

History of William Stringham

b. May 2, 1789

d. Nov. 3, 1865

Written in first person by
Mildred Stringham Phillips, a great-granddaughter

Queens, New York was a beautiful place on the lower tip of Long Island. The country was wooded with beautiful hardwood trees that my father and Grandfather used to make furniture and building materials. Their hand-made shingles were the choicest in the area. They had cleared quite a large area for farming and the soil was rich, producing most of the food that we needed for our family.

I was the oldest of ten children, six boys and four girls. All pioneer boys were taught to work. I didn't care too much for farming. I would rather work with the wood and carpentry, but being the oldest there was a great deal of the farming that was done by me and my brother George who was ten months younger than I.. George and I took our responsibilities very seriously.

I was born in this beautiful part of New York on Saturday, May 2nd, 1789 to James and Martha Willis Stringham.

When I was sixteen years old (1805) my parents decided to move from Long Island to the central part of New York.. With my parents and brothers and sisters and my Grandfather Jacob Stringham and some of my uncles and aunts, we journeyed to Broome County in the south central part of the state. We settled near Colesville in a very fruitful part of the country. Soon we were established on three hundred and sixty acres of beautiful farm land. Some of the acreage was covered with woods, some was partially cleared. We had some spring of good clear water and there was a creek flowing through the property. A more beautiful spot we couldn't have found. Everyone seemed happy with the choice of locations and we set to work getting the land ready to plant a crop: cutting logs for the building of suitable cabins; and becoming acquainted with our new home site. Everyone was busy and the days flew swiftly.

Our Father was anxious for us to have what education and schooling was available so whenever it was possible we children would attend the "home schools" that were held in the frontier settlements. In my spare time I learned to make beautiful furniture; carving the hardwood and fashioning it into useful and attractive. pieces.

One of our neighbors in Colesville was Joseph Knight, Sr. He was a successful farmer; he also operated a grist mill and a carding machine. It was necessary for him to hire help to operate his mill and machine and help with the farm work as his family consisted of girls and small boys who were a little young to do much in the way of heavy work. To bring some money into our family I hired out to him, helping in the mill and learning to operate the carding machine. I liked this work very much, especially the carding. Preparing the wool to be spun and woven into beautiful material. Then I learned tailoring and made the material up into suits for both men and women.

I learned a great deal from Joseph Knight who was a very kindly man, compassionate and thoughtful of others. He took an especial interest in the young boys, encouraging them to do their very best in anything that they undertook. He was quick to see areas in which they were capable and urged them to follow these interests whenever possible.

Mr Knight's oldest daughter, Esther, had grown into a beautiful young lady and I finally persuaded her to marry me. This was the happiest day of my life. Together we selected a beautiful spot for our home. It was located on a portion of my Father's 160 acres. I cut the logs and with the help of my younger brothers we built a cabin. I made the furniture, using all the skill possible, that each piece would be just right. Esther was busy making quilts and linens. I made a lovely hardwood chest for her to store these treasures in and we were happy in our preparations. We were married in 1815, surrounded by our friends and our brothers and sisters. It was a happy day. I was twenty-six and Esther was seventeen.

Our joy was complete when on February 28th 1817 a little girl was born to us. We called this little daughter Julia Ann. Four years later Harriet joined our little family. The days and years passed quickly and we were busy earning a living and teaching our little girls the best we could. In 1821 Esther gave birth to a little son. This little boy was never very strong and when he was eight years old he became ill and passed away.

It is sometimes strange and awesome that very small and seemingly unimportant events can have such an impact upon the lives of people. In September 1827 my Father-In-law had some business to transact in Palmyra, New York, his friend, Mr. Stowel accompanied him to that place. While they transacted their business they stopped with the Joseph Smith Sr. family. Some years before their son, Joseph had worked for Mr. Stowel. While they were there an event occurred that changed the lives of many of the people of the Colesville area, (as well as thousands and thousands of others). YOUNG JOSEPH SMITH RECEIVED THE PLATES FROM THE ANGEL MORONI, FROM WHICH THE BOOK OF MORMON WAS TRANSLATED.

In the early spring of 1829 my Father-in-law learned that Joseph Smith and his friend Oliver Cowdery were living in Harmony, Pennsylvania at the Hale home and were in the process of translating the plates. The Hale family were in rather poor circumstances and so this very good man loaded a wagon with provisions and drove the thirty miles to Harmony, that the work of translating could go forward without interruption. Such acts of compassion were a part of the life of Joseph Knight Sr.

After the translation was completed Joseph Smith and his wife moved to Fayette, Seneca County, New York. The people of Seneca County were anxiously waiting to hear of the Prophet's message. Many homes were open to them. The first copies of the Book of Mormon were printed in March 1830. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized in Fayette, New York, on the 6th day of April 1830, agreeable to the laws of the country, by the will and commandment of the Lord.

Later in the month of April 1830, Joseph Smith the Prophet paid a visit to the Knight family in Colesville. Mr. Knight and his family were Universalists, with broad, liberal views. We all willingly listened to Joseph Smith as he discussed the scriptures as contained in the Bible and the Book of Mormon.

I was very impressed with what he told us. It was so different from anything we had ever heard regarding God and Jesus Christ. It seemed so right and logical. He told us to pray about it, to find out for ourselves. This Esther and I did and we both had the feeling that what he told us was true. He held several public meetings and they were attended by many friends and strangers. Newel Knight, my

brother-in-law was a regular attendant At these meetings and seemed to be deeply impressed. Later Newel saw in vision the great work which would yet be accomplished through the preaching of the Gospel and the organization of the Church.

In June, 1830 Joseph Smith again paid a visit to Colesville. He was accompanied by Oliver Cowdery, John and David Whitmer. There were a number of us in Colesville awaiting baptism into the new Church. A meeting was held on Sunday where we heard a powerful message given by Oliver Cowdery. Oliver was a very dynamic speaker. Plans were made for the baptism to take place the following day. A dam had been constructed in a stream so that a pond would form in which this ordinance could be performed. During the night the dam was destroyed by those unfriendly to our plans. But early Monday morning the dam was replaced and thirteen persons were baptized by Oliver Cowdery. They were Emma, wife of Joseph Smith; Hezekiah Peck and wife; Joseph Knight Sr. and his wife Polly; Joseph Knight Jr. Aaron Culver and his wife; Levi Hale; Polly Knight, Esther's youngest sister; Esther and myself, and our daughter Julia. What a glorious experience this was. We could feel the Spirit of the Lord as hands were placed upon our heads and we were confirmed members of the Church and received the Holy Ghost.

As always Satan is striving to thwart the work of our Heavenly Father and immediately violence erupted. Those whom we thought to be our friends turned against us with hate. The Prophet was arrested and taken to South Bainbridge for a trial. Many falsehoods were circulated about this fine young man. My Father-in-law engaged the services of two respectable farmers who were versed in the law; James Davidson and John Reid and brought them to South Bainbridge to defend the Prophet. The enemies scoured the countryside in an effort to find witnesses who would testify against Joseph Smith. The justice of the peace who heard the case was a fair minded man and a lover of justice. Many witnesses were heard, among them were Josiah Stowel, Jonathan Thompson and the two daughters of Mr Stowel, all of whom gave evidence of his good character. Other testimony was proved to be false. The trial lasted from ten in the morning until midnight when a verdict of "not guilty" was rendered. As soon as Joseph was released he was arrested a second time by the sheriff of Broome County and taken to Colesville, a distance of some fifteen miles. A trial was held and again at 2:00 am the Justice said "Mr. Smith, we have examined the testimony and find nothing to condemn you, therefore you are discharged". The compassion of Mr. Knight saved the Prophet a second time.

From this time on for many years the persecution of the leaders and the members of the new Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was ever present.

In January 1831 the Prophet Joseph Smith received a revelation regarding the Colesville Saints, to the effect that they should be moved to Ohio. We were glad to make this move as the persecution had increased and our once peaceful surroundings had turned to a place of uncertainty and fear. The headquarters of the Church was now at Kirtland, Ohio and we were located about sixteen miles northwest from Kirtland at a place called Thompson.

We were to live according to the Lord's Law, that is, the order of stewardship and consecration of properties. Newel Knight, my brother-in-law, was charge of the Branch. All went well until one of the members. Lemon Copley became disobedient and it caused a great deal of confusion. Newell conferred with the Prophet and it was decided that this group should journey on to Missouri, which would eventually be the headquarters of the new Church, or "Zion".

It was a long trip to Missouri and we stopped for a time at Springfield, Illinois. Here my brother George, and his family decided to remain. Our daughters, Julia and Harriet, decided to stay with their cousins.

They had found work at the hotels (taverns). They first worked at the Clifton and later at the Spottswood Hotels.

After a long, hard journey we arrived in Missouri the latter part of July, 1831. My Mother-in-law, Polly Knight was not well during the trip but she had a great desire to get to "Zion" and would not be left behind in Springfield. The hard trip was too much for her frail condition and on August 7th, 1831 she passed away, the first of the pioneers to be buried in Missouri.

The Colesville Saints were located in Kaw Township. The Prophet assisted them in laying the first log, "for a house, as a foundation of Zion" in that place. The log was carried by twelve men representing the twelve tribes" of Israel. At the same time it was made manifest through prayer that the land should be consecrated and dedicated by Sidney Rigdon. "It was a season of Joy" the Prophet said, "to those present, and offered a glimpse of the future, which time will yet unfold to the satisfaction of the faithful" All this took place on the 2nd day of August 1831.

The Saints pledged obedience to the Lord, and Sidney Rigdon said, "I now pronounce this land consecrated and dedicated unto the Lord for a possession and inheritance for the Saints and for all faithful servants of the Lord, in the Name of Jesus Christ Amen." (Essentials of Church History ppl32) (A description of the Land of Zion from Church History V. 1 pp197)

The country is unlike the timbered states of the East. As far as the eye can reach, the beautiful rolling prairies lie spread out like a sea of meadows; and are decorated with a growth of flowers so gorgeous and grand as to exceed description; and nothing is more fruitful or a richer stockholder in the blooming prairie than the honey bee. Only on the water courses is timber to be found. There in strips from one to three miles in width, and following faithfully the meanderings of the streams, it grows in luxuriant forests. The forests are a mixture of oak, hickory, black walnut, elm, ash, cherry, honey locust, mulberry, coffee bean, hackberry, box elder and gass wood; with the addition of cottonwood, buttonwood, pecan and soft and hard maple upon the bottoms. The shrubbery is beautiful and consists in part of plums, grapes, crab apple and persimmons.

The soil is rich and fertile; from three to ten feet deep and generally composed of rich black mould intermingled with clay and sand. It yields abundance, wheat, corn, sweet potatoes, cotton and many other common agricultural products. Horses, cattle and hogs, though of an inferior breed, are tolerably plentiful and seem nearly to raise themselves by grazing in the vast prairie range. In summer and feeding upon the bottoms in winter. The wild game is less plentiful of course where man had commenced the cultivation of the soil, than in the wild prairies. Buffalo, elk, deer, bear, wolves, beaver and many smaller animals here roam at pleasure. Turkeys, geese, swans, ducks, yea a variety of the feathered tribe are among the rich abundance that grace the delightful regions of this goodly land ~ the heritage of the children of God."

"The season is mild and delightful nearly three quarters of the year, the winters are milder than the Atlantic states of the same parallel of latitude and the weather more agreeable. Surely a more perfect place could not be found."

Our homes and barns were built sturdy and strong. We cleared the land and planted our crops and everything seemed well. Why could we not be left in peace, to live as we desired, to worship "according to the dictates of our own conscience," to build up our wards and stakes under the direction of our Prophet. There was ample land for all, we had no quarrel with our neighbors who did not worship as we did. Why should they want to harm us?

Our life in Missouri was not as we had planned, we were driven from place to place, from county to county, by angry mobs. Our crops were destroyed and our homes burned. but we would move to another place and start again. The fear, the uncertainty and the hardships of this frontier land were more than my lovely wife, Esther, could endure and in 1833 after she had given birth to a little son, Hyrum, she never fully recovered and in a short time she passed away and was buried beside her mother.

Esther's youngest sister Polly cared for little Hyrum and in 1835 we were married. What a blessing Polly was to come into my home and care for me and my little son. How I loved her. What would I have done without her? Two years later a son was born to Polly and me and we called him Walter.

The persecution of the Saints in Missouri was almost more than we could bear. We were driven by the mobs from place to place, unable to defend ourselves and our rightful properties. The loss in properties and lives was tremendous and could never be repaid. During the winter of 1838-39 we were expelled from the State of Missouri. There were about fifteen thousand members of the Church who left behind everything they had accumulated excepting the little they could carry with them.

The Prophet Joseph Smith bought property near Commerce, Illinois and the Saints began to gather there. This part of Illinois was wilderness and much of the land was marshy. The Prophet felt that by draining the land and with the blessings of the Lord, the place could be made a pleasant habitation for the Saints, and they decided to build our city there. The Mississippi River makes a half circle around this place giving three fronts on the river. It was a beautiful location for a city. They soon changed the name from Commerce to "The City of Nauvoo. (This word is of Hebrew origin and signifies a beautiful situation or place).

In the early months of the year 1839 the Prophet Joseph Smith with his counselors decided that if ever the Saints were going to receive any payment for the wrongs done to them by the State of Missouri an appeal would have to be made to the President of the United States. Accordingly on October 29th Joseph Smith, Judge Higbee and Sidney Rigdon traveled to Washington D.C. to place their petition before the President. Martin Van Buren was President of the United States at that time. After several interviews and after reading the detailed petition, these were his words and they have gone down in history, "Gentlemen, your cause is just but I can do nothing for you. If I take up for you I shall lose the vote of Missouri." (To the present time nothing has been done to repay the Saints for the great losses that they sustained in Missouri.

The feelings of security and well-being that we experienced in Illinois were very wonderful. I felt now as though I could go ahead and build a home, plant crops, and live a normal life again, pursue the work that I loved and raise my children in peace and harmony.

After we were comfortably located in our new home, Polly and I felt that we should take a trip to Springfield to visit my two daughters, Julia and Harriet. Accordingly we made this trip in our wagon. It took three days but it was a good trip and we enjoyed the country that we passed through; wondering how such a peaceful country could possibly produce people who were vicious and mean. We found our daughters well and established in homes of their own. While there I met a tall, angular young lawyer whose name was Abraham Lincoln. When he found that I was a tailor, he had me make a suit for him. I think I had never made a suit for such a tall man before. He liked the suit and paid me well. I liked this man, feeling that he was kindly and god-fearing.

Back In Nauvoo work had commenced on a Temple. This was to be erected with volunteer labor. Those who were unable to do actual work on the building, gave their services in other ways. My, dear wife Polly pledged in Relief Society, that she would make men's clothes for those who were working on the Temple. Of course she knew that I would assist her in this endeavor as working on men's clothing was one thing that I enjoyed very much. Together we made many pairs of trousers, shirts and jackets. In this way we did our share in the erection of this beautiful building.

The Prophet Joseph Smith came to me one day and asked if I would make a suit for him. This of course I gladly consented to do. As I was making this suit I would take Walter with me when it was necessary for me to go to him for a fitting. He would hold Walter on his knee and tell him many beautiful stories of his life and the early days of the Church.

On April 6th 1839 I was given a Patriarchal Blessing under the hand of Joseph Smith, Sr. the Prophet's father. I was very glad to have received this blessing from the first Patriarch In this dispensation. He was quite elderly at that time and he died the next year in the month of October.

I thought that Nauvoo would be our home forever, that we would be secure here and that I could see my sons grow to maturity in this beautiful under the leadership of our beloved Prophet. That was not to be, and on April 28, 1844 my beloved Polly sickened and died. I could not seem to reconcile myself to this loss. Was it something that I had failed to do that caused her sickness, had she worked too hard? These were unanswered. Life must go on but I was restless and I asked a neighbor to care for my two boys and I went to Mindon, Illinois which was a short distance from Nauvoo and worked for a time on a farm belonging to a Mr. Lake. I worked there for a time, but I wasn't happy away from my children and the home we had in Nauvoo, so I returned.

Nauvoo was growing every day into a beautiful city, the largest in the State at that time. The people were industrious and frugal and law abiding. Factories had been established. In the few short years it had grown into a "commonwealth of some twenty thousand souls." All the growth and industry incited the jealousy of the surrounding towns and they started the rumor that the Mormons were going to take over the entire state of Illinois. This rumor spread and before long the lives of the leaders were threatened by vicious mobs.

There were also threats from within the ranks of the Church members, some in high positions. They were plotting against the Prophet, traitors among those who pretended to be the friends and co-workers of the Prophet. Of their disloyalty the Prophet was aware and he said: "I am exposed to far greater danger from traitors among ourselves than from enemies without, although my life has been sought for many years by the civil and military authorities, priests, and people of Missouri. I defy all the world to destroy the work of God and I prophesy they never will have power to kill me until my work is accomplished and I am ready to die."

On the 27th day of June 1844, under false accusations, the Prophet Joseph Smith, his brother Hyrum, Willard Richards and John Taylor were arrested and taken as prisoners to the jail in Carthage, Ill. I will not re-tell the events of the martyrdom. It is too horrible and inhuman. It is all recorded in the history of the Church.

Following the death of the Prophet and his brother Hyrum, the persecutions subsided for a time and we thought that we would be left in peace.

On the 1st day of December, 1844 was ordained a High Priest in Nauvoo. For this high calling I am so very grateful.

In the latter part of 1845 persecution was again very severe in Nauvoo, I therefore took my sons and moved to Mindon where I had work previously. Things seemed to be in a better condition there.

In 1846 Eliza, one of Mr. Lake's daughters, and I were married in Nauvoo.

Many of the Saints were making preparations to leave Nauvoo as the persecution had increased beyond endurance. Homes were being destroyed and lives were being threatened. Every available carpenter and wheelwright worked day and night preparing wagons for the exodus. I remained in Nauvoo and helped with this work. It was not the intention of the Saints to leave Nauvoo until the springtime had fully arrived, but the human fiends who hated the religion of the saints and coveted their abundance were not willing for them to wait. On Wednesday, February 4th 1846 the first of the Saints left Nauvoo and crossed the Mississippi River on the journey to the west. On the 14th a large company of Saints crossed the river on the ice and continued their journey about nine miles Sugar Creek where they established a camp.

We remained in Mindon, Ill., until 1856 when we were successful in disposing of our property and we made preparations for the journey west. Two children had been born to us, William, in 1852 and Maryette 1855. In the year 1849 my son Hyrum died of an illness the came upon him quite suddenly and we were unable to find a cure for it. With Polly's son ,Walter, Eliza's two children, William and Maryette, we started for Utah with Canute Peterson's train of pioneers.

On our journey to Utah we experienced all of the trials and hardships, the joy and the happiness of the Pioneers. Each day started, and closed with prayer and singing. The trail was long and hot and dusty. As we journeyed along the positions in the wagon train were rotated, so that the wagon to leave last and arrive last was not always the same. Many pioneers were on the "Westward Ho" trail, and we were not bothered with unfriendly Indians and the days, for the most part, passed with pleasantness.

We arrived in Salt Lake City in the early fall and remained there during the winter. Early the next spring we went to Manti. Manti is in Sanpete Valley about 110 miles in a southerly direction from Salt Lake. As we neared the settlement in this beautiful little valley, we hoped that it might be the end of our very long journey.

I selected a suitable spot in the area that had been laid out for the town of Manti, a little out from the central part. This put me nearer to my farming acreage. On this lot Walter and I built a home for the family. Walter had grown into a fine, stalwart young man. He had learned the bricklaying and plastering trade and with my knowledge of carpentry we were able to construct a good home. I was anxious to get our home built and made comfortable as Eliza was expecting her third child in the fall.

By some means the chest I had made years before for my beloved Esther had been preserved and this we put in our new home. It still held our treasured linens; thus we linked the past to the present.

The soil of this valley was productive and our harvests were good. We liked the climate and we felt abundantly blessed. Walter was making preparations to build his own home. He was using the native rock for this purpose. It was of such a quality that it was easy to work and cut into building blocks. Many of the pioneers were using this material for their homes. We, however, constructed my home of

logs as it was needed before winter. On November 5th, 1857 Eliza gave birth to a little girl. We called her Elzina.

I was able once again to do some tailoring and I assisted Eliza with the preparation of material for our clothes. As I grew older my eyesight began to fail, so my tailoring was not as good as it had been earlier in my life. I devoted most of my time to my farm and to Church work. The farm provided amply for my family. We were surely blessed in this beautiful land.

William Stringham died the 3rd of November 1865 and rests in the beautiful Manti Cemetery. I am grateful for this noble ancestor of mine and as I have researched and probed for each scrap of information I could find regarding him, I have learned to love him and I have found him to be one of the noble and great.

This noble man, my paternal great-grandfather, was always true to testimony he received when he was baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ, years before in Colesville. He never wavered from that time forth and he endured many hardships of frontier America. He was driven and persecuted by Satanic mobs, because he would not deny his faith and his knowledge of the truthfulness of the Prophet Joseph Smith and the Gospel he restored. I am so proud of this stalwart ancestor and I hope he will overlook and forgive any error that might have crept into this history that I have prepared of him; that my children and my children's children might know of their ancestor, one of God's noblemen.

Mildred Stringham Phillips

Information obtained from:

Essentials of Church History

Doctrine & Covenants

Bryant Stringham and His People

History of the Church Vol.1

I wrote this history in the first person because it seemed a little more interesting to me. I took a few liberties for which I hope I will be forgiven.

Posted on FamilySearch in 2015 by "Bruce Peacock1"