

THE MYSTERY OF NAHUM KNIGHT

By Darrell V. Knight

THE TRAIL OF THE FIRST SON OF JOSEPH SR., AND POLLY KNIGHT CONTINUES TO INTEREST FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCHERS.

Nahum Knight was born on 2 January 1796 in Marlborough, Windham County, Vermont. Mention of this oldest child in the family seems to be excluded from the prolific journal of his younger brother Newel and a shorter history of still another brother, Joseph, Jr. Even his father, Joseph Sr., fails to mention him in his "Reflections" account of the Restoration Period.

He is first mentioned on the second page of Newel's journal. as a married son, living near his parents in Colesville, New York, He was part of the Knight clan who were assembled in western New York after being forced out of Vermont due to several severe winters and poor crops. His wife was listed as Thankful and the children mentioned included, William, Joseph, John, Bethany, Sally, Eliza and Newel.

He and his family were part of the company of the Colesville Branch who moved to Ohio, but Nahum was not listed among those who were baptized around the time of the organization of the Church in 1830. This exemption occurs at the same time the married spouses of the other children are carefully included.

His baptism is listed in the book, "They Are My Friends" as an "unknown date." Nahum and his wife Thankful were included in a list of Colesville Branch who attended the Church organization meeting in 1830 at Fayette, NY (Larry C. Porter, Regional Studies in Latter-day Saints Church History, 1992, pg 154). His family was mentioned with the Knights who were part of the first Mormon settlers to arrived in Jackson Country, Missouri. At that time, the family consisted of "7 or 8" children

In the history literature of the family, several accounts are given of offices held by members of the clan; also tasks that were given by Joseph Smith, Jr., and performed by other members of the family. Nahum is not mentioned. In addition, lists of contributions to temples, missions, consecrations, etc., do not include that of Nahum.

Census records list a Nahum Knight in Clay County in 1840. The recording of names for frontier census takers could easily have been incorrect. For instance, an entry in the 1850 Census of Missouri lists Nahum as Nahum "Night", complete with Thankful and two children, Richard 22 years old and Mary at 17 years. His occupation was listed as wheelwright and his age was 54 which would be correct. His wife's age was listed at 55 years. It

seems certain that this Nahum Night is the missing son of Joseph and Polly. The location of the census placed them in Washington Township, Buchanan County. This county is in the northwest corner of Missouri some distance from Clay and Jackson County. By this time, his other children could have grown and left home.

No mention is made of his being in Nauvoo, except on page 158 of "They Are My Friends" it indicates that Nahum was included in the ordinances of the family in the Nauvoo Temple from December 1845 to February 1846 before the family all left for the west. However, Nahum history of his crossing the plains is absent from any of the journals or accounts by family members.

The 1860 Census for California places him in Diamond Springs, El Dorado County, the heart of the gold rush country. It is assumed then that the family went west from St. Joseph, MO with gold seekers, and the entry consisted of Nahum, a wife and two children, one born in Missouri in 1833 and one born in California, age 7. The last child may have been a grand child. Here is where the trail stops again.

His final whereabouts continues to elude us to this date, and fosters speculation as to his location, his relationship with the family and his status in the Church. Lydia Knight, wife of Newel arrived in Utah in October 1850 and later settled in Santa Clara, Utah as a wife of James McClellan. After his death in 1880, she served in the St. George Temple and performed many ordinances for the family. Her records indicate that some of the work for the family of Joseph and Polly was done over again in September of 1877, including Nahum's baptism. This may have been done because Nauvoo records were difficult to verify or find after the trek westward. Joseph Knight, Jr., stood in as proxy for Nahum.

The options of speculation leads one to the following possibilities as a result of the small strands of information that are available.

1. The family did not include him in their accounts of migrations and Church affiliations because he was not an active participant, baptized or unbaptized. They might have been saddened by his lack of support of the Prophet Joseph Smith or he might have suffered a possible estrangement after their removal from Missouri.
2. He may have removed himself from the society of the family in Missouri due to intense persecution, and thus settled in Buchanan County about 1850 in order to escape the fate of the persecuted Mormons.
3. He may have been caught up in the gold rush fever and traveled west to California sometime in the 1850s with several families from Missouri.

4. It is doubtful that the references of Nahum or Nathan in Church History refers to him, as these accounts include missionary service, being victimized at Hauns Mills and service in the priesthood, etc.

One repeated reference to a "Nahum" Knight is found in Susan Ward Easton's thesis, "Mormon Land Ownership as a Factor in Evaluating the Extent of Mormon Settlements & Influence in Missouri, 1831-1841." Page 172 is listed which would usually indicate a mention only. However, future examination of this work may reveal something additional of his whereabouts.

It is remarkable that the family left us without any mention of him or his family. Normal activities in or out of Church centered events should have included the first born of this early family. The absence of his name must suggest some sort of separation in fact or differences in religious commitment. One must only conclude that it would be helpful to have this last story of a remarkable family completed to record for history.

Census entries are 1850 U.S. Federal Census:

Naham Night - 011 (Dwelling number)

Buch (Buchanan County) Washington (Washington Township) Missouri

Film on file at the Family History Library of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City

1860 U.S. Federal Census Record

Diamond Spring, El Dorado, California

Ancestry.Com & Family History Library

This short summary was made after hours of work, tracing various avenues of research at the LDS Church's Salt Lake City library. The volumes, books, listings, and films that were traced are too many to list here. Those manning the library who are versed in the resources of the library were consulted several times as to other approaches to the mystery. Finally, after exhausting all their counsel and instructions, the search was called off.

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