

The Life of Jacob Mauss

by

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Jacob Mauss was born 20 October 1832 in Leidersheid, France, son of Jean Georges Mauss and Anne Marie Megel. His grandparents were Jean Pierre Mauss and Anne Marie Berthel. He was the youngest of eight children. Little is known of his early life other than that the name, Mauss was known among those who had vineyards and made grape wine. As a livelihood and in later years my father always took great pride in his vineyard.

At the age of 21 he was drafted into the army and fought in the war between France and Germany about 1853. He was married to Magdalena Kelsch on June 1, 1864. The ceremony was performed by George Heiner, a Catholic Priest. My parents were very devoted to that church. The horror of war was always foremost in my father's mind and he wanted to go to America so his sons would never have to experience war. A German couple by the name of Rosenstahl, close friends of my parents, had come to America, settling near Springfield, Nebraska. Through their encouraging letters, my parents packed their few belongings and with their six-week old baby girl, Mary, started for America.

After six weeks on the rough Atlantic, they landed in New York. Not having enough money to continue the journey, they rented a room, bought only what furniture was necessary. Father found work at a brick yard and mother took in washing. Mr. Rosenstahl had written my father and offered him a few acres of farm land to use for a year till they could get a new start in life. My folks often spoke of the kindness of these people. This land was near the Buffalo Creek and a log hut was on it. There was no floor in the hut, just the ground and a dirt roof also. Before they could go inside, father had to cut the weeds to make a path and weeds inside the hut were as big as ones on the roof. Mother often told how she sat on a tree stump with Mary on her lap and cried while father was cutting the weeds. In this hut was an old stove, two half-broken chairs, a table, and a bedstead. Mother had brought her bedding from Germany. This kind Rosenstahl family would lend father a team of horses and farm implements to get the planting done, then father would pay him back in work. No more honest people ever lived than my parents and they truly earned their bread by the sweat of their brow.

They faced many difficult problems by coming to America but often said each move they made was always for the better. In the spring of 1867, they homesteaded 80 acres of Government land near Papillion, a small town about 10 miles from Springfield, Nebraska. Again, they found kind friends who had in previous years

come to America and taken up Government land. With their help, my parents soon saw a bright future. In this part of Nebraska were only German-speaking people and not until the children were old enough to go to school did the English language become popular. Homes were few and far between, but all were willing to help each other. Before moving to the 80 acres, father borrowed money to buy a team of horses, a wagon, and some farm implements. With the help of a neighbor, they made a dugout in which they lived during the summer. Father plowed as much of the land as he could plant in wheat, oats and corn, borrowing the seed from a neighbor which he returned at harvest time. During the summer a carpenter built two rooms over the dugout, one a kitchen, and the other a small bedroom. At one end of the kitchen was a trap door under which were the steps that led into the dugout, which was used for storing vegetables. A barn was built for the animals and also a shed for the farm implements so when harvest time was over, all the machinery was put under cover. They got their first start of chickens by a neighbor giving them a hen with little chicks. They often told how rich they felt after the first harvest and each year more land was put into use.

As the family increased, more rooms were added to the house with an upstairs where the boys slept. I well remember mother taking me with her when she went up to make the boy's bed. I had just learned to walk and while she was busy, I toddled to the steps and down I went. Seems as though even now I can hear myself crying.

In these pioneer days, women did real men's work in the fields. As the grain was cut, they gathered it into bundles using a few stalks of the grain to wrap around the middle of the bundle, then twisting the ends together with the kernel of grain at the top, standing four bundles together so it could dry before threshing which took about a month. Farm work is not easy. It means long hours from sunrise to sunset. Practically five meals are served every day. Breakfast at 6:30 a.m., lunch carried to the field at 10:00 a.m. That was hot coffee and pretzels or a sandwich, all homemade. Dinner at noon, again lunch in the field at 3 p.m., and supper at six. As farm work increased father always had hired men. Harvesting hundreds of bushels of corn and potatoes, milking a dozen cows, currying and feeding horses, feeding hogs and chickens all meant work. There was always a big garden of all kinds of vegetables, Father took great pride in his concord grapes which makes me think he had some experience in that line while in his youth. In the fall soon after the first light frost the grapes were gathered and wine was made. He has a wine press and all necessary equipment for storage. He always had a stand of grapes on exhibition at the County Fair. After twenty-five years of working and economizing, my parents were known as the most prosperous farmers in the county.

The Sabbath day was always kept as a day of rest. Only the necessary chores were taken care of. Everybody went to church in the forenoon. After dinner, closest neighbors would get together, the men playing cards sitting around the kitchen table, and the women sat in the parlor to visit. Sunday was the only day the parlor was ever

used, The young folks played ball or croquet. At four o'clock everybody had coffee and "kuka", now called coffee cake. Then the company went home to do their chores. Each neighbor took their turn for this get-together.

About 1887, the first Mormon Elders came to our home. Elders Ammon Hunt and Morrison. Elder Hunt was very tall and Elder Morrison was short. Strange as it may seem the night before my mother saw two men, one tall and the other short walking toward our house, each wearing long coats, high stiff hats, and each carrying an umbrella and a small valise. As they told mother who they were she said I saw you in a dream last night. Mary had to interpret it as mother could not speak English. They were made welcome and stayed all night. Little progress was made by the Elders because neither father or mother spoke English. Soon a German speaking missionary was sent to our home and through him the first seeds of Mormonism were sown into the hearts of our family. Mary and Michael were the first to be baptized but father wanted first to see Utah and the Mormons before he would join the church. Elder Louis A. Kelsch, a brother to my mother, was on a mission in the Southern States at this time. He was given a leave of absence and accompanied my father to Salt Lake City. They stayed at the home of Bishop Millen Atwood, whose daughter Elder Kelsch had married. Father was so impressed with all he saw that he was baptized in the Tabernacle font on January 2, 1889 by Bishop Atwood and confirmed by Elder Kelsch. Also before returning home, he bought 32 acres of farm land in Murray from John Gabbot, paying seven thousand dollars.

I want to mention a dream my mother had the night before my father was baptized. She saw him in a large building, standing in water wearing white trousers and white shirt. When she told this the next morning she said there is no truth in this as father has no white clothes. On his return home he told her he was now a Mormon and had been baptized in the Tabernacle font wearing Bishop Atwood's clothes. To this she replied, "This is my warning, I want to be baptized." I mention this because it has made such a strong impression on my mind that God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform and trust it will do the same for you. Soon after all had joined the church, with the exception of my sister, Lena, who had married by this time. The spirit of going to Zion grew so strong, in the spring of 1891 the land and improvements were sold and three days were arranged and advertized in two newspapers that an auction would be held to dispose of hay, grain, farm implements and animals. Farmers came from all parts of the county and hot coffee was served with sandwiches and "kuka" to everyone. Kind neighbors came to help mother. Baking had been going on for days. The thought of being separated from dearest of friends made it rather a sad occasion. Before the sale, the family decided on the things that were to be kept and shipped to Utah. After the auction a railroad box car was rented. Dishes and cooking utensils that were carefully packed in bedding were the first to be loaded, then some farm implements, a two-seated buggy and harness for the horses, last the two choice horses that had always been the pride of the family and two cows, but one of the cows fought so desperately against being loaded into the car it

began frothing at the mouth. The town veterinarian was called and declared the animal insane and would have to be shot. It was necessary for Michael and Jacob, just teenagers, to travel in the car to feed and care for the animals. Boxes of food were packed and milking the cow twice a day gave the boys plenty to eat. Freight trains are slow traveling so it was five days before they reached Salt Lake City. Father, mother, Mary and I went by passenger train. This took two nights and a day, during which time I got the mumps. On arriving in Salt Lake, Harry Ballard was at the station with a two-seated buggy to take us to the house of mother's brother, Louis Kelsch where we stayed until our belongings arrived, then we went to the place father had bought. Here was a small two room house. One room was just large enough for two beds and the other was the kitchen. There was also a barn and granary in which a bed was put for the boys. Being in the spring of the year, the men started plowing and planting grain and potatoes. Harry Ballard, being a carpenter was hired to draw plans for a new house.



Michael, Jacob and Jacob (Jake) Mauss

Building a house, barn, chicken coop and other outside buildings was an all-summer project. By September it was ready to be occupied and it was truly a great treat to have the whole family sleeping under the same roof. Some adjustments had to be made, leaving an eighty-acre farm to live on thirty acres is quite a change. But dear father and mother both in their fifties and always worked hard for the good of the family really needed to have a less strenuous life and this they enjoyed.

Living the gospel was their greatest desire. They always mingled with the Saints both in sacred services and in social affairs. Never was I more proud of them than to see them on the dance floor in South Cottonwood Ward at a reunion enjoying a waltz. Mother with her long skirt brushing up the chalk dust that had been sprinkled on the floor to make it slick, looked like a picture. They never failed to take the family to all ward outings at Wandamere Park or Garfield Resort to swim in the lake. The greatest thrill was seeing the capstone laid on the temple in 1892.

Mary who had been employed in a seamstress shop in Papillion had no trouble getting work in Salt Lake City. Her employer, Sadie Thomas, soon saw how efficient she was and had her supervise the work on all the dresses for Maud Adams, Lizzie Edwards and all who performed in the Salt Lake Theater or in the Tabernacle. Mike got work on the County Roads hauling slag and gravel for \$3.00 per day. It was good wages at that time for a man with team and wagon. When Mike and Jake were old

enough, the necessary sacrifice was made by the family so they could go on missions. Mike leaving his wife and two children went to the Northern States and Jake also leaving a wife and two children went to Germany. It was customary in the early days of the church that mostly married men go on missions.

Changes came as time went on. The children were all married in the temple except Lena. She had married before the family heard the gospel. She never joined the church.

Before ending this story I want to pay tribute to my father. He was honest in all dealings, always willing to contribute toward carrying on the gospel plan. He donated \$500.00 to help build the stake tabernacle at 33rd South and State Street. He faithfully performed his duties when he was ordained an Elder and also as a High Priest. His devotion to my mother proved she was the only woman in his life and that was also true of her devotion to him as being the only man in her life. He knew she had had no chance for schooling in her youth and he always read the newspapers to her and in later years read a chapter in the Bible every morning. After father's death she would go to her room every morning and try to read the Bible, but little was accomplished. Perhaps she did this to renew her thoughts of him. They were truly devoted to each other, Never did I hear them speak unkindly to each other. They both loved plays and seldom missed the Saturday matinee at the Salt Lake Theater. Father died on December 4, 1907.



Front: Louisa, Jacob, Magdalena and Jacob (Jake)
Back: Mary, Michael and Lena