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Biographical Sketch

of

Thomas Ephraim Thornton

by Zella Hansen, his granddaughter

Pioneer Year 1852

John Wimmer Company

Born 2 Jan 1835 at Pickering, Ontario, Canada

Married Priscilla Covington 27 Apr 1856

Died 15 Mar 1918

Thomas Ephraim Thornton was born 2 Jan. 1835, at Pickering, Ontario County, Canada. He was the son of Oliver and Mary Griswold Thornton.

His father, Oliver, was the son of Joseph and Lucretia Calkins Sly Thornton, and was born 6 Sept. 1806 at Pickering, Ontario County, Canada.

His mother, Mary, was born 22 Feb. 1812, at Elizabeth, Ontario County, Canada (the daughter of Amos and Eleanor Stotts Griswold).

Thomas Ephraim was the third child of a family of twelve children. His brothers and sisters are as follows: Lydia Meachum, Amos Griswold, Edward Hotchkiss, Alice Ann, Apollas, Eleanor, Mary, Oliver Evans, Joseph Smith, Edmund Butler, and Nathan Moroni.

In 1837 when Thomas was just two years of age, his parents accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ. The following year they wrapped their four small children in buffalo robes rucked them into a sleigh and crossed Lake Ontario into the United States. They settled first in New York, where they buried their baby Edward, the first summer.

From this time on their thoughts, ideals, hopes and in fact, their very lives were devoted to the cause for which they, along with the rest of the saints were fighting, under the leadership of the Prophet Joseph Smith. They moved from place to place enduring in common with the other saints, the hardships, the persecutions and the joys of a newly revealed faith and religion.

Of all these trials, Thomas was childishly unaware except where they touched him, and then they were quickly forgotten. He does not remember the home in Kirtland, Ohio, where they remained for three months, nor their move to Far West, Mo. He was only four years old when they left Mo. and went to Bear Creek, near Fairfield, Adams Co., Ill. In February 1839. But after their arrival in Nauvoo, which was a year or so later, incidents and impressions began to make a lasting pattern on the young boy's mind.

When they arrived in Nauvoo the Prophet Joseph Smith advised them not to settle in the city of Nauvoo, but to locate in one

of the outlying districts, promising them that if they did they would escape many of the persecutions which would befall those in the city proper. They heeded this council and settled on a farm owned by Mr. David R. Fales, which was located between Nauvoo and Carthage.

Grandfather remembered of climbing to the top of the temple while it was being constructed, along with Joseph Smith Jr. and other boys. It is probable that his father was helping with the construction of the temple at the time. One incident which was forever stamped upon the minds of Thomas and his family was the martyrdom of their Prophet and leader. Their home was so near Carthage that the sound of the fatal shots which took the lives of the two brothers, Joseph and Hyrum, came clearly to their ears. Later, Thomas stood by and watched the procession which brought their bodies back to Nauvoo. Words cannot describe the feelings which were stirred in the nine year old boy's heart, but he cried bitterly and going off to himself, he knelt down and the prayer he uttered was his first real heart to heart appeal to his Father in Heaven.

During the trying months that followed, and the expulsion from Nauvoo, the promise of the prophet was fulfilled, for they escaped with almost no persecutions whatsoever.

They were very anxious to be among the first to seek a new home in the west, but it was not to be, for they were chosen to remain behind and raise crops so that those immigrants who were to come later should be provided with food. For two years they were allowed to remain in Nauvoo, and then in the spring of 1846, they moved to a spot on the Des Moines River in Iowa. They had to work untiringly to supply the demands which were made for food for the incoming and outgoing saints. After two years they moved to Lynn Co., Mo., but they did not remain long because the persecutions became so intense they were forced to leave. They traveled about 150 miles again, locating on the Des Moines River. While here they devoted all their efforts toward getting ready to leave for Utah.

During this period Thomas's mother had given birth to six more children, three of whom had died in infancy. It is probable that

the hardships and conditions surrounding their birth must have been responsible for these added sorrows which the family had to bear.

They finally obtained twenty head of cattle and two good teams. They exchanged their farm with the crops all planted and in good condition for their last horse. They needed a horse and the other man wanted a farm but had nothing else to offer, so they both took possession and were satisfied. They then moved to a little settlement about two miles north, called Kanessville where final preparations were made for the Journey to Utah.

The Journey was commenced in the summer of 1852, and they traveled in the John Wimmer Company.

At this time Thomas was seventeen years old. His Nomadic Outdoor life had built for him a strong sturdy body, a clean courageous mind and a deep abiding faith in God.

Although he was fearless and courageous he had a kind and loving disposition which was manifested in his love of animals. His father had a large white ox of which Thomas had made an especial pet. Once when the company were crossing a large river they sent the cattle in first. The white ox usually took the lead and brought them safely to the opposite shore. This time, however, something went wrong, for the ox started them to milling about in mid-stream. While the company looked on in despair, Grandfather jumped into the water and swimming out to the cattle he jumped onto the back of the old white ox and guided him to the opposite shore with the rest of the cattle following.

On another occasion, while the company were being ferried across a river, the cable broke. The ferry began to drift towards the rapids which were just below. Before the company had time to take in the situation, Thomas dived overboard and swimming out he grabbed the cable made his way to the shore and tied it around a large tree, thus saving the lives of all on board the ferry.

One day the company sighted buffalo and Thomas along with some other men were sent out to get meat for the camp. Before leaving they were warned not to kill the leaders of the herd. In the excitement, however, they shot and wounded a large bull, the leader

of the herd. Immediately the enraged bull charged the men. They were on the bank of a stream and grandfather dodged behind some large rocks, and the others had to dive into the stream to save their lives. The details of the story are forgotten but to Grandfather, the tramp back to camp without any meat impressed on his mind a great lesson of obedience.

They arrived in the Great Salt Lake Valley in the fall of 1852. They moved to American Fork where they homesteaded land along the state highway between American Fork and Pleasant Grove. They were forced to hurriedly erect a house to shelter the eleventh child which was born about a week after their arrival.

They now had a home from which they would not be driven by the persecutions of the mobs. The mother did not live very long to enjoy it, however. About six years after their arrival in Salt Lake and about three years after the birth of her twelfth child, she died 12 April 1858. She was a kind and loving mother a devoted and faithful wife, and a true Latter Day Saint.

Grandfather received his certificate of citizenship in Salt Lake Co., Utah Territory from N. I. Appleby, clerk, 19 April 1854.

He worked helping his father on the farm and later on in his life he worked as a carpenter.

On 27 April 1856 he married Priscilla Covington, the daughter of Berrill and Elizabeth Hodges Covington, who was born 27 Jan. 1839 in Bedford, Bedfordshire, England.

To Thomas and Priscilla were born five boys and six girls. The oldest son Amos, was born in Am. Fork, 9 April 1857; They moved to Ogden Weber co., Utah where two children were born, Annie Priscilla, 30 Jan. 1859; and Mary Elizabeth, 2 Dec. 1860. They returned to Am. Fork in 1861 and the rest of their children were born there: Henry, 23 Dec. 1862; Alice Melissa, 19 Nov. 1863; Thomas Ephraim, 4 April 1866; Simeon Covington, 30 Sept. 1868; Clarence Josiah, 2 Mar. 1871; Sarah Ellen, 2 Dec. 1873; Margaret Elzator, 4 Feb. 1876; Lydia Edwina, 27 Jan. 1880. They all lived to man and womanhood except Henry who died in infancy.

Grandfather was a Black Hawk War Veteran, and was often called to go out with others to drive off the Indians. He had many interesting and exciting adventures.

In 1880 they heard that there was land to be homesteaded in Deseret, Millard Co., Utah. It seems the call of new adventures in a new land was too much for them, for they were among the first to go. The soil was so full of mineral that it could not be made to produce crops, so that the venture was a failure, and they returned to Am. Fork in 1882, where they spent the remainder of their years.

During his later years, Grandfather worked at carpentering, as did all of his sons, and they did a great deal in building up the community. At one time he also worked as a wheel right in partnership with William Bromley who was a blacksmith.

Their first home was just west of his father's home, now known as the Stephen Mott pasture. Then they owned the home now known as the William Kershaw Home. Later he bought a piece of land from the city located in the fourth ward, and here he built their last home. It was there they resided until their death.

He was baptized by John Huntington in 1845. February 18, 1865, he and his wife received their endowments and were sealed for time and eternity in the endowment house in Salt Lake City. 8 Nov. 1894 they received their second endowments in the Salt Lake Temple.

His outstanding characteristics were charity and the little thoughtful kindnesses with which he showered his wife and family. He was a liberal donator and a strict tithe payer. He always took his grain, potatoes, meat, etc. to the storehouse of the Lord in the season thereof. There never was a more hospitable home than that of Thomas and Priscilla, and they were never more happy than when they were visited by their married children and friends.

He was a retiring and unassuming man and his voice was seldom raised in public, but he belonged to a generation which called for real man and womanhood. Thomas did his share and did ... both private and public, were very wonderful, for they showed a spirit of kinship, as though he were used to calling upon the Lord and depending on his help.

His dear wife and helper died May 7, 1916 and was buried beside her husband's parents. Grandfather was never very contented or happy after her death. He visited among his children until his death in March 15, 1918. He was a kind, thoughtful and affectionate husband; a firm but kind and loving father. He left a large family of children and grandchildren, who will always love, honor and revere his memory.