

A TRIBUTE TO DEBORAH DELANO LEAVITT AND TO HER PARENTS, MOSES AND LYDIA BAKER DELANO

Deborah Delano Leavitt, 1792-1829

Moses Delano, 1762-1827

Lydia Baker Delano, 1765-1845

by Joy Viehweg, third great granddaughter

The time is April of 1829. We see a woman of thirty-six years lying in bed, gravely ill. She knows in her heart that she has little time left on this earth. This woman is Deborah Delano Leavitt, wife of Nathaniel Leavitt. She has brought six children into the world, and all of them are still young. Perhaps she is miles away from home. How is she able to reconcile this situation in her mind? Can we begin to imagine the thoughts that are occupying her consciousness at this crucial time?

Is she thinking of her little John, her baby, barely two, the youngest of the children?
Without a mother, who will care for him and give him comfort when he is hurt or sad?
Who will tuck him into his little crib at night?

Is Deborah wondering how, when she is gone, her twelve-year-old Salena will be able to manage as the “woman” of the home? Of course, Roxana, at age ten, will be a great help to her older sister, and Caroline Elizabeth, being nine, will complete a trio of young household helpers. Little Nathaniel is only five, but he will try to be the “man” of the house when his father is out working on the farm. Her youngest daughter, Flavilla Lucy, with her two-year-old level of understanding will wonder where her mother is and why she doesn't come home. Deborah is frightened to think of what will become of her precious babes.

And what is Deborah feeling about poor Nathaniel, her husband? Is she wondering how he will be able to accept the huge responsibility of being both father and mother to their brood of little ones? Was Nathaniel close by, grieving to see his sweetheart so pale and fearful? Is Deborah also reminiscing about the time years before when she and Nathaniel left Irasburg, Vermont and took their two little girls to work out their destiny over the border at Hatley in Quebec? She remembers that those were hard times, but tilling new soil, welcoming more children into the family, and living close to many other Leavitt families undoubtedly created a setting for real happiness. Nathaniel's parents, Jeremiah and Sarah Shannon Leavitt were living there, as well as other relatives.

As Deborah lies there trying to gather strength, she might be thinking of her mother, Lydia Baker Delano, whose Baker family were Connecticut people who had originally come from England. Does Deborah's mother know that she is dying? Perhaps her mother is at her bedside holding her hand and trying to hold back the tears. But, this is more conjecture.

And what is Deborah recalling about her father, Moses Delano, who had died only two years earlier? Does she miss him terribly? Is she musing about how the Delanos had settled in Albany, Vermont, coming from Connecticut, and earlier from Massachusetts? Does she know through family stories that her 3rd Great Grandfather Philippe Delano was

born in Leyden, Holland before coming to America? Has anyone ever told her that the Delanos originally came out of France, probably because of religious persecution, fleeing to England, and then looking for haven in Holland where the Puritans settled? While Deborah is thinking about relatives, could she even imagine that a Delano cousin of some degree would, in about one hundred years, become the president of the United States and be known worldwide, with Delano as his middle name?

Little does Deborah know that after her death Nathaniel would marry a young woman, Betsy Bean, and that this new wife would bear three more little ones to him, Rosilla, Mary Jane and Wire. She couldn't know in this year of 1829 that eight years later Nathaniel's family, except for Salena and Caroline Elizabeth who elected to stay, would leave Quebec to make an unparalleled trek to the Great Basin of the United States in search of fulfillment in their new found religion. How could she even begin to surmise that Nathaniel would die on the way, in Michigan, and that, after his death, Betsy would return with her three children to Hatley? It is impossible for Deborah to envision that her other children, Roxana, Nathaniel, Jr., Flavilla Lucy and John would arrive in Utah in the 1850's and make their homes there.

It is thought by some, today, that Deborah died at Derby, Vermont. Derby is near the Canadian border, and is on the road between her home in Hatley and Albany, Vermont where her mother was living. Was Deborah in Derby to seek medical help? Was she traveling to visit her mother, suddenly taking sick? These are questions to be answered later after much investigation, a story yet to be written by her family.

Today we honor Deborah Delano Leavitt and her parents, Moses and Lydia Baker Delano. Deborah was adventurous and courageous, a mother of the frontier. The Delano and Baker families were intrepid colonial families which contributed in large measure to the upbuilding of two great nations in the free world. We dare not be complacent about the events in the lives of our ancestors. On the other hand, we will do well to remember them and to emulate their fine example.