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Biographical Sketch

of

William Smith Robinson

by Myrtle Robinson Seastrand, granddaughter

Pioneer Year 1849

Sailed on the Emerald

Ezra T. Benson Company

Born 29 July 1840, Manchester, England

Married 1865 in Endowment House, SLC, Utah

Died 1936

William Smith Robinson's life on earth lasted almost a century from July 29, 1840 until May 13, 1936. He was privileged to see the world's greatest one hundred years of progress.

This sketch is a record of the facts of his life and some of his many sayings, that we have heard him repeat as we played about his door or visited with him in later years. One always learned something on the philosophy of life by conversing with him. He had a great sense of humor and spoke in plain bible-like language and terms. He enjoyed to study and read the Bible, a copy of which he always kept in the east window of his living room by his favorite chair. He lay his hand caressingly down on his cherished book and said:

"This is my text book, there's none better. One little slate and a speller is about the only text book I ever had. You see, I was ten years old when our family came to American Fork the first year of its settlement. There was so much hard work to do: breaking up of land and building our home and roads. William Greenwood had a bit of a school, but I guess we were a hard looking bunch of students, if you could call us that. We did more fooling than learning. I remember the old log benches were pretty hard sitting without any backs. But what I was going to say, if the folks of today would study the Bible more, we would be a better people. But it says here, "In the last days, people shall be a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God. Sabe?"

"Sabe" is an Indian word meaning, "Do you understand?" that he used often to end sentences and he always spoke it with a little smile and chuckle. He loved the Red Man and understood his signs and some of his language. He often repeated an utterance of one of his familiar Indian friends.

"You white men a good people when you first came into the high up valleys, but now you got fine homes, herds, and horses, you not so good. You've all gone Democratic."

And I answered, "No, Republican, don't condemn us. You were white once and will be white again someday."

And she held out her hand and said, "You are about a finger-length better than the others."

Grandfather's splendid robust physique, his kind jolly expression, his splendid poise and his humble friendly way endeared him to everyone. In his advanced age he could read without glasses, could hear fairly well and had the use of his own teeth. His crown of thick, curly, snow-white hair made him distinctive from other Will Robinson's. There were three "Will Robinsons", one termed Buffalo Bill, one Mail-carrier Bill, and grandfather, Curly Bill. They were called by their nicknames more often than otherwise.

I asked him one day, "To what do you attribute your long healthy life," he replied,

"There is many things that makes a long life. Heritage, habit, and so on, but how you live is more important than how long you live." Keeping God's commandments is the big thing. Then you can live a long, happy life throughout all eternity. I've always tried to keep the first big commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you're in doubt about the measuring line come in on your own side a little. That's honesty. Sabe?"

"My Pappie had a good strong body. He lived to be nearly 90. He taught us good habits. He was a strong and good man, my pappie was. He was kind, but strict, yes, he believed in Solomon's rule alright. He used it quite often. I guess we needed it. I lived with father over a half a century, either in the same house or the same lot, never leaving him two weeks at a time, so I ought to know him."

"He was a real pioneer, not only in Old England, but in America. I just came along with him. His life story is my life story only he was greater than I am. He came here for the Gospel's sake and brought me. He was the first Railroad Conductor in the world on Robert Stevenson's steam engine, "The Rocket." It went on the rails from Liverpool to Manchester England in the year 1830. The same year that the Church of Jesus Christ was organized. That was the beginning of great things."

"How did your father come to get this position?" I asked him.

"Well, we were just common people, and only the rich could pay to go to school, so my pappie had to go earn his own living by serving as a footman to an English Lord. This training taught him

good characteristics and the Lord being part-owner in the railroad, recommended my Pappie. On his monument in American Fork City cemetery is carved a picture of the Rocket, under which is written, "Edward Robinson, The First Railroad Conductor in the World."

William Smith Robinson, son of Conductor Edward Robinson, was born July 29th, 1840. The same year Mormonism was first preached in Manchester England, by Hiram Clark and William Clayton. When grandfather was about one year old, he became seriously ill; his mother, a very religious woman with great interest in this new religion sent for the Mormon Missionaries. Brigham Young was then in Manchester and came to their home, anointed and laid his hands upon the sick child's head, and promised the parents that he should be made well and live to a ripe old age. Grandfather has been a living testimony of this healing, and always spoke of it with appreciative reverence. Soon after this his father also joined the Church and often let the missionaries ride free on the railway cars. He would say, 'Sit still and say nothing.' More than once he took them to his tailor and ordered a suit of clothes for them.

It took a year or so for Mary Smith to persuade her husband to quit his fine position as conductor and leave their native land to join the Mormon saints who were then in Illinois, Missouri, and Iowa, but the prayers of this little woman prevailed and in 1842 the parents with six children left their native land for America. Upon leaving, the railroad company presented William's father with a silver watch in which was engraved: "To Edward Robinson in token of regard from the Directors of the Manchester Liverpool Railroad, 1842." This watch is now in the keeping of the Daughters of the Pioneers of American Fork, Adams Camp. William was two years old when the family crossed the Atlantic in an old sailing vessel, possibly the Emerald, which crossed the ocean in Oct. 1842. The children names were Richard, John, Elizabeth, Edward, William and Mary Jane. Mary and Martha died in Old England. It took them nine weeks to cross the water. They were delayed by storms and the mother and two of the children lay at death's door during most of the voyage.

In grandfather's own words, "We thought we had struck it rich when we all set foot on land then changed ships for the steam

propelled flat river boat which sailed up the enchanting Mississippi for Nauvoo. The Saints had built this beautiful city in Illinois on the banks of the Mississippi, on swamp lands thought worthless by others.

William's father, believing this to be their permanent home, took their sayings and immediately built them a lovely little red brick two-story home. Learning the Gospel of Jesus Christ as taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith and others. In the newly built Nauvoo Temple, William and the other children were sealed to their parents, where they were endowed for all eternity.

They visioned only happiness ahead, but as the poet Burns said: "The best laid schemes of mice and men can aft alee and leave us naught but grief and pain, for promised joy.

Within the next year, 1844, the Prophet and brother, Hiram were martyred. Grandfather remembers his father lifting them up to look into the coffins, upon the handsome features of these noble leaders. This tragedy brought horror and unrest among the people.

Grief came with even more force into the home of Edward Robinson for three months later, in Sept. 1844, his wife then 35 years of age was taken in death at the birth of her 9th child. The baby, who was named Joseph after the Prophet, died soon after and was buried by the mother in Nauvoo where, as grandfather says: "My mammy went to sleep with her baby and left us motherless." Without a mother queen in his home, life was discouraging for Edward. He employed Ann Wootten, a widow, with three of her children, Attie, [John and Lizzie] to take care of his household. She made such a good housekeeper that Edward proposed marriage to her and these two plucky parents decided to rear their families together. Grandfather says:

"Ann Wootten was a good stepmother to us, but I won't say that she didn't cuff our ears once in a while, but a mixed family of nine children was a big job for one woman and she did mighty well by us.

"One day I remember I was sick with the chills. We had this malady a lot, it was so damp along the Mississippi River. I crawled

under the stove to get warm. Mammie gave me some quinine. I didn't like it and refused it. When I spit it out she gave me a good cuffing, that time. "

Unrest and mobbing in Nauvoo again became rampant and Edward taking the advice of authorities to seek homes in nearby towns and hoping to get employment, traded his little dream home for a team of horses and moved his family to Burlington, Iowa. Here for four years they struggled, trying to save enough to make their journey with the saints to Utah. His half-brothers, Alfred and Heber Robinson were born at Burlington. Grandfather tells how he and the biggest children, with their father, went to the mills and got roughin's for ten cents a bushel. From this their mother made sack after sack of bread which they dried, to take with them on their journey across the plains.

Speaking of the trials of crossing that 1,000 mile trek, he said,

"I can't say that it was such a trial, only at times. Some folks call themselves pioneers who were carried across the plains in arms but I was nine years of age so I remember it as if it were today. The young fellows thought it quite an adventure. We did get tired of the fun before we reached Salt Lake Valley; the miles seemed endless. The best we made was around 16 miles per day. So we plodded along all summer, three long months. The first boys or the real pioneers were ahead of two years, for we came alone in '49. Over 5,000 had gone ahead of us, so by then the paths first made by the light tread of the moccasined Indian were tramped into a dusty road, by the clumsy hoof of the oxen and (3) the rawhide boots of the men. My Pappie held up his coarse boot one night and said, "This old clod cruncher don't look much like the fine, polished English boots I wore in the Gentry. But such is the price of a pioneer life. Sabe?"

We were well organized into Companies of ten, and each man knew his daily duty. We had to kill rattlesnakes and ford rivers. If we had a big stream to cross they would send one man ahead on the first yoke of oxen as a try out; if there was any quick sand the rest of the men were ready with the best cows to pull the wagon out. In that case it was better to move on and try again, or make a ferry to move

everything across. The roads followed the streams a good bit of the way. The North Platt was a lovely river. The Sweet Water River got its name when a donkey went under its waves that was carrying two bags of sugar. The sugar was washed down the stream. The rivers gave us plenty of water for our needs and the banks were good grazing for our stock, night and morning.

“Father drove two good yoke of oxen to pull our two wagons and we had two good cows, Paddy and Lilly. I remember Lilly was a hard looker. She had her tail bitten off by a coyote, when she was a calf. But they gave us plenty of milk to soak up our dried bread and with an occasional flapjack or egg from the hens we brought along we had a mighty healthy diet. I can’t say that we suffered for eats. More people suffer today with eating too much. Oh, yes, and we had roast buffalo meat, now and then. There were plenty of these dangerous looking animals on the plains. At a distance they looked like a patch of cedar trees. We gathered buffalo chips to use for fuel. The Indians sorta claimed the buffalo and deer and they didn’t like to see so many white men coming onto their hunting ground. You take away the deer from him and you rob him of his food. So you can’t blame him for feeling hostile, and trying to frighten the whites away. The Lord has been good to us and made plenty of land for everyone if we could only behave ourselves and handle it half as well as he created it. Sabe?”

The Indians didn’t trouble us much, but they gave the company ahead of us quite an experience. A band of Indians wanting to make trouble came rushing along all bedecked in gay feathers and succeeded in frightening the animals which were enclosed within the circle of wagons for the night. Before the night guards could get them started out through their entrance, the critters ran bellowing around and around and several person were trampled underfoot, and wagons mutilated. We saw deserted wagons. Animal carcasses marked the road all along. Our worst sorrow was seeing older people so weary and sick that they couldn’t go any further. We stopped several times to bury the dead. I remember how worried we were when our stepmother too sick, and how we prayed for her. She had a

beautiful baby while crossing the plains, but it went to sleep when it was five years old.

Oh, our journey was a tough enough one but we came along singing. There never were happier young ones when the leaders said: "Only a few more mountains to climb and we see the Salt Lake Valley. If men hadn't have come with fresh teams to give us a lift I don't know whether we would have made the last grades or not. Our animals were pretty well done for. I believe the oxen held up better than the horses. The oxen never gets up enough speed to get as tired as the horses, and he is much easier handled, even at the plowing. He's too slow though for this fast age, but gasoline is more dangerous and so is this age.

When we finally started down grade into the valley we were a thankful lot. 'Tis true the land with its purple sage appeared dry and deserted looking, compared with the green plains we had left behind us, but the streams and the beauty of the lake made up for the land's dryness. The majestic mountains stood like sentinels guarding the people as they proceeded to build their homes once more. Happy with the thought that they would never be driven on again. Aren't we in the tops of the mountains? According to prophecy we are exalted above the hills. If we could live the gospel in its fullness people would be flocking here to learn of us, like black birds to a wheat stack.

But we've got too rich now, we've become selfish. Where your heart is your treasure is also. We were happier when we were poorer. We were interested in each other then; neighbor shared with neighbor. If a poor immigrant came into the valley, every one gave him a lift to clear his land or build his home. This was brotherly love and unity. And didn't the master say, "Unless you are one, ye are not mine"? President Brigham Young our great leader taught us how to hold our own industries and share the profits in business. But we've sold our birthright for a mess of pottage, so I guess we'll have to suffer with the rest of the world. The new generations will have trials worse than crossing the plains before they get out of the mixup we're in now.

The first thing Edward Robinson did when he arrived in the valley was to secure land. He rented the John Taylor farm and immediately commenced fall plowing using the faithful oxen that had brought them across the plains. Here, Grandfather says, "I helped split logs to make walls to keep the wolves out of the milk. We cleared the land and broke the sage and skunk brush up for fuel. We drove the oxen into the canyons to bring back cottonwood, wild game and berries. Deer and game were plentiful and that helped us out a lot when bread stuff was so scarce. We had to save most our grain for spring planting. You know it was the year before, in '48 that the crickets got away with a big part of the crop, when the Lord in his mercy sent the Seagull to help us out. And we needed so much more grain and flour in '49 for that is when the gold rushers came through. They were glad to trade tired animals for food stuff. That is how we got hold of some of our horses, sheep and cattle."

Let us vision Edward Robinson's pioneer home that first winter. A family of eleven children, three sets of half brothers and sisters, ranging in ages from one to nineteen years, living in one big room with its quaint fireplace, and black smoky kettles and primitive oven which must have been kept full to supply food for so many growing hungry youngsters; a spinning wheel, straw ticks made from the canvasses from the covered wagon, a crude box or chest made of native lumber which contained their Sunday clothes, two or three homemade chairs with buckskin bottoms. The last named articles I have cherished ever since my mother gave them to me upon the death of Great-Grandfather forty years ago and I have still got them in my keeping.

This was a home quite different to what might have been theirs had they remained in old England. Almost as humble as that of the Christ child. Yet I believe there was less murmuring than today in our expensive homes. A home which called for all the perseverance, thrift and patience, that individuals could cultivate. An abode where every member of the family of an evening, bowed his head in reverence and knelt upon his knees in thankfulness, for the preservation of his life, for the daily sunshine and the soil and

strength to bring about the things they visioned ahead. Content and happy as they were, this was as yet not their permanent home. The authorities asked the Saints to go to make homes in other valleys, which they did.

Their worldly possessions at this time were the scantiest they had ever owned. But that didn't daunt their determination to work and plan toward future growth. And from this time on, each year brought them added blessing and wealth. They journeyed south toward the beautiful Utah County then called Provo Valley. Arza Adams and Stephen [Chipman], their sons Nathan [Adams] and Henry [Chipman] had already passed through here on their way to the Fort at Provo and they were so impressed with its prospects that they returned and in the spring of 1850 built the first two log homes. They brought back the report of their find: vast green pasture lands around the fresh water Utah lake, abundant in fish; fertile bench lands covered with bunch grass. Lovely streams carrying water through the virgin soil. And much wild game including antelope and deer, all enclosed and protected by the majestic mountains apparently rich in minerals.

Picture this English family of thirteen souls, father and sons perhaps walking along side by side of the oxen and wagon. Women and children riding or perched upon their remaining few belongings. Imagine their open eyes of admiration when they pulled around the rugged path at the point of the mountain and first beheld this wonderful prospect of the final abode. And indeed it proved to be such. They purchased a lot and one room log house from Sol Thomas who wanted to join the Gold rushers. This lot was located at the South east corner within the previously built mud fort, where the city park now stands. The same corner where Grandfather has lived 86 years. Where three generations of Robinsons raised their families and passed to the great beyond. Here they again built them a log house, which sufficed for a few years of pioneer environment but even then Grandfather says,

"We were so many grown-up, that Ned, Richard and I had to sleep out in the straw with a bit of a log shed over it. But it wasn't bad. It made us healthy. Our covers were fashioned from the animal

pelts. My mother was a good seamstress and sewed me a fine buckskin suit. It had a fine beaver collar. I caught the beaver on the Provo River. Beaver were plentiful and some men got rich trapping them. We knew how to tan our own leather. My suit was trimmed with some red bandings my mother had dyed, for our home spun wool. And it lasted me and my younger brothers a good many years, and it was the kind of a garb to have through our cold winter, especially when you had to break the ice on the water to wash yourself of a morning. We always kept our wash basin outside our humble cottage door. Then we had to carry the daily water from city creek a block away. It was several years before father dug our rock well and drew the water out with buckets on ropes. You have it pretty slick now just to turn a tap and draw hot or cold water. Roughing it must have proved beneficial to Grandfather for he grew into robust manhood and after earning a few acres of land of his own and building himself a small adobe house on his fathers lot, sought himself a wife.

There were several young ladies whom Grandfather admired as they chummed about at church or parties (sleigh riding was their choice of recreation) but the dark haired blue-eyed Orpha, daughter of Arza Adams, the miller won his heart. Arza operated the first grist mill as well as being the first home-builder in American Fork. William always spoke of his wife as Arza's choice child, my little sweetheart, for she was only sixteen when he married her in the Endowment House in 1865. Mentioning their wedding trip he said:

"Once more we trailed the oxen back over the road to Salt Lake City, pulling my bride to be and myself. Orpha had a new homespun dress and I had my first wool suit. We had with us a load of grain which I traded for two brass cooking kettles, a rocker, a stand, and two or three chairs which we put in our adobe home and started keeping house.

Of this lovely couple, I can say: "Grandmother Orpha was more aggressive, the pushing power behind their high aims and ideals. Grandfather was the sure and talented type and very steady. With this combination they soon forged ahead and made a success of their family life. His wife always encouraged him to do church work as

well as serving in a church capacity herself for many years. He was President of the M.I.A. for a number of years before the wards were divided and served as a block teacher most of his younger days. At the time of his death he held the office of High Priest. They soon accumulated much land through their hard work and savings, and in a short time they built them a six room English red-brick home, quite like his father's dream house in Nauvoo in which Grandfather lived until his death. The American Fork City Officials tried several times to buy this home and lot from Grandfather and he would always refuse saying:

"My home is too dear to be sold for money and I want to stay here until I die." Which he did. His daughter Sabina kept house for him after the death of his wife in [1916]. The children born to these fine parents were five sons & seven daughters. William E. Nathan, John, Arza, and Richard, and seven daughters: Sabina Allen, Mary Halliday, Blanche Jackson, Olive Gardner, Florence Wolfgang, Ida Mann, Millie Howard. Nine of them lived to comfort and honor their father in his advanced age. One of his last utterances was,

"You girls mustn't try to keep me here longer. I'm ready to go, for Mother Orpha's waiting. She's watched for me now nearly 20 years."

The towering pine trees in front of his home, that he planted 60 years ago will be for years a monument to his memory and remind us of his living presence. For his life-time home has now been purchased by the City and converted into a beautiful park in which will stand a marker with the inscription, Robinson Park.

Just before his death as he lay patiently waiting for the Great Master to set his spirit free from his aching body, I stood watching Grandfather's saintly countenance and serene expression and these words came to me.

"When you come to the end of a lovely life, like the last flickering rays of the setting sun, 'Tis grand to reflect on time well spent, without one regret, as your soul marches on."