

HISTORY OF ANNA KNIGHT DE MILL

Composed and written in first person by Merial Musig Hawkins, Great-Great Granddaughter

I am Anna Knight De Mill. I was born March 5, 1804 in Marlborough, Windham County, Vermont. My parents are Joseph and Polly Peck Knight. I was the fourth of seven children. My parents came from Pilgrim and Puritan ancestors. I grew up hearing my parents talk about the Revolutionary War. My Grandfather Benjamin Knight fought in the war. In 1810 our family moved to Colesville (now Ninevah) in Broome County, New York. Father bought a large track of land that went from a small lake down to the Susquehanna River. It had a stream running through it on which he built a grist mill and two carding machines. He eventually bought three other farms and hired many hands.

I met a fine young man in Colesville. He was Freeborn De Mill. We were married when I was fifteen and he was twenty-four. My husband farmed like most men in those days. He owned two parcels of land. We lived in a nice home and enjoyed being close to our relatives. There we had our first four children, Mariah, Orpha, Lora Ann, and Oliver.

It was during this time that Joseph Smith worked for my father and lived at my parents' home. We became well acquainted with him. Joseph was the best hired hand that my father ever had. Joseph told my father about his revelations and that he was going to receive gold plates to translate. Other than his own family, my extended family was the first to believe the Prophet.

While Joseph lived with my parents, he courted Emma Hale who lived across the river and a few miles south. Father let him use his horse and cutter to go see her. It was winter and the roads were snow packed. On one trip, Joseph and Emma got married in a nearby town.

Father was so interested in the Prophet's work that when the time arrived for Joseph to receive the plates, Father took a neighbor who Joseph had also worked for, and they traveled to the Smith home. During the night Joseph and Emma borrowed my father's horse and carriage and drove to the hill to get the plates. Joseph knew that unprincipled men were watching for him to go to the hill and cause him trouble. Providentially he was not recognized in a strange vehicle.

During the time that Joseph and Emma lived at a house close to her parents and Joseph was translating the plates, Father took food, paper, and money to them several times, in order for the work to progress so Joseph didn't need to stop and get work.

When the church was organized, one third of the people that crowded into Whitmer's cabin were Knight relatives. I was pleased when my husband was baptized in the Susquehanna River by Hyrum Smith and confirmed by Joseph Smith. I was baptized later, at the same time as Emma Smith. You may have heard about the trouble villains caused when our baptism was planned. Newel built a dam in the stream in Father's pasture so that we would have a pond the next morning. But evil men tore out the dam in the night. When we gathered the next morning for the baptism, there was no pond and a mob greeted us. So, we were baptized later.

Joseph held meetings at my parents' place and many of our relatives and a few others attended. Many of us were baptized. More than once when Joseph Smith was holding meetings in my parents' home, a

mob caught Joseph and took him to jail. Twice Father hired two neighbors who were well versed in the law to defend Joseph, and they were able to get him released.

Persecution of the Prophet and our family increased until the Lord told Joseph that he needed to leave and go to the Ohio, and for our branch of the church to go also.

Father discovered that the mob was planning to capture Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and himself. He sent one of my brothers to warn the other two and he took Mother and my youngest sister, and they left in the middle of the night with just what they could pack on a horse drawn sleigh. They met up with the others and arrived in Kirtland together.

Our branch of the church consisted of 62 Knight or Peck relatives and was under the direction of my brother Newel. We were told to leave our property whether we could or couldn't sell it. We were fortunate to sell both of our farms, but it was so sad to lock our door, close the gate, and leave behind our friends, including Freeborn's twin brother Garrison, never to see them again. With our four children and what belongings we could take, we joined our relatives to travel to unknown places. Our group had three baggage wagons and eleven passenger wagons drawn by oxen.

We traveled north to a series of canals and then across Lake Erie. Ice impeded our travels. After approximately six weeks we arrived in Kirtland. There we agreed to live in a Church-supervised cooperative order. After turning in our money to the church we were assigned to live on a 1,000-acre farm in Thompson, 16 miles from Kirtland. The Colesville saints, as we were called, built fences, planted the fields, and began preparing houses. But our stay was very brief. The land had been donated by Lemam Copley, a "Shaking Quaker" who had recently joined the church. But church leaders excommunicated Mr. Copley for "bad conduct," and he wanted his property back and for the Colesville Saints to pay sixty dollars for damages! My brother Joseph said the only damages we did was "fitting up his houses and planting his ground."

So, we were forced to move. The Prophet received from the Lord Section 54 of the Doctrine and Covenants giving instructions for the Saints to settle in the new "Zion" which was to be located in Jackson County, Missouri. Our group made the arduous journey to Missouri, arriving a month later. We settled in Kaw Township, a few miles from Independence, and the men immediately began building log homes and planting the few crops they could that late in the season.

My Mother, Polly Peck Knight, had been so sick throughout the journey that Newel carried wood with him so that he could make a coffin for her, if she died on the way. She was very determined to see the land of "Zion" before she died and she got her wish, but she died soon after. We were comforted that the Prophet Joseph was with us, and he spoke at her funeral. He knew her so well, having lived with my parents for a time. Mother had washed and ironed his clothes, cooked meals for him, and no doubt heated a brick for his feet when he made his trips in our sleigh to court Emma. Mother was the first Latter-day Saint to die in Missouri, but was not the last. Many people lost loved ones due to harshness of our living conditions, lack of adequate food, and attacks from mobs. We were saddened when our older sister Ester also died. The following year my sixteen-year-old sister Elizabeth died.

In September of the next year I gave birth to our fifth child, Adelia. The winter had been very cold and until enough log cabins could be built, as many as ten families had to live in one cabin, which was open and unfinished and had only the frozen ground for a floor. In spite of our circumstances, most of the

Saint were cheerful and dedicated to their new beliefs. We gathered together in church meetings and rejoiced in the spirit of the Lord.

My father was lonely so he remarried. His new wife was a widow with four children. Her deceased husband was my mother's brother. Father was sixty-one and Phoebe was thirty-three. They had two children while we were going through the trials of the Missouri period.

The church headquarters remained in Kirtland and Missouri became an outpost rather than Church headquarters. The Prophet often sent letters to us and included revelations.

By November, the "old settlers" had become so bitter and resentful of the Saints that mobs started rampaging through Mormon settlements. You see, they were slave holders and most of us were northerners. It was before the Civil War, but men were already starting to choose up sides. The Mormon press in Independence was burned, some of our men were tarred and feathered, and others were killed. The Saints were forced to flee to Clay County for safety with only what we could carry. We all suffered great losses. Many greedy men became richer by taking at no cost Mormons' fenced farms, crops, animals, houses, and furniture. To ensure that the Saints did not return, raiders torched about 200 vacated houses and sheds.

The Colesville Branch camped in the Missouri bottoms. We lived in tents until winter set in, and did our cooking out in the wind and the storms. The season was severe and many families suffered for the lack of necessities of life. We stayed long enough that the men built a church. It was so nice to have a church to meet in. But our peace was only temporary.

Because my father and two brothers were millers, in each of the places we lived, they found a stream and erected a grist mill so they could grind the grain our men raised, and make flour for the saints. More than once, the mobs drove them away and they had to leave their mill, including the grind-stones. Also, during this time, my husband injured his leg in a saw accident. For five years he was "laid up" and could only do a sparse amount of work. This left a burden on me to earn our living the best I could.

This was the time of the tragic Haun's Mill massacre where we lost seventeen men and boys and twelve more were severely wounded. Then at the Battle of Crooked River two of our brethren were killed.

We then moved to Far West, Missouri. There I gave birth to our sixth child, our son Elias. Freeborn received his patriarchal blessing from Joseph Smith Sr. It alludes to sufferings he and our family had endured: "Thou was one of the first to come into the Kingdom and thy substance has been wasted", the blessing states, "but God will make up thy losses," and "make thee rich in the things of the world." I can't say we have received wealth, but I consider our posterity the riches of the world. We were blessed that we didn't have a baby die, which was common in our day.

I am sure you remember some of our troubles at Far West. A state Militia was called in supposedly to protect us but they were to be dreaded as much as the mobs. They took all of the Mormon's guns and left us defenseless. They arrested our leaders and were going to shoot them in the village square, except for the heroism of Brigadier General Alexander Donivan. Instead the officers took our leaders to the jail at Liberty.

When Governor Boggs issued his infamous "Extermination Order," we Saints were again forced to flee for our lives. We fled across the ice-covered Mississippi River into Illinois where many of the citizens of

Quincy were very helpful to our most destitute. Freeborn settled our family temporarily in Quincy. While there our daughter Mariah met and married Daniel Buckley Funk. In early 1842 we bought land in Nauvoo and moved there. Our last child Lovina Ester was born the following year. She was our 7th child.

The Prophet Joseph encouraged those of us who had suffered so much in Missouri, to file claims against the state of Missouri for our losses. Freeborn asked for \$500 for loss of time and labor and \$300 for "improvements" in Jackson County, \$300 for Clay County losses and \$500 for land and improvement losses in Caldwell County. For loss of time and expenses to move from the state, and for two rifles, he asked \$430. His petition added that he was "deprived of citizenship" in Jackson County "by a lawless mob," that kept him from voting, and again in Clay County in 1836 "by the same mob," and again "by the exterminating order of the Governor. His claim totaled \$2,030.00. Of course, we received nothing.

In Nauvoo we managed to get into a house a block north of the temple which was under construction. We were happy to be living in the same city as the Prophet Joseph and his brother Hyrum whom we had been so close to in Colesville. It was a privilege to visit with Joseph on the street or in his store. We attended gospel meetings in the grove and heard him speak.

Our son Oliver, who was thirteen, attended one meeting while I had to stay home with the baby. Oliver told me that Joseph was telling about a revelation he had received. Just then a flock of geese flew over. The geese made a quacking noise, and most of the people turned their eyes to look. Oliver did not. He kept his eyes on the prophet. Joseph said to them, "If you care more for the quacking of a wild goose than for the revelations of the Almighty God, I've no more to say to you at present," and he sat down! You can imagine how chagrined the people felt.

The Prophet organized The Female Relief Society of Nauvoo on March 17, 1842. I was able to join at the second meeting.

Trouble came to Nauvoo when the citizens of Missouri succeeded in stirring up the Illinois citizens to hatred and jealousy of the Latter-day Saints.

On June 27, 1844, the Prophet Joseph and Hyrum Smith were murdered! You can only imagine how shocked and saddened we were. Our tender leader and friend was gone as well as his brother! The whole city was in mourning. What was going to become of us and the church? We felt like sheep without a shepherd. The twelve apostles quickly returned from their missions. A meeting was held wherein Sidney Rigdon stated his claim to a "guardianship for the church." Then Brigham Young stood up and explained how the twelve apostles had been given the Keys of the Priesthood by the Prophet so that the church could go on if his life was cut short. Our son Oliver, who was 14, again in attendance reported to me that while Brigham Young was talking, his voice changed to the voice of Joseph, his appearance and every motion was that of Joseph, and his language was so convincing and prophetic that it seemed to bring conviction to the hearts of all who were present.

The remainder of 1844 and most of 1845 were spent by the Saints getting the Nauvoo Temple finished so we could all take out our endowments. Both Freeborn and I received ours and we were sealed for time and eternity.

It became apparent that we Saints would have to leave our homes again and seek yet another place where we could live in peace. We immediately began trying to sell our farm and prepare to leave in the spring. In early 1846, we were finally forced to forget selling and just flee for our lives. Because my

husband was crippled, we asked Newel if we could travel along with him, and he agreed. We had but one ox and a light wagon. Newel let us put some of our things in one of his wagons. We crossed the river and took our last look at the city we loved and the magnificent temple with its lofty tower raised toward the heavens.

After a month's journey, we reached the "Camp of Israel" at Mt. Pisgah, Iowa. It was a way-station where some of the Saints were asked to stop and put in crops for those who were coming later. It became our home for the next three years. My father and his family also stopped there and we helped them.

We had four children still at home. Two of our daughters had already married and Lora Ann married while we were in Mt. Pisgah. The other four children and I were forced to take more of the hard work upon ourselves as 51-year old Freeborn became more and more crippled. In his writing he recorded, "I was laid up 5 years in Missouri by a hurt on my knee, by a saw tooth, and again in Pisgah by a fever sore for about the same length of time." Oliver, at 16, grew up fast as more responsibility for outfitting the family for our westward journey depended on him.

To my great sorrow, my dear brother Newel passed away as a result of fighting a prairie fire that was threatening to burn their village at Fort Niobrara north of Winter Quarters. Less than a month later my father passed away there in Mt. Pisgah. He was 75 years old.

We left Mt. Pisgah for the Great Salt Lake Valley in the spring of 1850. We traveled with the Capt. Warren Foot wagon train. The journey across the plains was long and arduous, but the family was greatly blessed and, except for Freeborn's handicap, all managed to complete the journey alive and well. We arrived in the Salt Lake valley on September 17, 1850. Our daughter Mariah and her husband Daniel had arrived the year before with the original settlers, and that greatly helped us to feel at home. This was the eighth place we had settled in, since we left our home in Colesville, New York about 20 years ago. Of my parents and their 7 children, only Joseph Jr. and I made it to the valley.

If we thought that our trials were over when we reached Manti, we were sadly mistaken. We endured many hardships such as famine, trouble with Indians, and the many disadvantages of pioneer life. We were also isolated from the center of the church in Salt Lake City. We experienced two Indian wars where several of our men were killed in each one. We met these problems with the same courage we had had against the angry mobs of earlier days.

The Indians had first invited the Saints to move among them. But when our men took fields and fenced them, it made Chief Blackhawk and his warriors angry because we were taking his horses' feeding grounds. I couldn't help but feel frightened when the Indian squaws came begging for food. We were trying to follow Brigham Young's policy that "It is better to feed them than fight them," but at first, we did not have enough food to feed ourselves. I was grateful that our neat little adobe house was almost at the center of town, because I felt safer at night than if we lived on the outskirts of town. At night the braves would sometimes sneak into the Saints corrals and steal horses.

Also, during this time, we faced the uncertainties of those who had plural wives and were hounded by the U.S. Marshals. You see, Freeborn had been asked to take a second wife. He married Lynette Janet Richards and they had two sons. In time, Lynette took the boys and lived in Ephraim, the next town north of us.

Three of our children and their mates were called to settle the Dixie Cotton Mission. Oliver and his three wives settled Shunesburg. They had a fine two-story stone house, but had to leave it when their fields and orchards washed away. Two of our daughters, Lora Ann and husband Samuel Gifford and Lovina Ester and husband John Beale, also settled in Shunesburg and then had to leave and moved to Rockville and Springdale. They all were truly pioneers again and overcame great obstacles in that hot climate.

You may wonder if I am sorry that we made our choice to join this new church and come west with the Saints. My answer would be that all of our trials were worth it to be members of the true Church of Jesus Christ, and to have our large posterity strong in the faith. I think Joseph Smith as a 19-year-old boy, was Heaven sent 110 miles into our area to work. And after working for other men, he got a job with my father and my parents took him into their home. Then we were privileged to hear a first-hand introduction to the miracles of the restoration of the gospel that was in progress. I am so grateful that my parents' family remained valiant. It was a privilege to be next to the Smith family in giving the Prophet love and support.

Anna died on July 28, 1878 at the age of 74. Freeborn followed her 2 1/2 years later on January 23, 1881, at the age of 85. They are buried side by side in the Manti cemetery at the foot of the beautiful Manti Temple.

Note by author--I have enjoyed living with my thoughts on Anna Knight De Mill for the past two and a half months as I have written this history and prepared to portray her at the 2012 Joseph Knight Reunion in St. George. I am very grateful to Anna for what she went through, and that her blood flows in my veins. I have felt close to her as I have put this history of her life together.

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