

## Our Church's Story: Mary Stright Missionary School Teacher

*Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-13 (New Revised Standard Version)*

*I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.*

*But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift... The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.*

Mary Stright was a Presbyterian missionary school teacher who kept a journal from October 1882 to January 1883. It tells the story of her journey from home in Pennsylvania to New Mexico where she spent the rest of her life.

Mary was born May 6, 1857, at the Stright homestead in Mercer County, Pennsylvania. She became a teacher like others in her family. She attended Edinboro State Normal School and through the influence of her teacher, Isabelle Leach, she went to New Mexico at age 25. Isabelle, referred to as "Belle", married a medical missionary, Dr. John Shields and they were assigned to the Jemez Pueblo. Mary joined her friend at Jemez and after Belle's death from pneumonia in 1900, Mary helped care for her friend's five young children.

In 1894 Mary married the trader, John Wiley Miller, a fellow Pennsylvanian. He ran the Santa Fe stage station. When it closed, he started the Jemez Pueblo trading post. The area had a population of about 500 at the time.

Mary and John Miller had one son, Hugh Stright Miller, born January 25, 1896. John Miller died in 1916 following a fall. Mary continued to live in Jemez Springs until her death in 1944 at age 87. They are both buried in our cemetery.

Listen now to Mary's story and our story.

Thursday, October 19, 1882. Morning came at last and, oh how thankful I was.... We soon started on our road again which was the same as yesterday for five miles, when we came to a Mexican town where I saw a large flock of sheep, more than a thousand.... At last we get to Jemez and stop at Dr. Shields' door. They seemed very glad to see me. They had been quite anxious about me as they were afraid I would be directed on to Albuquerque where they said it would have been more trouble for me to get here... Dr. Shields' house is an adobe but it is comfortable and

homelike inside. It has large windows and plenty of room. There are two bedrooms, parlor, a bright kitchen, pantry, etc. The grounds are enclosed by a high mud wall.

Friday, October 20. Spent the day in the schoolroom. This schoolroom is a good sized, well lighted and pleasant room. It is furnished with an organ, maps, globe, and blackboard. Books, slates, pens and ink are all provided by the government. There (only about 12 or 16) scholars and (they haven't been coming to school) on account of corn husking and other fall work. A good many of the children go into the mountains for pinyonies, a small nut and the only kind of nut they have here. The children are scantily clothed, and are very dirty. They have bright black eyes and most of them look intelligent though here and there is one that looks as though his mind was a blank... We talk English to them in the schoolroom and they understand what you mean pretty well though they do not try to talk it much themselves. They act very much like white children. Some of them very fidgety. The older girls bring the babies with them as they have to care for them.

Sunday Morning, Oct. 22, 1882. The bell was rung at half past nine. We have church early (in the schoolroom) for if we wait they all go off to their work. Sunday or Monday is all the same to them. Dr. Shields did not expect many out today as it was a busy time. The services were in Spanish, singing and all. I could pronounce the words pretty well, but did not know the meaning. The Indians paid good attention and seemed to understand. Some days a good many come to church. At two o'clock we have Sabbath school. There were five or six small children, two large girls, Patri and Katalena, and one man. We read a chapter, each of us reading a verse in turn, sang some songs out of Gospels Hymns and had prayers. Mrs. Shields took the small scholars in charge. I took the two girls and Dr. Shields the Indian...

Monday, Oct. 23, 1882. Dr. Shields started very early this morning for Santa Fe to see the Indian Agent and to get some supplies. He can get things cheaper there than here where you have to pay two prices for almost everything except meat, beef and venison which is only 66 cents a pound. He had wanted to go for some time but could not leave. Santa Fe is 60 miles from here so that he will be gone three or four days. He intended to get there this evening. I took almost all the charge of the school. Belle was in some of the time as I have to get her to tell the names pretty often, but I am getting some of them learned. I will give you a few, girls names: Tolela, Ogawag, boys: Pintecte, Pamper, etc.

Wednesday, Oct. 25, 1882. There were but few scholars at school today. The Indians are very busy getting their corn in and almost all large enough are at work and the smaller ones go along for the sake of a ride in their wagon (like white children). They all live here, but their lands extend up and down the aciques for more than six miles. We hear their wagons drawn by oxen going along almost all the time until very late at night and again as early in the morning. They raise a great deal of corn and considerable wheat; also pumpkins, squashes, watermelons and muskmelons. They raise very good grapes. Belle has made a good deal of grape jelly and peaches too ... There are generally plenty of apricots but were none this year. They are very early, ripening in June. Their apples are small sweet affairs and do not amount to much. Like the

Mexicans they raise and eat lots of red pepper or chile. Great strings are to be seen hanging outside of every door. All their farming is done by irrigation as there is so little rain...

Sunday, Oct. 29, 1882. There were only two Indians at church today, a little girl and a large boy. Mr. Miller was there and I saw him for the first time. He is a nice and rather good-looking man. Dr. Shields did not preach as his sermon was prepared in Spanish and there were not enough there... The work is discouraging sometimes. The Catholic bell did a good deal of ringing and we could hear them ordering the people to come to their church. Don't know whether they had any better success or not...

Saturday, Nov. 4, 1882. Dr. Shields went to the springs this morning. He is to preach there tomorrow. An American who is married to a Mexican woman brought a wild turkey here. He had been out on a hunt with another fellow and they had killed 14. He is pretty poor and the doctor had given a good deal of medicine to his wife who is sickly; so he brings them game. Wild turkeys are plenty in the mountains. There are also wild cattle there as well as bears and often mountain lions, and deer too are found. Think it would be a good place to hunt.

Thursday, Nov. 9, 1882. The Indians who started to Santa Fe Monday for freight came this evening. They brought goods home which Dr. Shields had bought when he was there and the government supplies for the Indians which were clothing, blankets, shoes, stockings, muslin, calico, and seats for the school room. Dr. Shields bought a barrel of state apples, real good ones. It seemed like home to get a taste of them.

Saturday, Nov. 11, 1882. Today has been quite cold. It snowed a good deal in the mts. And they looked quite white but there was just a little here and it was gone about as soon as it came. The Indians are all excitement over the feast and tomorrow will be a big day for Indians from Santa Clara and other pueblos, some Navajos and Mexicans are gathering in. They danced last night, shooting and hollering, and making a general racket and are doing the same tonight. Tomorrow is the feast of San Diego, Catholic. The Indians all celebrate and it seems a part of their religion. Long ago they were forced to do it and now it is a part of their nature almost. This Catholic religion is a great deal more disgusting in this country than at the East.

Sunday, Nov. 12, 1882. The Indians were dancing, singing, and making all kinds of noise. They made a berth or St. House by putting up some poles and covering it with blankets. In this was an image to which they bowed down to. We did not try to have services. Dr. Shields said it would be of no use for no one would come. Mr. Miller came down and spent the evening with us. This has not been much like a Sunday at home where all is quiet and we always go to church if not too stormy.

Tuesday, Nov. 21, 1882. Today I had 30 scholars and Dr. Shields had 20. Our largest attendance yet. I was kept pretty busy. Some great big boys were there. Their idea is to get some clothes, not to learn. Not any of them are very far along and they do look so sheepish when I call them up to

read. There have been two in school who can read pretty well in the fourth reader. I got three letters tonight, one from home. They made me think I was not quite forgotten.

Saturday, Nov. 25, 1882. This afternoon Belle and I went out into the pueblo. We went down to the river where the women go for water. Met quite a number with their water pots on their heads. Saw some of their vineyards. Coming back we stopped at Augustin Pecos's house. Found him engaged in making saddles for their burros... Stopped in another place where there was a young baby only three days old. They had it fastened or wrapped to a board so that it could only move its head. There was a kind of framework over its head to keep the blankets from being too heavy when covering it. They keep the babies in this position till they are two or three months old and the back of their heads becomes sometimes quite flat.

Sunday, Nov. 26, 1882. A Mexican and his wife and baby from the springs were here to church today... They rode horseback all on one horse. They stayed for dinner. After church some Mexicans stopped in on their way from the Catholic Church. They were some who are quite friendly with Dr. Shields.

Friday, Dec. 1, 1882. The first day of another month found 30 scholars to begin with... For Nov. we averaged 37 out of over 70 enrolled. I had 20 on average. Some of the scholars did not start till last of the month and others did not attend regular though there were a few who did real well. Among them were Patrai who did not miss a day, and Persingula, George Teyo and Warasa. Two girls from the springs came down today for the mail. Both were horseback. One of them, Mary Kelly, a girl of 14 or 15, and daughter of a boarding housekeeper there. The other girl's folks are from R.I., but are living in Bernalillo now and she is staying at the springs for a while.

Tuesday, Dec. 12, 1882. This is a great feast day for the Catholics. It is the feast of Guadalupe. Mexicans from all around and lots of Indians went there today and I suppose with whiskey and dancing had a jolly time. It is all religion too. We only had 17 scholars and we treated them pretty well. Dr. Shields gave them all 8 sticks of candy apiece and then gave me the same saying he wanted to treat all alike.

Friday, Dec. 22, 1882. Our school averaged 45 this month. I had 26 on average. Dr. Shields says that is the best they have ever had.

Sunday, Dec. 24, 1882. Had preaching this morning. There were 26 present. Did not have Sunday school. The Indians have been busy baking bread, etc. for their feast. Called to see a poor blind woman. She seemed very much pleased, and had to feel Linus (the Shields' son) about all over. The Indians call him *Sho-bo-er-wor-ho* meaning morning star... The woman gave Linus a loaf of their bread...

Dec. 25, 1882. This has been a Christmas in New Mexico for me and a pretty busy one. A good many of the Mexicans stopped in today, some to see Dr. Shields and some to ask for Christmas gifts... Dr. Shields got the trees in and put up before dinner. There were three, not large, though

one reached to the ceiling, but good shape. I marked some things this forenoon and we finished making them, hung them on the tree, filled the bags with candy, and worked as hard as we could, but it was nearly four before we got everything in shape. A good many of the children hung around the door, looking in at the keyhole or were on the fence trying to see through the windows. Our tree looked splendid, almost as well as any I ever saw at home. The children behaved nicely and seemed very much pleased with their gifts. The house was just as full as could be and the old Indians took a great deal of interest in it. We opened the door at five o'clock, were all through by a little after six. Sung two pieces, the scholars helped and sang pretty well and then had a prayer after it was over we had our supper. We had a roast chicken. Mr. Miller stayed for supper and spent the evening with us. I went out into the pueblo when we finished fixing the tree to see them dance. They had been dancing some all day.

Monday, Jan. 1, 1883. The beginning of another year and I wonder what it will have for me! I hardly expected a year ago to be where I am now, in Jemes, N.M. This has been about the same as other days. Did my washing this forenoon. This evening we finished the chestnuts which I got from home and some apples which Mr. Kelly from the springs left here this morning for a present for Belle with a Chinese Pagoda of Silver cardboard.

Sunday, Jan. 7, 1883. Mr. Perea came back just a little before dark. Dr. Shields had made arrangement for him to do so and to baptize the baby. We moved the organ into the parlor. Mr. Miller was present and that was all beside us. I played the organ. We sang "All Hail the Power" etc., and Rock of Ages. Did not have a long service but it was a solemn one and like our meetings at home though so few were present. They named the baby Paul James. After that we had supper. Dr. Shields and Mr. Perea had a good deal to talk about in their work among the Mexicans. Some things discouraging and some encouraging.

*Note: This story was adapted from A Quilt of Words: Women's Diaries, Letters & Orginal Accounts of Life in the Southwest, 1860-1960.*

July 5, 2020 (139<sup>th</sup> Cburch Anniversary)  
David Whiteley, Pastor  
Jemez Springs Community Presbyterian Church