



# In Search of Mary Dudley

BY JILL DUDLEY DYCHES

*Some might call it coincidence, but I know the Spirit guided me.*

Several years ago, when I traveled to Massachusetts to visit my sister-in-law and attend a family history conference in her stake, I found myself thinking about one of my ancestors, Mary Lougee Dudley. According to some old newspaper articles, her husband, who was a minister, murdered her on the way home from a prayer meeting in 1848. After the conference, I felt prompted to stay in New England a few more days to try to learn more about Mary Lougee and her husband, Enos Dudley.

I rented a car and headed for the Prescott Hill Cemetery in New Hampshire. After three hours of driving, I found myself winding along a dirt road in a dense forest. As I

neared the cemetery, I came to a chain barricade marked Road Closed. A tremendous growth of foliage covered the ground, and rocks of all sizes were strewn across the roadway, making me wonder if anyone had passed this way in 50 years. Disappointed, I turned the car around and slowly headed back. A man walking along his driveway told me that no one had driven down that little road in years, and he knew of no other way to get to the cemetery. I stopped at two separate gas stations to inquire about directions and was given the same response.

## **First, Inquire of the Lord**

I had a map. I had a GPS tracking system. But they weren't enough. So I did what I should have done an hour earlier: I stopped the car and asked Heavenly Father to help me find my way.

A few minutes later I pulled alongside a man and woman walking down the road. "I'm lost," I told them.



Their response made me realize that my prayers had been heard.

They told me there were two Prescott Hill cemeteries, and the one I wanted was about 55 miles in another direction. The man instructed me to drive over a bridge and through a town so small he called it a hamlet. If I followed his directions carefully, he said, I would eventually arrive at the cemetery, which was on the left side of a narrow dirt road. In awe, I asked him how he could possibly know about this tiny cemetery in the middle of nowhere. His companion replied, “You could have looked the world over and never have found a better person to ask. He just retired last week from the park and road service, and he knows every ditch and bridge, every cemetery and road in the area.”

Feeling humbled and blessed, I drove to the small, unkempt cemetery on a remote, rundown road. I walked the entire plot. It didn’t take long; there were no more than 60 headstones. I learned new information about my ancestors, and I also learned that if I ask Heavenly Father for help, He will answer my prayers.

After I had taken numerous photographs and copied information from headstones, I felt impressed to drive to the town of Alton, New Hampshire, where the Dudley

family had lived. I found a hotel and planned the following day’s activities. I would ask the funeral home about old cemetery records, visit the two local cemeteries I had found on my map, and look at old records at the town hall.

### **More Answers to Prayers**

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In the morning I called the funeral home. The director told me that if I drove to the cemetery right away, I would find a caretaker there. I met the caretaker, who was responsible for both cemeteries I had planned to visit. I asked him if there were any Dudleys buried there. He looked in his little file and found a few Dudleys, but none of the first names sounded familiar to me. I was about to leave when he asked, “Maybe you would like to go to the Dudley cemetery?”

I turned toward him in surprise. “There is a Dudley cemetery?” He drew a map for me, and I determined to go there after I visited the town hall.

At the town hall a clerk brought out an old book with information about births, marriages, and deaths from the early 1700s. How wonderful that these records still existed—I could hold them in my hands and feel a bit of history! It was nice to see my ancestors’ names and even some of their signatures, but I found little information that was new to me.

I left the town hall and walked down the street to the Gilman Library, where I found some of the nicest people I have ever met. I described my ancestor Enos Dudley, who was accused of murdering his wife, Mary, in 1848. Did they have any historical accounts of this infamous event? The librarians had never heard of Enos Dudley, but they invited me to the archival room, a private area at the back of the library, to look through some of the books kept there. I felt like a child in a candy store.

As I followed two librarians through a doorway, I looked to my left and saw a box sitting on a table.

I asked what was in the box, and they said it contained some old papers that a former librarian had been working on.

To everyone's surprise, the box contained files marked Dudley.

As I opened it, the first name I saw was Enos George Dudley—my elusive fourth great-grandfather! The librarians were as excited as I was. They sat me at a large table and photocopied records for me as I searched through this box of valuable information. “My” project became “our” project. None of these women were members of the Church, but we became united in a cause.

### Visiting the Dudley Cemetery

After leaving the library, I visited the tiny Dudley cemetery. The caretaker, who lived next door to the cemetery, said he would be glad to show me around. What a wonderful man. He stopped working in his garden and not only showed me the Dudley cemetery but also took me to a Dudley monument that was hidden by overgrowth in the yard of a neighbor. On the stone were names and dates I had not known before. Who, I wondered, even knows that this monument exists other than the neighbors?

As we walked back to his home, I asked him if he knew of any members of the Lougee family buried in the area. To my amazement, he did know of some gravestones in a cemetery a few minutes away.

“How do you know this?” I ventured to ask. His humble reply was that he had retired a year earlier as caretaker of several large cemeteries in the area. He was kind enough to show me around the cemetery, where we found the Lougee gravestones. Later, he mentioned that I was very lucky to have found him at home. He informed me that he worked part-time at a local school and this was the first time he had ever left work early.

Lucky? I knew that luck had nothing to do with it. I had

been on the Lord's errand as I searched out my ancestors. He had guided me, through His Spirit, to everything I had found that day.

*Was my ancestor Mary Lougee Dudley murdered by her husband, Enos? A jury decided she was. They convicted Enos of capital murder, and he was hanged at Haverhill Corner, New Hampshire, on May 23, 1859. ■*

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