

WILLIAM BABBITT (1766-1814)  
 LYDIA BISHOP (1766- )

"The Babbitt Family History 1643-1900" written by William Bradford Browne has been the source for much of the material needed for the stories from Edward Babbitt (7-1) through five generations: Edward <sup>1</sup>, Elkanah <sup>2</sup> (7-2), Elkanah <sup>3</sup> (7-3), Zephaniah <sup>4</sup> (7-4), and now William Babbitt<sup>5</sup>.

"William Babbitt resided in Cheshire and Lanesboro, Mass. Married Lydia Bishop in 1785. After the death of William, March 1814, Lydia married sometime before March 1815, Benjamin Farnum and to this marriage, a girl, Mahala, was born, 7 Dec. 1815." <sup>1</sup>

The children of William and Lydia (Bishop) Babbitt, as given on a family group sheet submitted to the Genealogical Library in Salt Lake City by Karen Schoville, were:

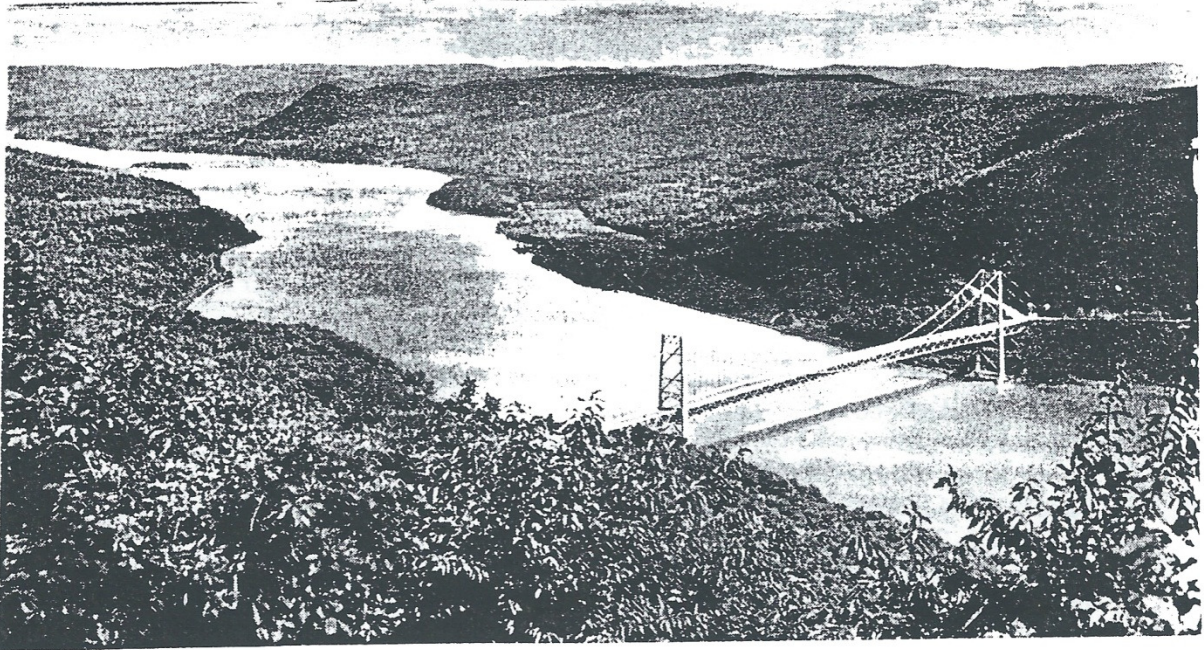
1. Sarah (Sally) Babbitt, b. abt. 1788, prob. Cheshire, Berkshire, Mass., md. Dec. 25, 1801, Joseph Crossier
2. David Babbitt, b. abt. 1787, Lanesboro, Berkshire, Mass.; md. Feb. 1, 1808, Eunice Curtis, dau. of Peter Burr and Pheobe (Sherman) Curtis
3. Ira Babbitt, b. abt. 1890; md. Oct. 26, 1810, Nancy Crossier
4. Lorin Whiting Babbitt, b. Sept. 19, 1806, New Marlboro, Berkshire, Mass.; md. abt. 1830, Almira Castle, dau. of Horace and Susan Castle (7-92). Almira died abt. 1828 or 29. at Nauvoo, Ill. Lorin Whiting's death date and place of burial is not known but he left Illinois in 1846 with the body of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and arrived in Utah sometime between 1849 and 1853. (see 7-6). <sup>2</sup>

William and Lydia had planted their family in the beautiful country of Western Massachusetts, more specifically in Berkshire County, but the temptation to find new land to the west was ever appealing to young and vigorous men. Once the formidable barrier of the Appalattians was conquered an almost infinite stretch of virgin country lay awaiting the hand of civilization.

The first great gap in the Appalachian range as seen in coming from the north is that made by the Hudson River. The Hudson is three hundred miles long and navigable for one hundred and fifty miles from its mouth; furthermore, the Mohawk River, a tributary to the Hudson, flows from the west eastward for one hundred and thirty-five miles, with a fall of only five hundred feet. The Hudson to the north penetrated into the country of the French; and to the West by the Mohawk, it reached its arm toward the Great Lakes region. Here we have an example of what a channel cut by nature through a great mountain system meant to pioneers unprotected by forts when they had, to the north and to the west of them, enemies, both French and Indian. No wonder that a descent upon New York's territory by way of the Hudson River was always, in early days, a danger to be considered.

The bearing which the topography of a region had upon the movement of frontiersmen, Indians and armies is an important consideration. The easier and safer the route to the West, the more it would be traveled.





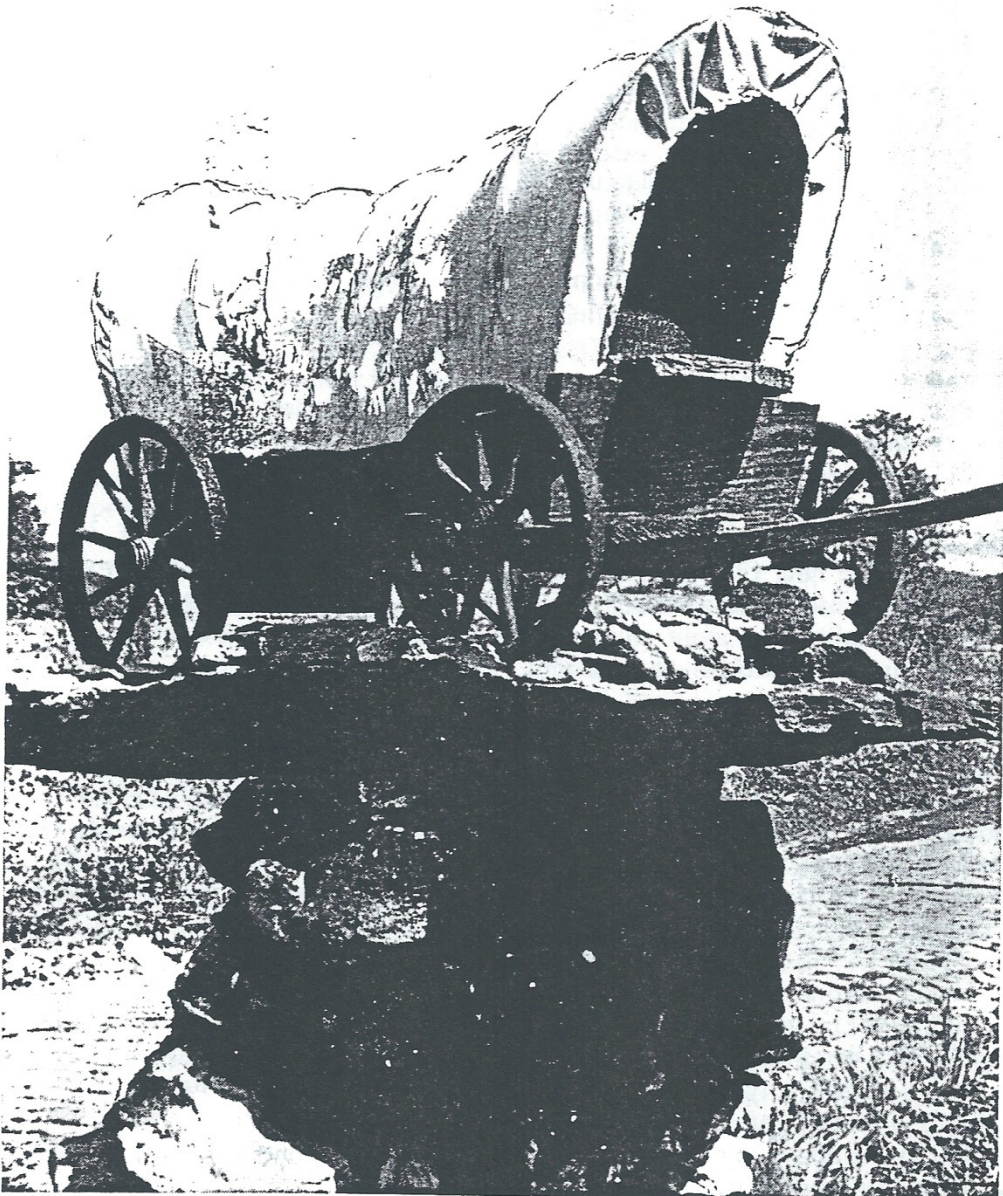
**THE HUDSON RIVER**, one of the routes by which the early Americans first worked their way inland. A number of bridges span it now - here the Bear Mountain Bridge, near New York.

When we speak of the tide of emigration from the eastern part of this land toward the western country that was about to become a massive wave in the time of William Babbitt, the topography of the Appalachians pointed the way that the human tide would flow. The avenue of approach was already prepared by nature and the Indian. When the Indian arousals had been somewhat subdued at the conclusion of the French and Indian Wars, the more adventuresome of frontiersmen were already barging into new western territory. The War of 1812 had a settling effect upon English migrants from New England. Many of the fears of an enemy were disappearing but the overland modes of travel were primitive and the waterways were hazardous. The Conestoga Wagon was designed for travel by this time and its boat shaped body was fitted for the rough hewn mountain roads. No matter how it tilted, cargo stayed in place. There was a great variety of river and canal craft - arks, barges, flatboats, keelboats and skiffs.

Arks and flatboats were built of heavy timbers and often served as living quarters for the family of the boatman. Everything the family owned was carried along - furniture, farm implements, horses, pigs, cows, chickens, dogs, cats, kegs of powder and boxed-filled provisions. The boat was a floating log cabin, fort, barnyard and grocery store and often the boat was loaded with extra provisions to sell to settlements along the river. The family could anchor at whatever spot they fancied. Toward evening someone usually played a fiddle so that the young people could dance. Who could resist a jig to "Turkey in the Straw?"

Travelers leaving Berkshire County were bound to travel both by wagon over the mountain road and by boat up river. The voyage downstream was carefree. Practically all the boats could be propelled upstream but the effort took time





MONKMEYER

A CONESTOGA WAGON, first designed for transportation over the Alleghenies. Its boat-shaped body was fitted for mountain roads. No matter how it tilted, cargo stayed in place.

and energy. William and Lydia, no doubt, saw many groups of migrants passing in Conestoga wagons on their way to the Hudson River and its tributaries to be carried by flat boats up the Hudson and the Mohawk to the rich lands of Upper New York. The American home-seeker who wrestled with nature and with Indians had stuck close to the streams that penetrated the interior, chiefly for economic reasons, as streams afforded practically the best means of transportation in colonial days. The lands between the rivers were occupied only after the best lands along the streams had been appropriated, and after a growth of population made their occupation a necessity. To all this may be added that the time was ripe for action. A struggle for the continent was at hand.

Two hundred years had passed since the founders of Plymouth had landed. It was 1820, six years after William's death, that his sons, David and Ira and their families joined the many other migrants in going west into upper New York and on to Ohio.

The Erie Canal was not built until 1825 so we can be sure they followed the primitive route through the Appalatian barriers and into the western country by its waterways as well as by the Conestoga wagon means of mountain and overland travel. Oxen were the most practical pullers over difficult terrain and long hauls. Horseback was always a means of travel and every wagon train had their horsemen.

A frontiersman did not have to own a boat in order to convey his possessions inland. There were river crafts of various makes that were available along with a navigator to transport a migrant from one point to another and for a nominal price. Frontier navigators or boatmen had a stamp all their own. Usually tall, slender and sinewy, they wore a picturesque costume that set off their splendid physique - a bright red flannel shirt, a loose blue jerkin that extended to the hips, and course brown linsey-woolsey trousers. The boatman's hat was of untanned skins with the fur side out, and he was shod in moccasins. Attached to his belt was a hunting knife and pouch.

A boatman's speech was no less colorful than his costume - an "iridescent vocabulary." Of a sudden occurrence, he said that it happened "quicker nor a fox can chew a chicken." If he wanted a person to act quickly, he commanded, "Start yer trotters." Of a difficult task, he proclaimed that it was "harder nor climbin' a saplin' heels uppard." To silence a long-winded individual, the phrase was "Shut off yer chin music" or "Shut yer mouth before ye sunburn yer teeth."

River navigation had been in common usage in the Quinnipiac, Connecticut, Thames and other streams of the east since the time of the first settlements of New England. The methods called for extreme alertness and skill. Rocks beneath the water could wreck any water craft; a sudden tree bobbing up and down with the current or a stump of log firmly imbedded in the stream was another of many hazards. Obstructions were constantly shifting and the early pilot had no guide except eyesight and memory.

As early as 1785 many experiments were tried at steam-powered boats. In 1807, the Clermont made the first successful trip in America, up the Hudson River.



The Babbitts lived only about 25 miles across country to the east from the Hudson River so, without doubt, they knew of this great event. William's son David was 19 years of age at this time and Ira was 17. The westbound travelers, with their newest means of transportation (Conestoga wagons), must have stirred the blood of these two young men as they watched them passing along their way. It was later in 1820, six years after Williams death, that David and Ira took their wives and young families upon this course of frontiersmen, to make new homes further west.

Of William and Lydia's children, Browne gives a review of the lives of David (#2) and Ira (#3). He tells us that David was in the War of 1812 after his marriage to Eunice Curtis at Lanesboro, Mass. Of their seven children, five were born in Cheshire, Mass. and the last two were born in Ohio. Both David as his brother Ira removed to Kirtland, Ohio and then into Illinois, joining a part of the followers of the newly organized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that migrated in groups westward. David died at Crystal Lake, Illinois, but Ira and his wife, Nancy, and their eight children went on to Missouri where at Boonevill, Mo., both Ira and his wife died.<sup>3</sup>

Ira had a son, Almon Whiting, who would be a grandson of William and Lydia Bishop. The similarity of the name Almon Whiting and Lorin Whiting, nephew and uncle respectively, caused some confusion in the genealogical searches made of these two relatives. Lorin Whiting was the son of William and Lydia Babbitt while Almon Whiting was a grandson.

It might be well to give some of the details surrounding the life of Almon Whiting before proceeding to the story of Lorin Whiting (7-6).

As told by Browne in his Babbitt history, Almon Whiting Babbitt and his wife Julia (Hills) Johnson, were married in Kirtland, Ohio; settled in Nauvoo, Ill., where they lived for a few years. Then they moved to Council Bluffs, Iowa, where they resided until about 1851, from whence they moved with their family to Salt Lake City, Utah. His son, Don Carlos Babbitt of Mesa City, Arizona relates the following story found in Browne's record:

"My father was killed on the old Mormon trail between the Missouri River and Utah. He was on his twenty second trip across the plains to assist the migration of church members to Utah. He was a great friend with all the Indians and felt as safe with them as with his neighbors at home, but they killed him nevertheless, and it all came about by an Indian asking the overland stage driver for a piece of tobacco. The driver shot the Indian who lived long enough to reach his village and tell his people. An Indian claims one or more scalps for every one of their people killed, and my father, being the first met, paid the debt."<sup>4</sup>

An additional sketch taken from the Church Historians Office in Salt Lake City was included with the above source which relates the accomplishments and services for the Church of this great man. He was president of the Kirkland Stake of Zion and was mentioned in Church history as having filled a mission into Canada, returning in 1838. He and his family passed through the Missouri and Illinois persecutions. He visited the Prophet Joseph Smith in Carthage jail on the day of the martyrdom and served on many occasions when legal redress on behalf of a persecuted people was needed. He was killed by the Cheyennes east of Fort Laramie, Wyoming.<sup>5</sup>

Almon Whiting Babbitt's story is told here for two reasons, first, that he may be recognized as a separate individual from his Uncle Lorin Whiting Babbitt, and, second, that his story is a matter of pioneer interest, leading, as it were, into a new era of history; an era that saw the establishment of colonies in the Valleys of the Rocky Mountains and the growth of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon).

William Babbitt did not live to see his three sons involved in one of the greatest migrations of all recorded history. He died when his youngest son, Lorin Whiting, was a boy of 8 years, on March 19, 1814 in Lanesboro, Mass., at the age of 48. Little is known about his wife, Lydia except that she was born May 6, 1766 at New Haven, Conn., the daughter of David and Sarah (Austin) Bishop (7-58 ), and that after William's death she married (2) Benjamin Farnum in 1815 and to this union was born a girl, Mahala Farnum, Dec. 7, 1815.

1. #38 p. 162
2. #170, p. (75)
3. #38, p. 283
4. *ibid*, p. 499
5. *ibid*, pp. 499-501