

# **Esther Knight Stringham**

## **1798 – 1833**

### **Daughter of Joseph and Polly Knight**

Esther Knight was born in Marlboro, Vermont on 25 April 1798, the second child and oldest daughter of Joseph and Polly Peck Knight. Both Joseph and Polly grew up during the Revolutionary War and were from Protestant, Yankee families who had been in America for at least four generations.

Joseph and Polly's first three children, Nahum, Esther and Newel were born in Marlboro, and then the family moved to the Halifax area in Windham County, Vermont, where two more children, Anna, and Joseph, Jr., were born.

Esther's maternal grandparents lived near the Susquehanna River in Broome County, New York, and in 1808, when Esther was ten years old, Joseph and Polly moved their five children to Bainbridge Township near their Peck grandparents. Two years later the family moved two miles downriver to Colesville Township, where they built a home and farm. In Colesville, two more girls, Polly and Elizabeth, would join the Knight family in 1811 and 1817.

The Knight farm grew as Joseph Knight acquired more acres, and he then built a grist mill on the great bend in the Susquehanna River that was the western edge of their farmland. As a young woman Esther no doubt was involved in all the things common to the time, in cooking, sewing and helping with farm chores. Even with seven children, there was more work to do on the farm than the family could handle and Joseph Knight hired young men to help with the work.

According to Stringham family stories, one of those young men hired was William Stringham. William had moved with his family from the lower tip of Long Island to central New York and then to the Broome County area where his father James established a farm.

Joseph Knight hired William to work in the mill and to run his carding machine that spun wool into yarn that was woven into fabric. The family story reports that William was interested in the process of turning wool into fine fabric that was made into clothing, and eventually it led him to learning the trade of tailoring and making suits.

Esther apparently got to know William during his time working on the farm, and in 1816, when Esther was 18 years old, she married William Stringham, who was 28. The couple made their home on a corner of the Stringham family farm. The 1820 census for the area reports that the Stringham family lived in Windsor, Broome County, New York. Windsor was a small town about 7 miles downstream from Father Knight's home, so Esther was not far from her parents.

William and Esther's first child, Julia Ann, was born February 28, 1818, and a second little girl, Harriet was born in 1821. About this time William and Esther moved to Colesville. About 1823 Esther gave birth to a son Harlow. Various family records have different names for this child, including Arlo or Alanzo.

In October of 1825 a young man named Joseph Smith came to work in the vicinity of the Colesville Township, doing digging for Josiah Stowell. In due time Joseph Smith was also hired by Joseph Knight to work on his farm, sometimes staying with Esther's parents Joseph and Polly Knight.

Esther and William believed the things Joseph Smith taught, and became ardent followers. It is possible that on April 6, 1830 the Stringhams were in Fayette, New York as the new Church of Christ, which became the LDS Church, was organized. Church records simply report that 20 were in attendance from the Colesville Branch, and certainly many of that 20 were Knight family members.

On June 28, 1830, Esther Stringham, William Stringham and their oldest daughter Julia Stringham, who was 12, were baptized by Oliver Cowdery in a dammed up stream near the Knight family home. An angry group of neighbors tore down the first dam that was built. And when a second dam was built, again an angry mob descended on the followers of Joseph Smith and stopped the baptismal service before other family members had the opportunity to be baptized. When the family tried to hold a confirmation service that same night, a mob gathered and Joseph Smith was arrested for disturbing the peace.

When the members of the LDS Church in Colesville learned of the revelation that the Saints were to gather in Ohio, they collectively sold their farms, gathered up their essential things into wagons, and left together as a group in April of 1831. The Stringhams' wagon included William, Esther and children Julia, almost 13, Harriet, almost 10, and Harlow, about 8. There were 67 members of the church who left Colesville, including Esther's siblings and their children and many aunts, uncles, and cousins.

As the Colesville Branch arrived in Kirtland, Ohio in May of 1831, they learned of a revelation that they were asked to live the law of consecration, and share their property, labor and income with all in their group. Led by Newel Knight, Esther's younger brother, the Colesville group was asked to settle in Thompson, Ohio, twenty five miles from Kirtland, where a man had consecrated his farmland to the new economic endeavor. It only lasted about six weeks before the property was withdrawn and the Knights and the Colesville group needed a new home. They were asked to go to Missouri.

The Stringhams, along with the others in the Colesville group, left Thompson on June 28, 1831. They traveled by wagon to the Ohio River and they boarded boats that took them down to the confluence with the Mississippi. On the Mississippi River they traveled by paddleboat upstream to the Missouri River, and then up the Missouri River until they arrived at the Independence, Missouri landing on July 26, 1831. They were a group of 60 men, women, and children who needed homes.

The Knight family cluster was asked to go to Kaw Township, which is now part of Kansas City. They arrived in Jackson County too late to plant crops, but land was widely available from the government for \$1.25 an acre. Within a few days of arriving, Esther's mother, Polly Knight passed away. Polly had been sick through much of their journey. Joseph Smith spoke at Polly's funeral.

On 2 August 1831, William Stringham, with five other Knight extended family members, was invited to be part of a ceremony "to lay the first log as a foundation for Zion in Kaw Township. Symbolizing the 12 Tribes of Israel, 12 men carried a log as the first log for the first Mormon building in the new promised land. After the log was placed, Sidney Rigdon consecrated and dedicated the "land of Zion."

Life was very harsh for women and children in Missouri. It was the frontier, sickness abounded, medical care was almost non-existent, and Mormons were being harassed and driven from their homes. A family biography of William Stringham recounts that Esther, at the age of 35, gave birth to a little boy, named Hyrum, although other sources refer to this infant as Amos. Esther never recovered from childbirth and passed away in 1833. Esther's sister, Polly, helped care for baby Hyrum after Esther's death. At some point in this time period, eight year-old Harlow Stringham also passed away.

Biographical information gleaned from the Joseph Smith papers included with the William Stringham biographical information states Esther died in 1833. But in the biographical information on Esther there is not a death date recorded, only that she died in Kaw Township. Mormons were pushed out to Clay County in 1833. William Hartley, Knight family biographer, suggests Esther died in 1831.

Esther's daughters Julia and Harriet were young teens when their mother died. With their father and extended family, they endured the mobs that pushed them from Jackson into Clay County in 1833, and then to Caldwell County, and then out of Missouri altogether in 1839.

In 1835, two years after Esther's death, William Stringham married Esther's younger sister, Polly Knight. Polly had one son, Walter, and was married to William nine years before she died in Nauvoo in 1844. After Polly died William married Jemima Young, but they were divorced six months later. William married Eliza Lake in 1846.

In later years, William Stringham, wife Eliza, and his son, Walter, joined the Saints in Utah and settled in Manti, Utah. Esther's daughters never came west. Julia and Harriet Stringham each married while living in Springfield, Illinois, and never followed their father west. They raised their children, lived full lives and died in Illinois. Esther's son, Hyrum Stringham, died of a sudden illness in 1849 in Illinois, before William and Eliza left for the west.

Sources:

William G. Hartley, "They are My Friends, A History of the Joseph Knight Family," Grandin Books, 1986.

William G. Hartley, "Stand by My Servant Joseph," Deseret Book, 2003.

Joseph Smith Papers biographical summary for Esther Knight Stringham and William Stringham found on Familysearch.org.

Familysearch.org, under William Stringham memories, "William Stringham History" by Mildred Stringham Phillips, a great-granddaughter.

Family Search.org, sources for William Stringham details, citation of 1820 and 1830 census of Broome County, New York.

Diane L. Mangum, April 2018

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