

The Life Story of Polly Peck Knight (1774 – 1831)

Compiled by – Lila Nielsen Meacham (1997) written in first person

I am Polly Peck Knight, the sixth child of thirteen children of Joseph and Elizabeth Read Peck, and the wife of Joseph Knight, Sr., who was a loyal friend of the Prophet Joseph Smith and helped the Prophet in so many ways to make it possible for him to translate the Book of Mormon from the Gold Plates in much less time than it would have otherwise been possible.

I am a fifth-generation American. My father was known in the history of Vermont for his militant role as Captain Peck in Vermont's thwarted New York rebellion. In my early years, I heard so much about the trouble between New Hampshire and New York. New Hampshire's issuance of the New Hampshire Grants led to conflict between the two colonies; for the region was claimed by both of them. At that time, Ethan Allen formed the Green Mountain Boys to resist New York authority. This was during the American Revolution when we lived in Guilford, Windham County, Vermont.

In 1777, Vermont declared itself an independent state, but was not admitted to the Union until 1791. New York, nevertheless, continued to claim parts of Vermont. Guilford was the only Vermont town where pro-New Yorkers dominated. In July of 1782 the 'Yorkers' became desperate and asked Governor Clinton for military aid. Therefore, Governor Clinton authorized the town to create six militia companies and appointed Joseph Peck to be captain of the 1st Guilford Company of the Cumberland County (New York) militia.

In order to stop the New Yorkers' military activity, Vermont sent militia, under Ethan Allen, to suppress the Guilford rebels. In January, 1784, Allen's men raided our home. Five men came to our door; and when my mother told them that my father was not at home and refused to say where he was, they became frustrated and plundered our house, taking with them my father's sword and other weapons, in addition to carrying off whatever else they wanted that was of value.

Later as compensation for the losses the Vermont families suffered during the war between New Hampshire and New York, New York granted them an eight square-mile township in south-central New York, along the Unadilla and Susquehanna Rivers. Captain Peck received 640 acres and moved there around 1787. I did not go with the family when they moved, as I felt I was skilled enough in spinning, weaving and sewing as well as having learned the value of good, hard work in order to succeed in life.

My father and the adult male members of our family were all busy taking care of the necessary work that needed to be done in the fields and at the mill and also saw to hauling and chopping the wood and kindling. Any other work in connection with the house was left for us women to do. We milked the cows and took care of the milk so that we would have good, clean milk to use for making butter and cheese. This involved straining the milk and then putting it in big pans where the cream could be skimmed off when it rose to the top after standing overnight.

Hard physical labor was common for the women of my day, except for the ones whose physical condition was not good. We planted and cared for our gardens and harvested the fruit and vegetables

which we produced to fix our meals and also to can, dry and pickle in order to store them for the winter. We also had to learn to pickle, dry, salt and smoke meat in order to preserve it. We baked our wheat or rye bread in the ashes of our large fireplace. We women hauled water, killed chickens and other wild fowl, and were responsible for raising the fowls and barnyard animals.

Washing clothes and ironing them were arduous tasks. Washing the clothes involved carrying the water from the river, stream or well and then heating it in large kettles that were suspended in our large fireplace. The clothes were boiled and scrubbed on the 'scrubbing board', using our hard homemade soap, then rung out by hand, rinsed and wrung out again and hung up or spread out to dry. Ironing required a lot of time, for the clothes of our day were usually made of heavy material, and were not made of simple patterns. Then the flat irons were heated on the stove for use in ironing. They either had handles which had to be latched onto the iron in some way to pick them up or else the handles were built right on the iron. In this case, some type of heavy material had to be made into a pad to make it possible to pick up the hot handle on the iron.

Taking care of meat was a real job and usually required several family members to do this. When a pig was slaughtered, hams and bacons had to be cured, link or other sausage to be made along with head cheese and pickled pig's feet. It was a matter of pride to be able to use everything but 'the squeal'. Spinning, weaving and sewing took up much of our time in the winter. We did get to socialize when we had quilting bees. Candle making and making homemade soap were tasks which required good hard work, but candle making was generally done only once a year. Soap making meant stirring the soap for hours over a hot fire out in the yard. On holidays, while the men could find time to enjoy themselves, the women worked hard preparing, cooking and clearing away.

I became acquainted with a fine young man about my age who was from Marlboro in the same county in which I lived, and in 1795, I was married to him. Little did my parents think when they moved to New York that some day they would be in-laws to Joseph Knight. In 1808 we moved with our young children – Nahum, Esther, Newel and Anna – to Bainbridge, where my parents lived. It was indeed a happy reunion since we lived close to my parents and they enjoyed visiting with their four grandchildren. They were also there when I gave birth to our fifth child in that same year.

After two years we moved six miles down the river to the outskirts of the town of Colesville (now Nineveh). This was a beautiful area. The whole family worked hard to clear the land and build a house and farm buildings. There was also a stream that had the right fall where Joseph could build a mill. Joseph was a very industrious man. He soon had the gristmill built as well as adding two carding machines. The boys were old enough to help their father; so they were kept busy working at the mill and on the farm. The older girls helped me with the housework.

We raised our children in a fine manner and gave both the girls and the boys a good education. Our family followed the Universalian doctrine of religion, believing that everyone gains salvation and that there is no damnation.

In 1824, a fine young man named Joseph Smith was hired to work for us and he also lived with us. Our son Joseph was close to his age and was very impressed with him. When Joseph Smith told us, in confidence, about his experiences with heavenly beings, and that he was eventually to receive sacred records, we felt he was sincere. Our son Joseph and he worked together and slept together and our son wrote: "My father and I believe him, and I think we were the first to do so after his own family... Joseph

and I worked together and slept together. My father said Joseph was a man of truth and the best hand he ever hired."

While Joseph was living with us, he began courting a young lady named Emma Hale who lived across the river and down the road twenty miles in Harmony. After he had finished his work for the day, he would borrow our horse and cutter and go to court Emma for the evening. It was a real surprise when on January 18, 1827, Joseph Smith and Emma eloped and were married in a nearby town.

One time my husband came home from Palmyra and told us of being at Joseph Smith's parent's home when Joseph Smith had received the Gold Plates. Many times after that event, my husband helped Joseph Smith with money and provisions. I was not so sure that he should continue to do so, but he felt he should help. I felt perhaps our own married children might need some help. However, I became convinced when I went with my husband in March, 1829 and visited Joseph and Emma and listened as Joseph talked with us about his translating and some revelations he had received. From that time on, I began to believe and was a full believer from then on.

I went through many trials and tribulations because of being baptized and becoming a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints after the Prophet Joseph Smith organized it, but it has all been worthwhile. I only hoped and prayed that I might live long enough to make it to Zion; and my prayers were answered. I have finally made it, and I thank God for letting me have the wish of my heart. I can now pass away in peace.

Polly Peck Knight passed away on August 7, 1831, shortly after arriving in Kaw Township, Jackson County, Missouri, which was then "Zion". The Prophet Joseph Smith preached her funeral sermon. On her journey from Kirtland, Ohio to Missouri, she was very ill, but her greatest desire was to set her feet on the land of Zion and to have her body interred there. Her son, Newel had previously bought some lumber for a coffin, least she should die on the way, but she arrived in "Zion" just a short time before her death.

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Polly Peck

Polly Peck descended from Pilgrims who immigrated to America in 1638 to help settle in the original Plymouth Colony. Her line includes Nicholas and Rebekah Bosworth Peck; Hezekiah and Deborah Cooper Peck; Hezekiah Jr. and Elizabeth Carder; and her parents, Captain Joseph and Elizabeth Read Peck.