

# Tales from the Life of Lauritz F. Mortensen

*Compiled by Fern A. Burtenshaw*

*(Wife of Farron E. Burtenshaw, Grandson of Lauritz)*

## History of Lauritz Mortensen

*(As dictated in 1955 to Charity Leavitt Rowley, wife of Lauritz's nephew, Vernon Rowley)*

Father (Morten P. Mortensen) was a convert in the old country (Denmark). Uncle Lars, Uncle Andrew, and Father came over to America. Brigham Young promised father that he would not lack for means if he helped his brothers. Father went back to the old country on a mission after he had married Aunt Dorothea. He converted my mother and Aunt Trena and married both of them when he got back.

Mother's mother was converted to the church in Denmark. She joined the church but grandfather never did. He was a Mormon hater. He was a sailor. Grandmother wrote to mother here in America. Mother read the letters in Danish and then explained them in English.

I don't know much about my father's father. I never did see him or his wife because they never came to America.

I remember reading an article in the *Era* about my father about 25 years ago.

Mother lived in poverty while Aunt Trena and Aunt Dorothea had nice homes, carpets, and organs. Mother was pretty easy going and had a good disposition. In her old age she was quite ill with dropsy and died in her rocking chair.

Bishop Durham Bayles and Dad are second cousins. George Adams is a first cousin. Aunt Ev, Nene Perkins' mother, is my own cousin.

My father was called to Tuba City, Arizona; I was about six years old at the time. He left mother at Willow Springs, ten miles from Moenkopi (now called Tuba City).

On the way to Tuba, we crossed the Big Colorado at Lee's Ferry. My brother teased me and told me I had to swim the river with the cattle when they swam across. I bawled and bawled. They put me on the ferry with my horse so I was ready to care for the cattle when they got across. I was only six years old. Martin liked to tease me.

Martin traded my little curly headed pony off then I had to ride an old mare. Martin told me that if I got hungry, I'd have to milk her. He kept me upset a lot.

Before we got to the Buckskin Mountains, it was dark and the coyotes howled and howled --- I howled too.

When crossing the Buckskin Mountains, going from Scipio to Willow Springs, and going to Moenkopi, we cut trees and tied to the back of the wagon as the road or trail was so steep and the brakes wouldn't hold. When we got down off the mountain that night we

put the wagons in a circle and cooked supper. Then we heard the Indians calling back and forth. They started fires encircling our camp. One Indian came to camp that night and talked to father and Martin and others.

There was a well at the campground - Coombs Well.

While at Scipio, I climbed an apple tree, fell out, but I sure clung to the apples.

When we first moved to Tuba, I had to carry water about a mile from the spring to the Wool Factory they were building. Got my hands barked up when I was cleaning wool pickers. If I brushed with a broom, it was grabbed out of my hands.

Father was a pretty good man. He was a coppersmith. Made barrels whenever he needed them. Mother was a weaver and made woolen cloth and made all our clothing.

At Willow Springs we had a little rock house. Used to gather saleratus for mother to make bread. We had one cow and mother milked her. She gave us plenty of milk and cream. We just lived on it. I peddled milk when I was eight or nine years old. When I peddled it, I would carry two gallons. Father made a yoke that hung over my shoulders with ropes hanging down to hold the buckets so I could carry the milk. I delivered it to a hotel run by Mrs. Ranium. One time the wind was blowing something awful; I had a little old cap on my head and it blew off. I tried to catch it and then ran on. She asked me what I did with my hat. I told her and she gave me a nice black hat and said, "Hold tight to it." I did.

I was baptized at Sunset, Arizona, in the Little Colorado; this was across the river from Winslow. A little girl was baptized then too, and she bawled like a good one.

All three of father's wives and their families were there in the Fort; all of us eating in the same dining room. We lived in United Order there at Winslow. Lot Smith sat at the head of the table. Lot had Big Alice, Little Alice, Mrs. Garn and my sister Diantha, who was father's first child by his first wife. Lot was my brother-in-law and president of the stake. Joe James, the baker, had Elizabeth S. Bloomfield, Mary Eliza Bloomfield, and Orpha Amelia Rogers. Ed Nelson and a Mr. Merrills lived there too. There were lots of others.

Joe James had an oven built of adobe that was four feet long. He had a wooden paddle that he put the bread in and out of the oven with. He made about fifty loaves a day. Bread was awful good but it had lots of sunflower seeds in it. He had a burr mill that ground the grains all together --- bran and all.

Lot Smith had red whiskers that came down on his chest and always carried a gun even to meetings. He married Diantha, my half-sister. One time two officers came to take him. He went out and gave them a drink at the well. "Is this Lot Smith?", they asked. "Yes."

“Well, we’ve come for you.” “Go ahead and take me,” Lot said, pointing his gun at them. Lot weighed 250 pounds.

Lot was shot in the back by Indians while on the range, then rode six miles home to his wife --- dying soon after.

We all had different work to do. My job was pulling weeds. Lot’s boys didn’t like to work. George Bailey had charge of the weeding and if Lot’s boys got tired and wouldn’t work, we ‘ding-bumped’ them --- I helped. George Bailey was sure a nice fellow to work with. We had to pull weeds out of the wheat.

Josh Stevens lived on a ranch near Pacheco. Had a nice place. Mexicans came and shot him.

Father helped put a dam in the Little Colorado in a V shape. I helped carry the rock.

The Mormons had a shed, walls woven with willows, where church was held as well as the school. There was an old man already there when we got there. He was a Mormon and was the first school teacher. He wouldn’t eat anything but raw dough.

Probably moved to Thatcher (Arizona) in the fall and on to Mexico the next year. Mr. Dameron let us camp close to a sweet potato patch. He had told us to help ourselves and we did. I ate those sweet potatoes just like they were apples. We all had to work hard there. Thatcher was a small town. I remember going to a meeting there with my mother. President Sayton got up and said, “Brethren, stay home, beautify your homes, put out shade trees, keep off the freight road, come to my place and buy a new Moline wagon.”

I was ordained a deacon in Colonia Díaz, by Father or Bishop Johnson, or Joe James --- they were all in the Bishopric. I was ordained a teacher and went teaching with Will Adams. Can’t remember being ordained a priest. I was ordained an Elder in Díaz. Ward teaching was done in the daytime in little cottage meetings. The one that went visiting was in charge.

Apostle Teasdale thought quite a bit of me for I hauled him from Díaz to Deming where he caught the train to Salt Lake for Conference. He would write a note to the Bishop for me to meet him on his way back. I paid my tithing that way. The Bishop would give me a slip of paper after my trip saying it had been paid.

I first met Amy Elizabeth Rowley in Old Mexico. John Rowley lived on the outskirts of town. I remember seeing her out picking peas. I was about 18. I was out riding after the cattle.

We had a party at my mother's place. Amy came with all the others. My brother, Peter, asked if he could walk her home. It made me so mad because I had been kinda smiling at her, and she at me. She gave him the 'sack'. I asked if I could take her home and she said, "Yes". That was the first time I took her home.

We were married in Díaz by Apostle Teasdale. Teasdale lived in Mexico until President Ivins came to take his place. We were married in Amy's mother's home in the evening. We had a big supper after the wedding. All I had was 50¢ when I got married. I had to go to La Ascension, 3 miles, to buy cloth for Amy's wedding dress. She made it herself. After supper her father said, "Now boys, you've had a fine supper now go on home and leave them alone!" My friends knew John Rowley and they went.

At first we lived in one of John's wife's rooms. I was working for Charles Richins. He had cattle and I helped him fence.

I soon bought dobies and built a one room house. It had a dirt floor at first but later we got lumber for the floor.

John Rowley wouldn't allow much meat in his house. I bought some and took it home and we sure had a feast.

All our children were born in Mexico except Bob (Rupert Wendel also known as Robert), who was born in Parowan, Utah.

Don't know whether to tell this or not --- One time I was out fencing or building a levee around the town to keep the flood water back. My wife wrote and told me the Church had assessed us a certain amount. Will Adams was one of the Committee men. They said I was the only one who hadn't paid any so I wrote back that I would come in in a few days and pay up --- and I did. A year later in the co-op store, Will Adams said to a man that came in that the man, meaning me, hadn't paid up. I said that my wife wrote that I was the only one who hadn't paid any. He said my wife was a liar. We fought. I got hold of his mustache and made his nose bleed. Boy, I fought like a badger and I was scared of him --- he was 6 feet 3 inches. We were supposed to go ward teaching that day, but Andrew Anderson said if we couldn't get along any better than that then we'd better not go teaching. We didn't go and I haven't gone since. (Arch was about 8 at the time.)

I was a policeman in Colonia Díaz for two years and then later for a four year period. Bishop Johnson and Brother Teasdale told me, "You've got to be a minute man!"

We had the most company down in Old Mexico. All the renegades that came across the border we had to feed.

Johnson was Bishop for 20 years.

I worked on a survey outfit from Deming to Orogrande. They transferred us to the city of Chihuahua, 400 miles away and was to work north until we met the railroad. Worked down there for six months. Never had one day of pay. Got \$30. I sent \$20 home and kept \$10. Looked every month for a payday. They went broke, and we've never been paid yet. It was called "Mañana Railroad".

My \$10 brought me from Chihuahua to Deming. Had 10¢ left when I arrived.

George and Parley Johnson came out from Old Mexico wanting a job so I brought their team home to Díaz while they stayed and dug "canaigre", a root that grows in sandy country used to tan leather. My brother, Alfred ran a tannery in Díaz. Parley Johnson made shoes there and fixed harnesses. I plastered the vats for Alfred.

By the time we left Mexico, we had a nice place on Main Street with 8 inch walls of dobie brick with real brick on the outside. It had three rooms downstairs and three upstairs. We got word at eight one morning that the rebels were coming. We were going to make a stand but word from the President of the United States said to get out for the U.S. was going to intervene. We thought we would be gone for just a few days or weeks. We came to Hachita, New Mexico out by train and left everything --- and lost everything.

Parley Johnson came here (Blanding, UT) from Mexico. After I went to Parowan, he kept writing to me to come here. I came on the train to Thompson. It looked like a hell hole. We took the stage to Moab. It was like a garden of Eden. Stayed a year there but Parley kept writing to come to Blanding. We came on the mail to Monticello. Stayed at old man Frost's place where we had two rooms with stove and dishes. He charged \$7 which was awful high. I wished I had had 100 houses to rent. I felt so sorry for the poor refugees from Mexico. We only had our clothes and bedding. We walked, Arch and I, to Blanding to see Parley.

In Blanding we lived in a tent in the cedars. I soon took up a homestead between Blanding and Monticello. Chris Christensen lived across the highway. I cleared four acres and planted corn. I had the loveliest corn you ever saw. Frost came and wanted to help cut my corn, so we cut it and shocked it into shocks.

I wanted to trade corn for oats to Chris at 100 pounds square across, but he wouldn't trade. That fall I sent corn with George Adams to Salt Lake. In the spring I was shelling corn (this was the year Hoover was president). Had to have so much ahead to get sugar. I took corn and ground it into cornmeal. Lots of people came to buy it. I charged \$3 per 100 pounds. Finally, I raised it to \$7 and \$8. A letter came from Denver offering me \$16 a hundred pounds. I was just sick.

Chris then wanted corn. I offered it for 12¢ a pound. He refused. He went to Mancos but it was the same price. He came back, and I sold him 200 pounds for \$25.

Amy died in 1917 and I was left with four children. I was the first one to put up a headstone in the cemetery in Blanding.

I married Phebe Rowley. I knew Phebe in Old Mexico. She was about 10 years younger than me. She was a Stevens girl before she married the son of Orissa Rowley. She had four children during her first marriage. Ed Stevens had four children and Chloe Black was caring for them. Ed Stevens asked me to care for them. We did until we went to Bluewater, New Mexico.

In Blanding, we built a home where Jesse Johnson now lives. I also quarried the rock for the post office. Burt and Parl (Parley) Redd got me to quarry for \$1.25 a perch. That was 16½ feet long, 1 foot wide and 1 foot thick. It weighed a ton. I got it out of Westwater. The snow was two to three feet deep while I worked, all by hand. I made some sharp steel gads about 3 to 4 inches long and used the pick and sledgehammer to drive them in. They would come out in layers. It took all winter. I made \$125, and I was sure glad to get it. I just quarried the stone and someone else hauled it out. I had to blast some of it out. I had known Parl and Burt in Old Mexico. The building was a bank. Burt was cashier and President Redd was a stockholder in it.

We bought the first Dodge car from Jacob Adams in Monticello for \$75. It was a second-hand car; then we left for Bluewater, New Mexico. Arrived there May 1, 1921. We ran out of gas and had to sleep on the prairie in our blankets. It was pretty cold. Doris Childs took us in at Bluewater when we got there.

Daughter Hortense, and her husband, Morgan Nielsen went with us to Bluewater.

I was working for a company that was drilling for oil out north of Bluewater. I was cutting and hauling wood. A splinter flew up and hit me in the eye. It was 1925, I think. After much pain and trying to doctor my eye, I had to go to the hospital and have my eye taken out.

I was a plasterer and brick layer.

I think I raised a good family, most of them being active in the Church, with high moral standards. My oldest son, Archie was in the Stake Presidency, in Farmington, New Mexico and filled a mission in Central America. Udell, my second son filled a mission in the southern states, spending most of his time in South Carolina. He was a counselor in the bishopric of the Mesa Second Ward for a year and a half and then served as a bishop of that ward where he was 8 years. Bernice does lots of work for the Relief Society in Blanding. Pearl worked for the Relief Society in Needles, California. I was sealed again to my wife in Salt Lake Temple on October 10, 1918. Because of failing health, I have been living here in Blanding with Ras and Bernice. Ras has been like my own son.

\*\*\*End of Dictation\*\*\*

## *Grandpa Mortensen's Story*

*(As told to his granddaughter, Delna Burtenshaw Knighton)*

I was born in 1872 in Scipio, Millard County, Utah. We left in 1878. I was six years old then. We started out with cattle and went to Arizona. I had to help drive the cattle across, then we put the wagon on the boat and ferried it across, and I was one of the first ones that went across. I had my pony so that I could take care of the cattle. I can remember going through when we wanted to make water places. Coyotes would howl and so would I. When we came to the Buckskin Mountains in Arizona, the Indians were bad. We formed the wagons in a circle when we camped. I can remember one night the Indians set fires all around on the Buckskin Mountains; we were down in the valley. When crossing the Buckskin Mountains, my mother drove one team and we just had a little trail of boulders and they cut pinions and tied a chain to the back of the wagon because the brakes wouldn't hold the wagon to go down the steep hill.

When we landed in Tuba City, Arizona, my mother lived in a rock building, just one room. When we got located there, we had one cow. There was alkali there. I went and gathered that, and my mother used it for soda to make corn bread. We had that cow, and she gave us all the milk and butter we wanted. There was me and my brother Alma (Almy) and my sister Elizabeth (Lizzy).

When we first went to Tuba City they called it Moenkopi. A little later on, they changed it to Tuba City. How they came to call it that, there was an old Hopi Indian named Tuvvi and so they named it Tuba City. My mother was the first white woman to settle in Tuba City.

We lived at Willow Springs. It was ten miles from Tuba City. There was such a nice spring there. My father was called to Tuba City as a missionary with Jacob Hamblin and Chris Christensen to try to make peace with the Indians. The people that settled in Tuba City had to move because the U.S. government finally bought the people out. Finally, we went on to Gila River after his mission was over. My father had three wives: Dorothy, Trena and Martina. My mother was Martina Rasmussen. Officers came after them for living in polygamy. We came to Tuba City --- at that time my father made me a yoke to set over my shoulders, and I had to carry water down from the spring down to Tuba City.

In Winslow, Arizona, they started living in the United Order and they found out they couldn't get along, so they stopped living it. Lot Smith was president over the United Order. Lot Smith was my brother-in-law, that was his first wife.

They had a fort built, and they had adobe houses all facing the one house. The Indians couldn't get in. They had all the windows barred on the outside. They all lived in



different rooms, but it was just one fort. They only had one entrance and one outside door. We all ate at one table. They farmed, and they put a dam in the Little Colorado and put the water out in irrigation. Everything they made went all in one place.

I had to pull weeds out of the wheat. I can remember the man that was over me. It was George Bailey.

Nobody could live the United Order. We had milk cows, and I had to carry two gallons of milk over to Winslow. We lived in a place called Sunset. It was just a little ways across the river from Winslow. We moved to Sunset after they couldn't live the United Order. Afterwards, when they started up Winslow, there wasn't a railroad and people came in and built one from Holbrook to Winslow, Arizona. I was about nine years old then.

One time we were carrying milk over to Winslow. We had a raft, and we had to ferry it across the Little Colorado. One time there was too much ice coming down, and I couldn't make it, and I went back and told my father, and he said, "You have got to go," and I said, "I am not going to go, I can't make it!" My Dad gave me a licking and I said, "That is all right, go right ahead and whip away because I am not going unless you go with me." So he took me there. He put me across and took the raft back. They had a bridge up around, and I had to walk back around that way.

After we left Gila Valley, my father decided to go to Old Mexico with the rest of the people down there. When they got there, they built dug-out houses to live in. They dug wells, and they had steps going down into the wells so they could get the water out. Finally, they made a good colony of it and built nice homes.

When they first were there, the Mexicans wanted to rob them out of everything they could get, but they finally got so they just thought maybe they were there to stay. People rented farms off them and showed them how to farm in a different way.

There was a man named Ancheta, and he was President of Colonia Díaz at that time. The Mexicans started to rebel and Ancheta was in favor of the Mormons. The Mexicans didn't like that so they killed him. When he was killed, they asked the Mormon people to come over there and help guard the town because there was about twelve of them that was barricaded up in a grist mill. Later on his brother-in-law decided to preside over the people there, and I was with them when they went up to try to get them. He called and told them he was the President of the locality and about this time they started shooting. We hid behind a wheelbarrow that had adobes in it. While they were getting away, they killed San Quentins. We guarded the town because the people were rebelling against that. The soldiers came in there and captured them and took them to the City of Mexico. They put them out on a boat on an island and kept them there for a while. I remember some of them

coming back from the City of Mexico and that started the revolutionary war (in Mexico) from there on. They were glad to have Mormons come over there then.

One time I went to arrest a fellow, and he wouldn't be arrested. They had a tannery right close to their home and so there was several people working there. I went to arrest this boy and he broke and ran. I overtook him and knocked him down. I was there on their premises and his grandmother came out there. She had a twisted rope and whacked me over the head a time or two, and I had to let the boy go. I grabbed her and put both her arms together and held her. The boy ran to the house and got his six-shooter and he came out with it and said, "Grandma, get away from him and I will fill him so full of holes his own folks won't know him." I drew my gun. He broke and ran into the house. His grandpa was Justice of the Peace there at one time. So a little later on, I was arrested and I had to be turned over to the Justice of the Peace of Shoshone. He fined me \$5 and the woman was fined \$2.50 and the boy was fined \$4. A little later on, they took him to Shoshone to try and get him turned loose and of course I went over as a witness. When we got there, we had court in the Judge's office. When we got in there, I told him, "If this is going to be the law, I want my papers back, and I don't want to be sheriff anymore."

The Justice of the Peace said, "We will see what we can do." I told him his Grandpa was Justice of the Peace and what he had fined them and they investigated. He fined the woman \$20 and the old man refunded my money that he had fined me and "If you want to put her behind the bars you can." The Justice of the Peace that fined me had used my \$5 to buy a black hat.

One time I was water master up on the ditch. One day a man named Seltz-a Logo asked if I was Mr. Mortensen, and I said, "Yes." I was cleaning the moss out of the ditch so the water would be divided evenly. This man had bought the Scarity Ranch and he said, "You were the man that cut some hay on my ranch," and he said, "I am going to kill you." He called me all kinds of names. I said I hadn't got anything to defend myself and what good would it do to kill me up there? I told him I had permission to cut grass. So he put his six-shooter up and a little later on he came to me and was my very best friend. After that I could never pass his place without him insisting I come in for a while.

I arrested Jerome Adams and took him to court and he was fined \$25. After he got out of court he went up to his brother-in-law's place and got a six-shooter and came back and killed one of my neighbors. I was told to go after him. After a long chase he was captured. He was sent back to Old Mexico where he was tried and sent to jail. He got out of jail, but he made his threats, "Whenever I get a chance, I will kill you." He came through where I was living, but he was afraid to do anything when he got out of jail.

I lived in Mexico 22 years. We went to Dog-Springs just across the border to New Mexico. That was in 1912. I went from there to Hatchita, New Mexico. That was in 1912. The rebels ran us out of Old Mexico. There were 4,000 people (Americans) who came out at that time. We left Hatchita and went to Thatcher, Arizona.

I met my wife in Old Mexico at her home. She went to church a time or two, so I decided to court her. We didn't have much courting because my father-in-law wouldn't let me. I went on a survey job after I met her, so the rest of the courting was done in letters. I was 20 years old when I was married. I was married in July by Apostle Teasdale in Colonia Díaz, at my wife's place. I had 50¢ when I got married. We lived in a room at my mother-in-law's place. Later on we built a nice seven room home. We had ten children.

I went to Parowan, Utah. Left there and came to Moab and then we lived in Monticello and rented a farm. Then we moved to Blanding in 1915. I helped put the first water system in Blanding. Parley Redd and Burt Redd wanted some rock quarried and I took a contract for 100 perch. The rock I quarried out is what the Post Office is made of. I quarried the rocks down below Westwater.

From Blanding we went to Bluewater, New Mexico. I lived there the biggest part of the time until in 1952 when I took sick and came to live with Bernice in Blanding, Utah.

----- *Addition made by son, Arch Mortensen - May 1990*

About 1908 - Lauritz was transporting a party of athletes from Colonia Díaz to Colonia Juárez, Old Mexico. During the over-night stop, in route, one of the wrestlers wanted someone to work out with him, as competition was in a couple of days. Lauritz accepted the challenge, and upset the athlete in a side-holt wrestle.

Dad was a real live wire when he was young.

About 1910 - During a trip from Colonia Díaz, Old Mexico to Colonia Dublán, Old Mexico, Lauritz, with a four-horse team and freight wagon, met an acquaintance four miles out of Colonia Dublán. A horse race was challenged. Lauritz unhitched one of his leaders, a cropeared horse. The two men decided the distance to run and the race was run. Lauritz won the race and a small wager, harnessed his race horse and delivered his freight to Colonia Dublán.

I was with him when he ran the horse race.

----- *Addition made by son, Udell Mortensen*

Dad lived a full life, and I am sure he was happy most of the time, because that was his nature. He loved people and enjoyed talking to them. Dad was a great storyteller and was in his delight when he was telling about some of his experiences with Mexican rebels, outlaw Indians, and exciting horse races or a hunting trip. He lived in an exciting time, had an exciting life, always willing to go the second mile to help someone, even if it did mean that his life might be in danger.

When the Indian outbreak started in San Juan County, Utah, Dad was one of the first to go to the Bluff to help protect the people of that county, and besides he loved the excitement of it.

He loved horses and the great out-of-doors. He loved to be close to nature. He loved deer hunting and it was only the last few years of his life that he didn't get his deer. He enjoyed all kinds of sports, horse racing, ball games and especially foot racing. When he was a young man, he was very fast on foot, and I knew even in his older years he was very sure of foot and his step had a firm fast action.

I remember when I was a very young child, Dad would get me on his knee and we would play "Here Comes Frohn." I suppose he played that with all of his children and many of his grandchildren. This was a Danish custom taught to him by his own father, no doubt.

----- *Addition made by daughter, Bernice Mortensen Burtenshaw*

Lauritz married Amy Elizabeth Rowley on July 20, 1892 while both were at the age of 20. Lauritz served as water master and sheriff and his livelihood while in Old Mexico was farming and mason work. They left Mexico May 24, 1912. They lost everything because of the revolution and came to Thatcher, Arizona. In 1913 they moved to Blanding, Utah.

In the fall of 1917 Lauritz and Erastus Burtenshaw quarried the stones out of Westwater for Parley Redd's store. He helped lay the first pipeline in Blanding. Lauritz took up dry farming in Virgin and dry farmed for a living. He loved horses and always had the best. He also was a good mason and most of the houses he built are still standing.

Amy was a very religious woman, very quiet and a hard worker. She always looked dressed up even when she wore old clothes. Her pastimes were reading and horseback riding. She was in very poor health most of her married life. She died in childbirth the 24th of April 1918 in Blanding, Utah. The baby was stillborn.

Lauritz left Blanding in 1922 and spent 31 years in Bluewater, New Mexico. He spent his last two years in Blanding with his daughter, Bernice Burtenshaw and died April 21, 1955 at age 82.