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Biographical Sketch

of

Oliver Thornton

by Hattie M. Thornton Snow, his granddaughter

Pioneer Year 1852

Married Mary Griswold

Died in American Fork, Utah, 21 Jan 1891

The history of the early settlement and founding of the state of Utah is very unique. All pioneering savers of toil and struggle and sacrifice, but the Mormon people, after the persecution they had endured in the east were searching for a home-not only where they could make a living but where they could worship God according to the dictates of their own conscience. The message of the restored Gospel had appealed to noble men and women not only in the U.S. but in many of the European countries, and in Canada.

They gathered together first to Kirtland where they built a Temple, then they were driven out and went westward to Missouri, then up to Illinois where they built another Temple at Nauvoo. But there was no continued peace anywhere for very long, and finally in 1847 they braved the vastness of the western prairies and rugged Rocky Mountain passes and journeyed westward and found a land we love and live in now. President Young directed the colonizing of all these western valleys of the Wasatch Range. "He chose men of strength and fortitude to go to remote parts and build towns and cities, make roads and bridges, and made the desert waste over into beautiful private gardens. The economic, social, civic and intellectual life was never to be forgotten, for he said to all his colonizers--"Build your homes; then your school and meeting house. In your amusements see to it that they are controlled by the spirit of God; and teach your children that in their moral and intellectual lives, all should go to the glorification of God."

My own grandparents were among the many who made this journey and helped to settle this state. The following is taken from my father Amos G. Thornton's notes on the travels of his father's family from the time they joined the church until the family arrived in Utah. He says:

"My Father Oliver Thornton and my mother Mary Griswold Thornton joined the Church in 1837 in Canada, in the township of Pickering. They left Canada in the spring of 1838 and went to Kirtland, Ohio. They stopped there about three months and then went on to Far West, Mo. arriving there on the 15th of October 1838 and stayed there until the following February, 1839 and then moved back to Adams Co., Ill. to Beer Creek, near Fairfield and from there to

Hancock Co. near Carthage, on a farm owned by a man named David R. Fales. Here we engaged in farming for two years--1841. We lived here at the time of the martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph and Hyrum Smith in June, 1844.

Carthage was 18 miles from Nauvoo and our farm was so near the jail that we could hear the firing of the guns very distinctly at our house at the time they were assassinated which was between 4 and 5 P.M. June 27, 1844. I very well remember that night about 12 o'clock Sister Grant, wife of George D. Grant, who lived about one mile away came to our house with her little children and told us what had happened and that Brother Grant had gone to Nauvoo to carry the sad news. Later our mother took us all to see the bodies of those martyrs as they lay in state at the Mansion House.

In the spring of 1845 we moved to Nauvoo. We left Nauvoo In the spring of 1846 and went into Iowa, stayed there two years. We then moved to Lynn Co., Mo. 1847. We left Nauvoo on account of the spirit of mobocracy and persecution, that same spirit which had driven the saints out of Missouri. As I have said, in the spring of 1846 my Father with his family crossed the Mississippi River into Iowa. We traveled about 150 miles westward and stopped on the Des Moines River. Here we stayed two years farming and freighting for a living. Here we lost one of our family, a little girl named Mary. From here we went to Lynn Co., Mo. where we engaged in freighting for about two years when we managed to rig up two good teams together with 20 head of other stock, and again we hitched up and moved to 25 miles north of Kaneshville near Council Bluffs, Ia. Here we bought a place, opened a farm and made other improvements, desiring to make a fit out to go to the valleys. At this place our neighbors were rather scattered from ½ mile to 2 miles or more apart, yet we used to have some good times when we got together at meetings or parties. We stayed here till the summer of 1852, then we crossed the plains to Great Salt Lake, arriving there in the early fall.

This is a brief outline of the movings of the family of Oliver Thornton and his wife Mary. The Gospel came to them in the year 1837, at their home in Pickering, Ontario Co., Canada. They were comfortably located there surrounded by many relatives and friends

for both the families lived there. But the Gospel message came to them with its convincing power. They were possessed with a desire to gather with the Saints; so very early in the spring, before the cold Canadian winter had loosened its hold they packed up their belongings, what few they could take, cuddled their four children into a sleigh and drove across the great lakes on the ice into the U.S. Aunt Lydia, the oldest child was then 8 years old. Amos was not quite six. Thomas was four years and the baby Edward Hotchkiss only a few months. Sacrifice marked the journey from the very first, for they lost their baby that first summer.

Grandmother Thornton bore 12 children. Four were born in Canada, six were born as they struggled through the drivings and hardships in the states--no two in the same place, and two boys Edmond and Nathan were born in American Fork, Utah, Edmond being born November 19, 1852 just a few weeks after their arrival here. She had had 14 years of travel and travail. She only lived 6 years after they arrived in Utah. She left no photo but we do know that she was a brave, courageous, noble and God-fearing woman who stood by her husband in his efforts to come to Zion and gave her life that this western wilderness might be subdued and that her family might live among the Saints. We love and cherish her memory and hope to emulate the strength of her womanhood in our own lives. She was born in Pickering, Canada Feb. 22, 1812 and died in American Fork Utah, April 12, 1858. Her name was Mary Griswold and her father's name was Amos Griswold and her mother Eleanor Stotts. They all lived in Canada. She had six sisters and four brothers making eleven in the family. Grandfather's name was Oliver, his father's name was Joseph and his father's name was Joseph.

There is a tradition that the first Joseph came from Maine. The second Joseph was born in Cambridge Mass. and Oliver in Canada. His mother's name was Lucretia Calkins and her father was Solomon Calkins. He was born in Vermont, as was also Great-Grandfather Griswold.

Oliver's mother bore seven sons. He was the only one to join the church. The other brothers had large families. His brother Ephraim was a doctor and his children were all professional people.

He came to American Fork in 1852, and settled in the old Fort. Later he chose some farmland down the lane, midway between American Fork and Pleasant Grove, built his home, and made his farm. He was an orchardist and was one of the first to do grafting or budding and had one of the finest apple orchards in the country. He was interested in the promotion of everything that tended to build up the country and glorify his religion. He belonged to that class of men who are absolutely honest. He was industrious and embodied in his life's work those characteristics of rugged worth that marked the early pioneers. He died in American Fork, Jan. 21, 1891 at the age of 85. He had one plural wife named Diana Stoddard [Stoddard, and she wasn't a plural wife, but Oliver married her after Mary died].

One can see that there was a spirit of pioneering in our ancestors. They seemed to like to move on to the borderland of civilization and to blaze the trails for others to follow. They came from the New England stock that boasts of keen intellectuality and deep religious devotion.

How closely interwoven with the history of a city, or a country or a community are the lives of the men and women who helped to build that country and little do we realize how much the lives of these pioneers in every line of their endeavor mean to us and to all succeeding generations. They have filled our paths with opportunity and opened up the way for progress and learning. The youth of today know little of the cost of progress. The buffalo and the Indians made the first trails. Then came the trappers and the Fur Traders and the Spanish Missionaries in 1776 Father Escalante came into Utah valley; finally came the Mormon pioneers who were the colonizers. They came to stay. They cleared the land of the boulders and the sage brush:--Much of the land was infested with the snakes and all troublesome vermin. They subdued and Christianized the Indians and made neighbors of them instead of fighting enemies. They built homes, schools, amusement halls were built and every line of cultural endeavor fostered until now our state is second to none in its onward march for progress in this enlightened Era--but let us never forget the men and women who blazed these trails and made possible for us these blessings.

Four baby graves were left by Oliver and Mary Thornton as they travelled from Kirtland to Council Bluffs.