

# Pioneer Woman – Martha Freeman Goddard

Joseph Goddard; Salem, Mass.

Throughout the Western States are statues of the Pioneer Woman. These statues commemorate the integral, indispensable role that the Wives/Mothers played in settling the west and building the Country. Our ancestor Martha Freeman Goddard was one of these American heroes.

## ***Family***

### **Who Were Her People?**

Martha Freeman Lepper was born July 12, 1851, in Waverly, Pike Co., Ohio (south of Columbus); she was the oldest child, and had four brothers and two sisters:

- John Clark (“Bud”)
- Charles Freeman (“Chas”)
- James Madison (“Mad”)
- Nicholas Barton (“Bart”)
- Sara Elizabeth (“Lib”)
- Marilla Jane (“Rilly”)



*Martha F. Goddard, perhaps about 1880*

## **Pioneer Woman – Martha Freeman Goddard**

Her parents were James Lepper\* and Mary Ann Clark. James was born in New York state, and moved to Ohio in 1837. Mary Ann was born in Ohio; her parents were born in Ohio shortly after statehood (it seems).

### **Husband and Children**

Martha married Thomas Miller Goddard, who was born in Troy, Iowa, November 24, 1846 (the year Iowa became a state). Martha and Tom had one girl (Io) and five boys (Sim, Jim, Dick, Guy, and Ray).

### ***Life's Course***

#### **Centerville, Iowa**

When “Mattie” was about 2 ½ years old, in 1854, the Lepper family moved from the civilization of Ohio to Appanoose County, Iowa, to a 160A farm in Walnut Township (Mystic).

In her 20's, Mattie worked as a typesetter in the newspaper office in Centerville, the county seat. A 28-year-old lawyer, and civil war veteran, Thomas M. Goddard, decided that she was the one woman for him. Family legend says she replied to his proposal, “Oh, Mr. Goddard, you wouldn't want a little good-for-nothing like me.” He retorted, “WOMAN, I KNOW MY BUSINESS!” They were married April 17, 1875 – Mrs. Goddard was 24 years old.

#### **The Move to Dakota Territory**

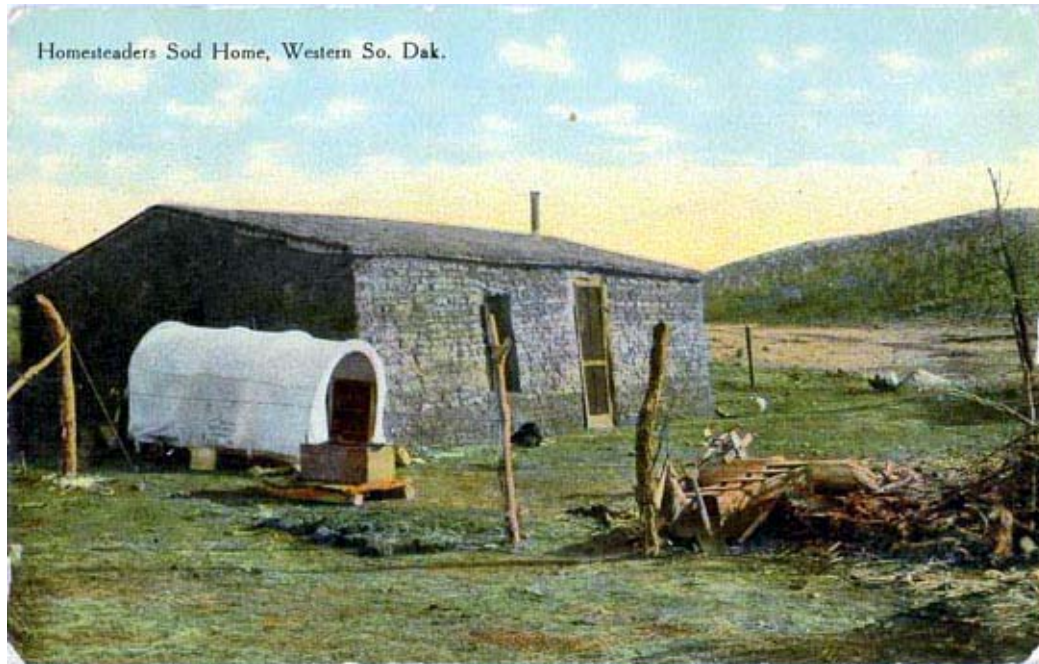
One day in 1883, Tom Goddard came home and informed Martha that they were going to move from Centerville to Dakota Territory and settle on a homestead. According to Martha's narrative, she had a few weeks to pack everything she might need, say goodbye – probably forever – to her family, and get on the train with her three small children. (Some 65 years later, as Martha told this story to her family, she said, “And that's what we done.” It has become a watchword in the family.)

Tom and some neighbor men would go out ahead to the Territory, stake claims, and get started on building sod houses for their families to spend the winter in. The week she was to follow him, Martha prepared to go for her last farewells with her family; but there were heavy rains, “the Fox was out of its banks”, and she could not manage the visit after all. So, departure day came and she set out with Io, Sim, and baby Jim to go to the great gray prairie.

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\* Her great-grandfather, Wyand (or Whyand or Wyant or Weigand) Lepper was a private in the Continental Army from New York, during the Revolution.

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*Typical Dakota Soddy*

As one might expect, life in Dakota was viciously hard. They had a homestead claim and a wood claim in Sully County: they farmed as they could, Tom hauled freight across the width of South Dakota to the Black Hills, and Tom practiced law when possible. Martha had three more boys – Dick, Guy, and Ray – and raised the family. After statehood in 1889, Tom went to Pierre to serve in the South Dakota legislature.

The marriage was not a happy one in those days. Tom “beat his horses, he beat his wife, and he beat his children.” One day young Guy found Martha in tears, mourning “if it weren't for you children I wouldn't stay with him another day.” Tom's strict sense of Methodist discipline led him to punish infractions swiftly: examinations of the accused boy that resulted in a verdict of guilt would earn the sentence: “Bring me the buggy whip.” Io, the only girl, was exempt from corporal punishment, as was the baby Ray.

As a result, the children left home as soon as possible. Io went to school and became a teacher. Sim and Dick left the farm. Jim joined the army for the Spanish-American War and died in Florida before going overseas. Guy “borrowed” one of the family's draft horses and left one Sunday night when he was 12. Martha was ultimately left with young Ray and her husband.

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Goddard Family 1890: (1) Tom 44; (2) Martha 38;  
(3) Io 14; (4) Sim 12; (5) Jim 8 1/2; (6) Dick 6;  
(7) Guy 4; (8) Ray 1 1/2

### Hot Springs

Things turned around with the new century. In 1903, Tom secured the post as Commandant of the state Soldier's Home in Hot Springs, South Dakota; Martha was appointed Matron. Guy rejoined his parents, as did Io when school was out of session.

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Tom's attitude mellowed, and life was good; the Goddards ran the Soldier's Home until 1907. At a farewell dinner, the old soldiers surprised Tom with an armchair and gave Martha a gold watch with a chain and turquoise-studded slide. She had to stand on a chair so they could all see her. When Martha opened the red plush box and saw the pretty bauble inscribed "from the old boys," she cried.

### **Vermillion**

Leaving Hot Springs, Tom moved his family to Vermillion, South Dakota, so that Guy and Ray could attend the university. Tom kept bees, and life went along, until 1916. Tom, ailing, went to the veterans' hospital at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and died there on January 26, 1917.

### **As a Widow**

About 1920, Martha's oldest son Sim moved with his family to Sheridan, Wyoming. When Martha's daughter Io died in 1925, she moved to Sheridan with Sim.

About 1938, Sim moved the household – including 87-year-old Martha - to Boulder, Colorado. The reason was the same as his parents' move to Vermillion: so the kids (Glen, Harold "Rusty", and Doris) could go to the university.

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*Rocker and table built for Martha by Sim*

During the years with Sim's family, Sim – who was a skillful carpenter by trade – made his mother a table and a rocking chair matched to her diminutive size. These pieces are still with the family.



*Martha Goddard at age 93  
with great-granddaughters Eileen and Kathleen Goddard*

Martha died in Boulder at age 99, on July 16, 1950. They buried her out on the lone prairie of Sully County, and brought Tom's remains from Leavenworth to rest with hers.

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