

Notes on the Early Life of Jordan Thomas Harris  
and James Arthur Harris

Jordan Thomas Harris, son of John Work Harris and Martha Jane (Dille) Harris, was born December 18, 1858, on what was known as the "Work Farm", on the State Road three-fourths of a mile west of the Mount Hermon Church, Berne Township, Athens County, Ohio. When Jordan was about fourteen years of age his father bought a small tract of land, all forest, and since his father, a plasterer by trade, was away from home much of the time, the responsibility of carving out a home in the wilderness rested largely upon Jordan's shoulders.

He worked for some time with an uncle (George) at the trade of stone cutting. During these years he attended the district school three or four months during the winter. One of his teachers boarded in the Harris home and Jordan decided he would like to have her as a life teacher, so on January 1, 1880, he was married to this teacher, Ida Ellen Lambert.

To secure a home he bought a tract of land (about 68 acres) and since there was no house on this land, the young couple began housekeeping in a log house which stood on his father's farm. This cabin stood on a slight elevation, surrounded on three sides by a ridge of hills, much of it forest. The logs were rough and uneven in length. The open spaces between the logs were filled with pieces of wood called chinking and the crevices were filled with mortar made of lime or sand, or oftentimes with clay. The roof was of clapboards rived (split) from the trees near at hand. A rough fireplace was built into one end of the cabin, where wood was used as fuel. The cook stove stood in the

2.

corner of the room to the left of the fireplace. Native forest trees of oak and beech stood in the yard. About twenty-five feet from the house was a spring of living water. A long box was placed in the ground just below the spring, which was used as a refrigerator for the milk, butter and other articles of food.

Here midst surroundings scarcely excelled as to natural view, on September 29, 1880, a little baby boy came into the home. At this point we shall follow the career of the lad. The presidential campaign of 1880 (Candidates James A. Garfield and Chester A. Arthur, Republicans) was on and since both parents had been rocked in the cradle of the Republican party, it was quite fitting that the lad should be named James Arthur.

Since this home was only one-eighth of a mile distant over the hill to Jordan's parental home, constant communication was kept up. Jordan's youngest brother, Seth, was only five years older than Arthur and they became great chums. Arthur was a bright and inquisitive child. Nothing escaped his attention. He had a little black dog named Jettie, a constant playmate. Arthur's imagination could easily transform Jettie into a wheelbarrow, a locomotive, or a threshing machine. What a happy life he lived! In the evening the song of the whippoorwill, the cricket, the locust and other insects made the music instead of our modern radio.

In the meantime a more commodious home was erected beside a highway on their own farm. This house was built of well selected logs scutched down to make them uniform in thickness.

A stove for wood was used instead of a fireplace. The windows had large panes of glass. This made a neat and comfortable home, a home in which love, true affection and high moral and spiritual ideals held sway.

Within a few rods and on the opposite side of the road stood a log house, in which Arthur's great-grandparents, Lewis and Olive (Linscott) Dille lived. Arthur spent much time with these good people and was a great favorite with them. It is a significant thing that at this time Arthur saw one great-grandfather, four great-grandmothers, two grandfathers and two grandmothers. He had eleven Aunt Marys.

On November 10, 1885 Arthur's sister, Nellie Lois, came to brighten the home. A cousin of Arthur's mother, Dr. Oscar A. Lambert, now of Okmulgee, Oklahoma, boarded in the home one winter and taught the district school. Arthur, along with six of his father's brothers, attended the district school taught by Oscar Lambert. This school was known as the town house in district #8, Berne Township, Athens County, Ohio. Arthur was a bright pupil. His grandfather, John Harris, possibly because Arthur was the first grandchild, used to say, "They will never raise Arthur. He is too bright."

Arthur's parents were devout Christians and daily read a portion of Scripture and offered audible prayer in the home. They were faithful members of the Mount Hermon Church, United Brethren in Christ. Until old enough to walk, Arthur was carried in the arms of his parents to the church about two miles distant.

4.

His mother taught him Bible stories, so that at the age of six Arthur knew more of the Bible than many adults. No one can estimate the profound influence the lives of these Godly parents had, not only upon their children, but upon the neighbors of the community.

The high idealism of these parents led them to venture into what was then considered a far away territory and on April 9, 1887 the family, with part of their household goods, left the old home for Southwest Nebraska. Jordan's brothers Joe and Leonard, with the big road wagon, made the journey with them to Stewart, the railroad station, a distance of twelve miles. On the way Arthur noticed the great white sycamore trees and excitedly exclaimed, "Papa, Papa, how did they get up there to white wash the trees?" The family visited over Sunday with an uncle, Leander Harris at Stewart, Ohio and then took the train on Monday, April 11, 1887 for their new home in the west.

They lived in Wilsonville, Nebraska until the Fall of 1887, then moved to Cheyenne County in Northwest Kansas and took up a claim as a home. Four successive seasons the crops failed. Arthur's mother taught school and thus helped to stem a serious financial situation. In this way Arthur was the pupil of his mother and it should be noted that she was a teacher among teachers, very thorough in all her work. It was about this time when Arthur, having read something about the Royal Society, said to his mother one day in crossing the prairie, "Mother, I mean to be a member of the Royal Society".

On account of the severe drought the family wanded their way eastward until they settled in their own home at Lawrence,

5.

Kansas where Arthur and his sister, Nellie Lois, graduated from the high school and Kansas University. Arthur's career from this point is quite well known. As a child he was a favorite with everybody.

The above was written by Joseph H. Harris, a brother to Arthur's father, November 10, 1932.