

TWO PIONEERS ACROSS TWO CENTURIES

By Allison Ji-Jen Merrill

Dear Ebenezer, you do not know me; we have never met. On November 17, 1830, you were born in Dunblane, Perthshire, Scotland, to Andrew Bryce and Janet Adams Bryce. They named you Ebenezer.

One hundred forty-three years later, I was born in Hualien, Taiwan. They named me Ji-Jen Hung.

You started to work in shipyards at age 10. Later you became an apprentice and were very skillful in your trade.

At age four I started to memorize times tables and the Chinese phonetic symbols. It was not easy, but I managed.

In the spring of 1848, you developed an interest in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, although your father, family, and friends did not share your enthusiasm. They did everything possible to persuade you to denounce the Church. Your father even locked up your clothes to keep you from attending Sunday meetings. But your faith was steadfast. In spite of persecution you struggled on.

On December 4, 1986, two American missionaries from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints knocked on the door of my father's house. Although Father let the missionaries visit regularly, he was never interested in the message. A few months later

he divorced Mother and remarried.

When Father informed the missionaries of the sad news of our broken family, he also told them not to come back.



The missionaries left a copy of the Book of Mormon with the address of the nearest church written on the inside cover and said, "We will always be your friends. If there is anything we can do for your family, come to this address, and you will find us there."

Saying good-bye to the missionaries that evening was difficult, for I had felt something precious in their message.

Stepmother moved in. She and Father became cruel, life became hard, and I became a cynical teenager.

One night, when I could take their horrible treatment no longer, I dashed

out the door in fear and hid in the rice fields, lonely, depressed, and hopeless. I wanted to run away, but I had nowhere to go.

Suddenly I remembered what the elders had said during their last visit. "First thing tomorrow, I am going back to find my friends!" I told myself, feeling a sense of inner peace for the first time in years.

Early the next morning I hopped on my bike and went downtown to the church, but the elders who had visited my family a couple of years before had returned home. Just when I was about to give up, two friendly ladies with the familiar black name tags on their coats approached me and introduced themselves.

Dear Ebenezer, despite your father's opposition, you were baptized in April 1848, the only convert in your family.

A month after I met the sister missionaries, I was baptized, in November 1988, the first convert in my family.

But Father and Stepmother made it difficult for me to attend church.

One day after I came home from a Young Women activity, Father stomped into the den, swore at me, grabbed my scriptures, and tore them into pieces. Flakes of white paper floated and drifted in the air, gracefully and gently landing on the floor, where my teardrops also fell.

*A Scottish boy. A Taiwanese girl.
A century and a half apart but bonded by faith.*

It was like a nightmare I could not wake up from.

When I turned 21, I expressed a strong desire to serve a full-time mission. Father responded by disowning me. On Chinese New Year's Eve, when most people went home to be with their loved ones, I was expelled from home.

Dear Ebenezer, when the persecution from your family and friends became unbearable, you decided to emigrate from Scotland to America to join the Latter-day Saints and cross the plains to Utah. Your father was furious. He commanded you to stay, but you were a deter-

mined young man. The day you boarded the ship was the last time you saw him.

Life as a 17-year-old immigrant was not easy for you, Ebenezer, but you managed.

Ebenezer Bryce helped build the Pine Valley chapel (below), completed in 1868. He also discovered the canyon that now bears his name, Bryce Canyon National Park (right), in southern Utah.



Your carpentry, millwright, and shipbuilding skills were immediately put to use. You were called to build a chapel in Pine Valley, Utah. Though you had never built a chapel before, you did not hesitate to accept the calling.

Today that building is the oldest Latter-day Saint chapel still in use.

Later you discovered the majestic natural amphitheater that now bears your name, Bryce Canyon National Park.

On June 4, 1994, I reported to the Taiwan Taichung Mission as a full-time missionary. I pinned a black name tag on my coat, just like the elders who had

come to visit my family years before. I was humbled. I was honored. I was blessed.

After my mission I emigrated to Utah, where I met my husband. We were married in the temple for time and all eternity. Through my husband's lineage, I became connected to you.

Dear Ebenezer, you don't know me. We have never met. But I have heard stories about you. Your feet never stopped traveling. Your hands never stopped working. Your heart never stopped believing. You never stopped serving. After all these years, your faithful example lifts me still. Thank you, dear Ebenezer. Thank you! ■

