

DUP AF Book 2

Biographical Sketch

of

James Boyer Shelley

by June Shelley Wright, great granddaughter

Pioneer Year 1851

Sailed on the Ellen Maria

Born 7 Jan 1792 in Cheaton, Shropshire, England

Married to Elizabeth Bray

Died 19 Nov 1870 in American Fork, Utah

James Boyer Shelley was born in the little village of Cheaton, Shropshire, England, January 7, 1792, the son of James Boyer and Martha Shelley. As a boy he learned to be a tiller of the soil and grew up to be a hardworking, honest man.

Conditions at that time were far different from what they are today. The golden-headed grain was cut by hand with the sickle, or old-fashioned cradle. At this time it was carted to the barn and stored until the cold weather of winter came on, when it was threshed out with a flail, furnishing employment to the farm hands during the winter seasons. Farm wages were ten shillings a week, or about \$2.40. That was considered a good wage at that time. Under these conditions, James acquired habits of industry, thrift and economy.

He married Elizabeth Bray, daughter of Francis and Margaret Tasker Bray, who were also born in Shropshire, England. Oct. 21, 1794, and to this union 7 children were born; William, Thomas, Martha, James, John, Joseph, and Sarah.

Grandfather [James] and Grandmother [Elizabeth] were members of the Church of England. Grandmother afterwards joined the Methodist faith. In the year 1848 Mormon Elders visited the neighborhood in which the Shelley family lived and on December 11, 1848 Grandmother Shelley and her son Thomas joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day-Saints, followed soon after by the other members of the family, with the exception of Martha. After they had accepted the newly revealed religion they desired to gather with the Saints in the Rocky Mountains of America.

In the month of February, 1851, Grandfather and Grandmother with their sons, William, Thomas, James, John, and Joseph, and their daughter, Sarah, together with the wife of Thomas and the wife and four children of William, set sail on the ship "Ellen Maria" and after a voyage of several weeks landed in New Orleans, 5th of April 1851.

Within a few days the party proceeded by steamer up the Mississippi River. When near Memphis, Tennessee on April 13th, Grandmother Shelley was drowned while attempting to draw a bucket of water from the swift river.

The following is an account of this incident taken from the Latter-Day Saints' Millennial Star, July 1, 1851:

"Arrival of the "Ellen Maria" at New Orleans.--- By a letter from Elder G. D. Watt, dated St. Louis, April 17th , we learn that the Ellen Maria arrived at New Orleans on the 6th of April, having made the voyage in 63 days."

She experienced a strong gale of wind on the 5th of February, but it abated on the sixth, and in a few days afterwards the Saints had become accustomed to sea life, and were free from sickness. On the 11 she cleared the Irish Sea, where it is not uncommon for vessels to be detained twenty or thirty days. The remainder of the voyage was as peasant as sea voyages generally go.

"Meetings were held every Sabbath, and also during the week; at which Elder Pratt addressed the Saints and others present, on the glories of our Holy religion. Explaining the dealings of God with mankind in former times, and what he will do in the latter times. He would quote from the Prophets in the written word, and opening the future to view, until the Saints felt like leaping for joy, and shouting aloud, because of their privilege to live in these days, when the power and majesty of God are, and shall be displayed, in so many marvelous ways.

"On the 9th of April, most of the company left New Orleans for St. Louis, on the Alex Scott, one of the largest boats on the river, and arrived there on the 16th.

"A sorrowful circumstance transpired in going up the river. Sister Shelley, aged 55 years, wife of James Shelley, from Worcester Conference, in attempting to draw a bucket of water from the stream, while the boat was running ten miles an hour, was suddenly plucked into the water by the force of that mighty current. She floated for a moment, and then sank to rise no more. The engines were stopped immediately, and a boat manned and sent in search of her, but it was unsuccessful in obtaining the body. We sympathize with the bereaved husband and family. This is not the first accident of the kind. The Star not long ago contained a similar report and the brethren and sisters were then cautioned against this unwise action.

When will the Saints be advised and learn wisdom from what experience teaches? It is the work of the strongest man to reach water from the mighty current of the Mississippi, especially when running against the stream at so rapid a rate; and no female should on any pretense attempt it. We hope this sad occurrence will prove a warning hereafter."

Upon reaching St. Louis the Shelley family with the exception of William and family started across the plains by team to the abode of the Saints in the Rocky Mountains. They settled in American Fork, which was then known as Lake City, upon their arrival in 1851.

The habits of honesty, thrift, and industry, which had characterized his life in England, were manifest in his new location and he proceeded to make the then barren desert blossom and bring forth its fruit. Realizing that lumber was an essential material in the construction of homes, he constructed the old sawpit, near where the Nielsen Blacksmith shop now stands [1st north and Center Street]. (This was the first saw mill in American Fork) and proceeded to saw by hand the rough native logs into amore finished product.

His was a life of honest toil. His opportunities were meager; no timesaving machinery; no splendid equipped high schools or colleges in which to receive special training. He just had the plain school of experience to which he proved an apt scholar.

Mr. William S. Robinson bought lumber from him for \$5.00, which was made into a flour bin, which was still in existence when this history was written.

Grandfather took another companion in life. He married Mary Bathgate on Dec. 21, 1856. He died in American Fork, Nov 19, 1870, in his 79th year. [He was one of the first to be buried in the American Fork cemetery.]

He was quite lame and used a walking stick. He was plainspoken but not afraid to speak his thoughts and was very witty. It is told of how on one occasion that he was loading hay and his boys were pitching it on the wagon, while he was stacking. They were trying to see how fast they could load it. He slipped down on

the side and when they asked him what he came down for he replied, "For more hay." He also raised sheep and was a very good sheep sheerer.

Grandmother Elizabeth Shelley, being strong in the faith after she had joined the Church, influenced her husband to come to Utah, and leave England where they were living in good circumstances. She carried a large belt of money around her waist. The day before she was drowned she took it off and gave it to her husband. She always had the feeling that she would not get to Utah, but would go far enough to make sure her husband would not go back.

Written by a Great-Granddaughter, June Shelley Wright dated 8 June 1933. The following was added by George F. Shelley, grandson of James Boyer Shelley and read at a Shelley reunion. To us as his lineal descendants, he has left a legacy lesson of industry, lesson of thrift, lesson of economy and above all a lesson of honesty. Let us profit by them, and with our increased opportunities for knowledge, honor the name and memory of our beloved ancestor and grandparent.