two sat together in school, did their lessons quickly then were ready for play. They would draw pictures on their slates, hold up for others to see, and tell a story as they drew the lines, much to the enjoyment of all. They memorized everything they could find — poems in their reading books, vowel sounds — not knowing what was their meaning. This, for instance — fate far fall wad, me prey, fine, shire, sir, no. At the bottom of the other page was: — Love, do, wolf, due, full, chord (they pronounced it soft "c") Chaise, is thee.

One day Maggie Garrison and Lizzie were whispering behind their big geographies, when Darwin McCrilles, the teacher, came down the aisle and hit Lizzie on the back. As he was giving Maggie her "dose", Lizzie peeped out at the others and laughed, so he hit her again. Maggie's parents took her out of school, but Lizzie bore no resentment, knowing she got what she deserved. She was always pleasant and her teachers liked her.

In the spelling book was the poem "Old Rover was the finest dog that ever ran a race, etc." This she learned and can repeat now. Then there was the rule for partial payment, "Compute the interest on the principal to the time of the first payment. If the interest exceed the payment compute the interest on the same principal to a time when the sum of the payments shall equal or exceed the interest due, etc." Lizzie and Hattie learned this and surprised the class by rattling it off verbatim and fast. In later years mother used this rule to figure interest for Aunt Luna in a business deal and had the right answer when the St. Johns bank was incorrect.

In the Academy the same books were used again and again. There were no grades but promotion came by examination sent out by the state regents at Albany. Before she had finished school here, her parents moved to a farm a mile northwest of town. This meant a walk of two miles a day back and forth, but she liked it.

Eliza in Amos Belden's Studio

When she was about eighteen years old, she went to the home of her older sister, Marietta, who was married and lived in Bloomington, Illinois. Here she stayed for two years and attended school.

Her half sister Alma, was a very successful teacher in Cleveland where brother Daniel lived and she persuaded Lizzie to come there for an interview with Mr. Rickoff, the Superintendent of Schools, preparatory to a position. He gave her a written examination, then said "Let me look at your eyes." She laughingly closed them and he said "You'll do!"

They placed her in the third grade of the "Bloody Fifth" Ward. She knew nothing of the theories of teaching and emerged at the end of the year almost a physical wreck. A supervisor kindly told her she must work for better order, and from that day she had no more trouble. Teachers were often sent to her room to observe the good discipline. Mr. James, the principal, said "You were brought up with boys." Indeed she was and she enjoyed them in school more than the girls.

Eliza and fellow teachers

Eliza and her students

She was advanced to the fourth grade, then the combined sixth and seventh and the seventh alone, teaching for almost six years in the Cleveland schools. The names of Miss Umstaetter, Miss Wagerman, Miss Reardon, associate teachers, are very familiar to us since mother has been proud to tell us often of her teaching experiences.

In the summer following her fifth year, Miss Keys visited the Huron Beebe family near Racine, Wisconsin. Here she met a neighbor young man, Chester Jackson by name. A romance flourished which resulted in her giving up school duties at Christmas time with plans for a wedding in the spring. This, took place at Holley, N.Y. April 15, 1881. The honeymoon trip led to the island of Antigua, B.W.I., her future home for nine years. Here three daughters were born, but the climate affecting her health, a move made back to the states. After residing in Holley, N.Y. for one year, the couple came to Ovid, Michigan where they have lived since the spring of 1891.

Chester Jackson in 1878

Mother recited this for me Dec. 9th, 1940 a "brain teaser" that always pleases us to hear her give. Aunt Myra learned it at a party in Holley and taught it to Lizzie, a young girl as they lay in bed that same night.

One good fat hen and away she goes.

Two ducks, a good fat hen and away she goes.

Three plump partridges.

Four screaming wild geese.

Five pairs of Don Alfonso’s pincers.

Six Limerick oysters.

Seven bones of a Macedonian horse.

Eight ships sailing from Orinoco to Madagascar on Prince Gilgal’s wedding day.

Nine pragmatic double and twisted left handed physicians.

Ten allopathic Abyssinian acrobats ambling after anacondas on Arabian antelopes.

Eleven belted and booted bewhiskered barbarians biting a bit of bitter butternut before a better breakfast.

Twelve Californian catamounts cautiously careening over Corinthian columns closely contiguous to a Catholic cemetery.