

JOHN FITZGERALD

1840-1892

John Fitzgerald was born 25 March 1840 near where the city of Vermillion, Illinois, now stands, being the oldest child of Perry Fitzgerald and Mary Ann Cosat. He was a young lad at the time of the Mormon expulsion from Nauvoo. His father, being an outstanding and reliable figure in Nauvoo, was appointed to join the vanguard exploratory company to Utah in 1847. John was just seven years old at this time. This exploratory company was composed almost entirely of men, so John and his mother stayed at Winter Quarters. John's younger brother Daniel had died in 1844 and his younger brother, Alvah, died in 1847 in Winter Quarters. His father left in April for Utah. It is not known whether he left before or after his son Alvah's death. This left John and his mother alone in Winter Quarters during the summer of 1847. John's father Perry returned to Winter Quarters with Brigham Young and the other pioneers that had returned for their families, arriving - Oct. 31, 1847.

On the 24th of May 1848, John's father and mother left Winter Quarters for Salt Lake. John was eight years old, being the only child left in the family. John was, however, old enough to accept a lot of responsibility on the long journey to Utah. They arrived safely in Salt Lake in September and his father and mother spent the winter of 1848 in Salt Lake where his father helped build the fort. In the spring of 1849 John's father moved his family to Mill Creek. The Perry Fitzgerald family now included a new baby brother for John, his name was Manasseh having been born Feb. 11, 1849.

John's father only stayed a short time in Mill Creek and then moved to South Willow Creek in the southeast end of Salt Lake valley. The area was a good place to raise cattle and consisted of marshes, meadow and plenty of good clear running water. The first impression that remained with young John Fitzgerald of his early days in Utah was people living in log houses with leaky roofs made of dirt.

The winter and summer of 1849 was one of sever hardship for the pioneers in the valley. The spring of 1848 saw great tracts of land plowed for crops. There had been good rainfall and indications for good crops couldn't have been better. But then came the crickets. There were about 2,000 pioneers in the winter of 1847-48. Two large companies came in the late summer totaling 1,229 souls in Brigham Young's company and 1,891 souls in Heber C. Kimball's company; so there were about 5,000 people to be fed during the winter of 1847-48. And this after the crops had been partially destroyed by the crickets. It became necessary to make their food chiefly of thistles, sego lily bulbs and wild onions. John Fitzgerald recalled that they had bread once a week, this being on Sunday and even then there was only one slice for each member of the family. John's father was so poor that he couldn't even buy shoes for his family so the children went bare footed.

On the 22nd of January 1851, John got a new brother which was named Perry Jr. John's mother had never really recovered the hardships she had gone through and died just three months after her last child Perry was born. John was a young boy of eleven when his mother died. There was a young boy of eleven and a baby of three months for John's father to take care of. Before the year was out his father married Ann Wilson. She had two daughters. About a year later, John's father entered into polygamy and married Agnes Wadsworth on March 22, 1853. She had thirteen children which made a large family for John's father to provide for.

John had not had too much opportunity for formal education, maybe some teaching in Winter Quarters during the winter of 1847. Being the oldest child, John had to help his father and,

although there was a school in Draper, John could only go a short time in the winter. The first school was taught by William Terry during the winter of 1852-53. The schoolhouse was a small adobe building with two windows on each side. The entrance was a single door at the east end. On the opposite side was a fireplace near which was kept a large pile of sagebrush. Slabs resting on wooden pegs served for benches. By the end of 1853, Draper had a population of some 200 people.

In 1856 there was a young sixteen year old girl who left with her family from Wales their destination Council Bluffs where; they joined a handcart company heading across the plains for the Salt Lake valley. The hand cart companies experienced the greatest hardships of all the pioneers crossing the plains. They had no protection when it rained and they had to push their handcarts through the mud. They didn't have room in their handcarts to carry enough water to last them in-between waterless areas. The sand and dust storms made it worse and shortened the miles they could travel in a day.

The young sixteen year old girl that made this trip with her family was Sarah Ann Williams. Her parents were John and Mary Williams. The Williams family moved into a log house near Thirty-third South. The Williams family arrived in Salt Lake City almost destitute. Sarah Ann decided that she must find work and she left her home and started walking along the old pioneer road that led to South Willow Creek. After walking about twelve miles, she being dead tired, came to a cabin which was Perry Fitzgerald's, John's father. John's father took her in and she stayed and worked for the family for about two years. By this time, John and Sarah Ann had fallen in love and decided to get married. They were married in the Endowment House by Daniel Wells, Feb. 17, 1858. For their wedding supper, they had mush and milk at his father's home. They made their home with John's father for quite a while.

Not long after their marriage, John, with some more pioneers, was called by Brigham Young to go to the head of Echo Canyon to keep watch as the Johnston's Army was threatening a raid against the Mormons. When the pioneers heard that Johnston's Army was coming, they were determined to burn their houses and barns down rather than letting the army destroy or capture them. They had piled sage brush all around the buildings ready to set them on fire. John Fitzgerald was one of the men left to burn the town of Draper if the Army made an attack. This was not necessary as the army went through the valley and camped at Fairfield west of Utah Lake.

John Fitzgerald made several trips back to Fort Laramie to help immigrants coming to Salt Lake. He related many times to his family the difficulties that were encountered on these trips. While on one of these trips, he stayed and worked to earn enough money to buy his wife, Sarah Ann, a cook stove. She was among the first in Draper to have one.

When he and Sarah Ann moved to themselves, their home was a little log house with a dirt roof, and when their daughter, Sarah Jane, my grandmother, was born, the roof leaked so badly her mother had to cover the bed with pans to keep her and her second child from getting wet.

John owned an ox team at this time, which he used for the farm work and for hauling sugar cane to Cottonwood, where the cane was ground and the juice boiled and made into molasses. It took all day and most of the night to make one of these trips. At one time, he arose about four o'clock to get ready to go and, as he was going outside, he saw an Indian squaw stealing onions out of his garden. He went over to her and slapped her face and she left crying. When his wife, Sarah Ann, found out what he had done, she felt very bad because she knew that she would be bothered by the Indians during the day. Towards evening, she noticed a big Indian coming from their camp on the large sand hill in the eastern part of Draper. She became very frightened, because he had a long knife in his hand, with which, she thought no doubt, to scalp her with. So,

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she ran and jumped over a high oak fence almost into the arms of a neighbor by the name of Tyler. The Indian asked Tyler if Sarah Ann was his squaw. When he was about to say no, Sarah Ann said, yes. The Indian then went away without bothering her.

A short time after this episode, John bought a house and farm down near the fort and to this his small family moved. By this time, he was well enough off to buy some horses whose names were Nimrod and Jeff. Feed for the animals was very scarce now, and the farmers found it necessary to turn their horses out at night to find what feed they could. Early in the morning, the farmers had to go look for them, so they could start the daily work. One time, John was gone all day and most of the night searching for his horses. The townspeople became worried and all prepared to go in search of him, as they feared the Indians had killed him as they were very troublesome. Just before they left, they noticed a fire on the mountain east of the town, at a place known as The Clear Spot. John had made this fire to let them know he was still alive. But he had not as yet found his horses. He finally found them and brought them down the next morning.

For a long time, he was manager of the dances in Draper. The dances started at two o'clock in the afternoon and lasted until twelve o'clock midnight. At intermission, his wife, Sarah Ann, prepared supper for the orchestra and anyone else who desired to come. She charged twenty-five cents a plate or fifty cents a couple. The meal was usually potatoes and gravy, meat, squash, mince meat, peach or apple pie, doughnuts, cabbage or parsnips, sauerkraut, suet pudding, pickles and bread and butter. The dances at this time were chiefly the Virginia reel, quadrilles, polygamy dance and marches.

During John Fitzgerald's life in Draper, he was active and was a progressive citizen, holding several civic positions as well as various religious offices in the Church. Among these were: Justice of the Peace, Superintendent of the Sunday School, Ward Clerk to Bishop Isaac Stewart and William C. Allen. He filled these offices with honor and devotion.

His life was dedicated to deeds of kindness and charity, which won him the respect and love of both young and old. John was a man who was very fond of his family, which numbered eleven children, two boys and nine girls. Sarah Ann and John's daughter Margaret Rosa died as a young girl being sixteen years old when she passed away. In the winter, the family would gather around the table and sing such songs as: Oh My Darling Nellie Gray, When You and I Were Young, Maggie. He taught the older children the multiplication tables by singing them, and used all but the fives for verses and the fives we used for the chorus. For the evening refreshments, we parched corn and made molasses candy.

John owned many bee hives from which he extracted many pounds of honey, some of which he sold to the neighbors and some he sent to Salt Lake City. He was rated as one of the successful farmers and stock growers of Draper.

He was called on a six-month mission to Illinois. He went to see his mother's relatives, but they were very prejudice against the Mormons because of the early death of his mother Mary Ann Cosat Fitzgerald, as they supposed the terrible hardships and polygamy had killed her.

From exposure to the weather, he suffered from inflammatory rheumatism for many years, the attacks coming more frequent as he grew older. When he was fifty-two, he became bedfast and died at six o'clock Feb. 16, 1892, leaving Sarah Ann with six children still at home. His life was not long, but he left a great posterity.

Prepared by Edson S. Packer a great-grandson, Feb. 1980. Taken mainly from Sarah Jane's story of her father.