

DUP AF Book 2
Biographical Sketch
of

John McNeill

and four wives

Janet Bowman, Sophia Cooks, Charlotte Spencer, Elisa Golden

by Edith Boley Jones, granddaughter

Pioneer Year 1852

Sailed on the Olympus

Born 1 Mar 1827

Married to Janet Bowman on 23 Aug 1850

Died 19 Mar 1903

I, John McNeill, born March 1, 1827, was baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints June 23, 1847 by Priest William Smith at Lockgelly Branch, Fifeshire, Scotland and was confirmed a member of said church June 27, 1847 by Elder John Currie in said branch.

A few weeks after being baptized I moved to Dunfirmshire Branch in Fifeshire. December 26, 1847 I was ordained to the office of a Teacher by Elder William McMaster and acted in that office for several months.

In October, 1848 I was ordained to the office of a Priest by Elder William A. McMaster and labored in that office for several months in traveling and preaching in company with others and sometimes alone. I was called to go in the eastern part of Fifeshire and travel and preach alone. I continued in preaching in the office of a Priest until July 8, 1849.

Then I was called and ordained an Elder by Elder William A. McMaster and I preached in the offices of a Priest traveling and Elder about six months in the year 1849. I traveled a great deal and did much preaching. I baptized and confirmed one man by the name of David Pearson. It was on April 2, 1849.

Then I was called to go and preach the Gospel alone as a traveling Priest in the eastern part of Fifeshire, Scotland. I traveled in the capacity of a Priest until July 8, 1849. When I was ordained to the office of an Elder by Elder William A. McMaster I continued to travel and preach alone in the eastern part of Fifeshire until the Fall of 1849. Went to Clackmanenshire and traveled there three months in December, 1849.

I was sent to Kirkcaldy and on January 31, 1850 I stopped traveling and went to work as the Saints there were very poor and not many of them. I was appointed President of the Kirkcaldy Branch and preached to the Saints on the Sunday and around the different towns in the week nights. Mostly in the open air. The blessing of God was with me.

One evening, while preaching in Chapel while being a little annoyed by several persons trying to break up the meeting I noticed

a man by the name of Thomas Low listening with great attention. At the close of the meeting I walked over to him and gave him some books pertaining to the work of God. He took the books and I asked him to read them. The next week I went again to the same place. Mr. Thomas Low was there. I preached in the open air. At the close of the meeting I gave the Book of Mormon to said Thomas Low and asked him to read it and told him when he became convinced of the truth to come to my place and I would baptize him. About two weeks after he came to my home and told me he had read the Book of Mormon and was convinced it was true. I went and baptized him in the sea. He remained a good, faithful Latter Day Saint. He came with his family to Utah and remained faithful to his death on August 23, 1850.

I was married to Sister Janet Bowman. Elder Crandel Dunn pronounced the ceremony. I stopped a few weeks after being married in Smeaten then left and went to Lockgelly and stopped there, working and preaching until February 15, 1851.

Then I stopped work and prepared to sail for America. A Brother James Herd loaned us five pounds. Brother Charles Duncan loaned us three pounds and Brother John Duncan and a lady by the name of Mrs. Methreen loaned us two pounds. All of said money I refunded back to the owners with interest from America to Scotland.

On Friday the 21 February 1851 we left Fifeshire and went to Edinburgh and stayed all night. Next day we left and went to Glasgow on the train February 22, 1851. Stopped in Glasgow all that day until the afternoon of the said 22nd of February. Then we went on board the steamboat and sailed down Clidee River to Greenick. Stopped at Greenick a few hours then sailed for Liverpool.

There was a great deal of sickness in sailing through the Irish channel. Next day we stopped in Liverpool until the 27 of February. When we went on the ship Olympus then sailed on March 4. We sailed to America on the south route. Passed several miles from the Island of Jamaica. We also sailed near the Island of Cuba. We crossed the bar in the mouth of the Mississippi and the river. We arrived at New Orleans in Louisiana the following day. We went on board the

steamship Atlantic and sailed up the River Mississippi to St. Louis in about ten days.

Sometime in the beginning of 1851 after landing at St. Louis we moved to Gravia near St. Louis and stopped there about eleven months. While stopping there my brother-in-law John Bowman Jurrus, three children, all his children then alive and my wife's brother George Bowman died also and my beloved wife Janet Bowman McNeil died of cholera on September 5, 1851 and my son, George McNeill who was born June 5, 1851 at Gravia and died on September 3, 1851 at Gravia. My wife, Janet, and my son, George, were both buried in one grave in the Holy Ghost graveyard near St. Louis. The three children of John Bowman and said George Bowman died and my wife, Janet, and our son, George, all died of Cholera and a great many of the Saints died also about the same time with the same sickness. I was forced to stop working a few weeks to administer to the sick and help bury the dead. I stopped in the Gravia near St. Louis until the beginning of April 1852.

I then left with a company of Saints with ox teams for Utah. We traveled by ox teams from near St. Louis, Missouri, to Salt Lake City, Utah, a distance of about 1500 miles. We had many pleasant days in traveling and some troubles. After traveling over four months we arrived in Salt Lake City sometime in the month of August, 1852.

A few days after arriving in Salt Lake City I commenced work on the Church Public works and worked until the severe, cold, winter weather set in. I then went to the West mountain and chopped cedar wood and burned charcoal during the winter. When spring opened in 1853 I then worked on the Public works helping to dig out the foundation of the Temple. I then continued to work on the Public works until the October conference in 1853.

I was ordained a seventy in April, 1853, and was admitted a member of the 12th quorum of seventies.

I left Salt Lake City in October, 1853, and moved to American Fork City, Utah County, Utah. I was employed in helping to build a house for my father-in-law, Thomas Crooks, and also a house for

myself, a one room adobe house with willows and kane grass and soil dirt for a roof.

In the spring of 1854 commenced farming on shares and raised a good crop. It was in the spring, 1854, I commenced to teach Sunday school in American Fork. We met in a little, one room log house with a fire place in the one end of the building. Brother John Borne was the superintendent and Brother Richard Steel and myself were the teachers. I was a very faithful teacher for several years. Except a few weeks in 1865 or 1866.

I attended school very constant at that time in administrating the sacrament and reading, in a few weeks I commenced teaching in the Sunday school again and kept on teaching until the summer of 1893. The superintendent, Warren B. Smith, and other officers changed the method of teaching.

All the other classes were disorganized and the Sunday school was divided in three divisions and three young brethren were appointed to take charge of said divisions and myself and many more of the older brothers and sisters teachers were thrown out or left out of having anything more to do in the Sunday School. Teaching the few years of the Sunday School in American Fork. The classes consisted of boys and girls, male teachers. No sisters taught in early times.

There was a great scratching of books one time in the class I taught. My pocket Bible was the only book in my class, teacher and scholars read verse about. My Bible was worn out in the teaching.

I remember, also, that the teachers and scholars in the Sunday School were very hard up for clothing. The teachers were often clad in Denim pants and wore coarse shoes. We had no inside warm, winter clothing and many of the children were without shoes and otherwise poorly clad. The first few years the Sunday School convened in the warm weather and stopped in the cold weather. The meeting house for children was very cold. We had no stove in early times, only a fireplace and wood to burn by donation mostly.

The teachers and children of the Sunday school of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints are now, at the time of writing, all

comfortable for clothing and warm houses to meet in this 1901 being March 25th at American Fork City, Utah County, Utah.

The history is taken from my journal and also from my memory and believe it is very correct.

Now, in religious matter, I have been a teacher and presided over the teachers in American Fork wards for several years. I was often called in the early years of my settlement in this ward to visit and preach in surrounding settlements or wards. I have been four times called to visit the wards in the Utah stake of Zion as a home missionary. I was ordained a teacher in the lesser Priesthood, then a Priest a few months after an Elder, a few years after a seventy, then a High Priest (see page of this book on page 33 for time and place and by whom ordained) (June 21, 1891 American Fork, Utah by William H. Kelsey).

I will now give a history of my family relationship. I was first married to Janet Bowman on August 23, 1850. She bore me one son, George McNeill. I married her in Scotland. My wife, Janet, and her son, George, died in Gravia, near St. Louis, Missouri, September 1851. She was my first wife.

My second wife, Sophia Crooks, I married in Salt Lake City in the early spring 1853. She bore me eleven children. She was separated from me by divorce several years before she died in July 8, 1899. She was born September 3, 1827.

My third wife, Charlotte Spencer, was born October 2, 1851 and died November 26, 1890. She was my first plural wife. She bore to me ten children, six boys and four girls. She was about seventeen years old when I married her. She left England and came to Utah. We were married on December 28, 1868.

My present wife's (or 4th wife) name is Elisa Golden. She was born March 22, 1861 in Woolwich, Kent, England. We were married August 24, 1892 at Logan Temple, Cache County, Utah. She has bore to me two children both boys, alive up to the present time.

I have been married to four wives and had born to me twenty-four children. Three of my wives are dead and nine of my children, to

wit; seven sons and two daughters, see correct information in births, marriages and deaths on pages 29, 30 and 31 of this book.

My history in a civil capacity in American Fork City is as follows: I was elected Alderman in American fork City 1875, held the office several years by reelection, was one year Mayor of the City. I was unlawfully denied the right to vote or hold office by the five United States commissioners for the period of three years. (This was because he had a second wife.) The United States Supreme Court ruled against the decision of said commissioners. I was then appointed Alderman. Ex-officer Justice of the Peace. I continued in that office a few years. Was elected Precinct Justice of the Peace of American Fork Precinct. I am now holding said office at this writing, March 25, 1901. Several years ago, I learned Probate Law and I have settled and put through many estates very successful and also practiced some in divorce cases very successful in the Probate Court at Provo City, Utah County, Utah.

When I crossed the sea in 1851 I was appointed assistant secretary of the company of Saints. Brother Thomas Smith, secretary, was sick and unable to attend to the business and I was compelled to attend to the matter.

I crossed the plains in 1852 to Utah in the first company of fifty or a hundred wagons. I was appointed and acted captain of the first ten. I discharged the duty faithfully and was well liked by the company. The companies of ten separated near Fort Bridger. The first ten wagons arrived in Salt Lake City August 14, 1852. The rest of the company came to Salt Lake City several days after we (the first ten) arrived in Salt Lake City. I commenced working on the Public works and continued until the winter set in.

I moved to American Fork in the fall of 1853. I followed farming and other kinds of work. I was appointed Road Supervisor of American Fork Precinct Road District by the County Court of Utah county in the year 1882. When I went into office the roads and bridges were in a very bad condition.

About four years after my appointment I got the consent of the County Commissioner to build a new bridge on Harrington and Water streets near Chipman's Store. The old bridge was down in a hollow place. I remember of telling Brother E. Hunter, the man that was building the rock work, to take a sign from a note in front of the Co-op store and Harrington street and to make the top work of the bridge on a level with said note of high ground. I told him the time would come when the street would be leveled from that point. Today it is nearly completed in its level.

I remember, also, the roads between Green's Farm and Lehi Precinct were in a very bad state, especially in wet weather, almost impassable for mud. I visited the County on the matter. Bishop McCullough of Alpine, one of the County Commissioners, went with me and looked at the road. He asked me what I desired to do to mend the road. I answered I would need about one hundred dollars to help and I would apply a great amount of the Pool Tax and Turnpike to the Road. The said commissioner looked very carefully and state he thought it would be a hard job. It was then so spongy. He told me he would give seventy dollars.

I got together the men that had temas and scrapers and also a plow. The said commissioner asked how I was going to do it. I told him we would plow on the sides and scrape up to the center, then round it up and the rain and water would run off the road and that it would be good and hard.

After finishing the upper road to Lehi we then turned our attention to the lower road to Lehi. It was one of the worst roads I ever saw. We plowed on each side of the centre through mud, water and wet sods. We then scraped two men to a scraper and scraped the wet sods to the center. We then plowed down below to the clay and scraped that up to the centre of the grade and rounded it up.

While we were at work Brother Powell came up from the mill and asked me what we were doing. I told him we were trying to make a good road for teams to travel with loads. He answered he though it was impossible. He said those wet sods looked bad. I told him that the clay we scraped would make the roads as a board and

teams would travel through with loads and not mire down. Brother Powell thought it doubtful.

I remember, also, a little circumstance. Once, when we were eating our dinners, at the time we were grading the very bad lower road. Brother B. Driggs, with a small buggy and sewing machine, stopped as he [saw] us and expressed an opinion that turnpike roads were an imposition on the public. I answered him we're not making a road to benefit sewing machine men. We were making a road that single teams with two tons (4,000 lbs.) could travel along and not mire down. I told him to wait a few weeks and to see it fulfilled truthfully. It was only a few weeks after we finished turnpiking when the upper and lower roads became as hard as a board and up to this date, February 20, 1903, it is a pleasure to travel on the said roads.

I will further mention that a few weeks before I went out of office the large Bridge across the American Fork Creek became very dangerous. The main timbers were rotten and it was very dangerous for the public to travel. I wrote and visited the County Commissioners and after hard pressing and urging in the matter I was allowed to pull down the old Bridge and build a new one with rock buttments and good redwood timber. It has stood for several years and is good for many years more.

I went out of office in the division of politics in the year about 1893. I will say that I liked the office of supervisor better than any office of a Public nature I ever held. I never had a dispute or hard word with any man all the years I was in said office.

I came into office as Alderman and ex-officio Justice of the Peace in 1879 and continued in office until 1882, being then unlawfully deprived of voting or right to hold office by the United States Commissioners. During that time I was appointed Mayor of the City in 1882 to fill the unexpired term of L. E. Harrington, resigned. I served one year as Mayor in 1885, Alderman and continued in office until the expiration of 1890. During the year I was a City officer I served the city faithfully as an officer of the city and also a committee man in the Council.

In the year 1894 I went into office as Precinct Justice of the Peace of American Fork Precinct, Utah County, Utah, and have held said office continually up to the present time this being May 8, 1902 except two years, to wit: 1897 and 1898, that Ebenezer Hunter held said office. There is no salary attached to said office, allowed fees as provided by the laws of the State of Utah.

I now wish to write a few instances of the history of my life. When a boy about 6 years of age I was living with my parents at a town named Edmunstone in Edinburgshire, Scotland. At the time Asiatic Cholera was very bad then in some parts of Scotland. I was taken down very sick with said disease. Persons sick were not allowed any water to drink. I remember I watched till my mother went to sleep. I then caught hold of a great cup of water. I thought it would be the last drink I would get on earth. I drank so heartily I fell down on the floor. My mother lifted the cup and called, "Oh, Johnny, you're dead." I remember no more for ten days. The doctor, my parents and neighbors thought I would die but God preserved my life.

A few weeks after I got better of Cholera my night clothing took fire on my body and I was nearly burned to death. I well remember the severe pain I had with the burning. My parents and the doctor thought I would die but through the Blessing of God, I recovered. A few weeks after I recovered from the burning I went to school under the care of my sister, Susan.

One day a short time after I went to school the scholars at recess were playing on a new railroad track being built. The large boys and girls were pushing a large car with other children in it. I was a little helpless boy standing on the new grade when the car was being pushed along. A girl out of kindness pushed me, intending of the grade. I fell over, my two legs near the knee joints on the rail. The large wheel of the car crushed into my two legs. My sister Susan put me on her back and carried me home, about a half-mile distance.

Both legs were black and blue from my knee joints down to my toes. A large abscess came in the joint knee of my left leg. The town

doctor told my mother nothing but cutting off the left leg above the knee would save my life. My mother would not submit to the operation. She carried me from home across the fields on her back to a farmer and an ingenious doctor by the name of Bakery. My mother carried me into his farm house. He asked my mother to let him see my leg. He looked at it, then asked her what the town doctor said about it. She told him that the town doctor said nothing would save my life.

Doctor Bakery replied, "Oh, the damned fool, that leg will not need to be cut off. I will cure it," answered the farmer and Doctor Bakery made a salve and gave it to my mother. He told her how to apply it. She did so and by the Blessing of God and with the medicine of the self-made doctor and the great care of my blessed mother my life and my limbs were preserved.

I crossed the water with my wife, Janet Bowman McNeil in 1851. My wife and child were taken sick with the cholera at Gravis, near St. Louis, in September, 1851. Our baby, George McNeil, died September 3, 1851 and my wife, Janet Bowman McNeil, died September 5, 1851 at Gravis, near St. Louis, Missouri. I will here relate an instance at her death.

She showed me her hands and said, "My nails are getting black and I am dying." She said, "I am not afraid to die." She asked me to promise her that I would be true to her and have her sealed to me in her own place. I answered her I would do so. We were all alone in our own place. Few persons would come to see us because of the cholera. I asked her to let me go out a few minutes. She was willing. I retired alone and bent my knees in secret behind a bush near the house and prayed to the Lord and asked the Lord, my God, to let my life be taken from the earth to save her life. After praying I arose and went into the house. My wife looked at me and said, "I am dying," and in a few moments she was gone.

No time was lost in getting a coffin from St. Louis and I drove with a few friends to the Holy Ghost Grave-yard and my wife and baby George were buried in the same lot. The grave-yard or cemetery was owned by the Catholic Church near St. Louis, Missouri.

About two weeks after my wife's death I had not slept or rested much. I could not sleep; I was in such sorrow. One night about two weeks after her death her spirit appeared to me in a dream or vision, as follows: about the middle of the night she appeared to me in dream or vision. She appeared to me in full stature and looked as beautiful as when I first beheld her. I exclaimed to her, "Oh, I am glad you have come back to me. I have been sorrowful since you went away."

I held out my hands to embrace her. She refused to give me her hands. I then became silent. She then spoke as follows, and said: "Man, you should not be sorrowful that I have died. You should not desire to die. You should desire to live for my sake. I must go." As she went out of the house I awoke from my dream. The dream or vision was a great comfort to me.

In the winter of 1852 and 1853 I was all alone crossing the Jordan near the point of the mountain with two yoke of oxen and a wagon load of charcoal. The river was very high. The oxen stopped near the middle of the river. The night oxen inclined to go down the river; if so I would have been drowned. I prayed earnestly and shouted to the cattle. The off cattle then lugged the night cattle up and crossed straight ahead and my life was preserved. I was alone.

Also come time in the winter of 1879 when traveling with Henry Miller and Niels Christenson with loads of hay; we came to a deep ditch north of Sandy and below Granite. The two brothers proposed as I had a good team for me to cross first. I did so. In passing through the ice creek my horses and wagon went down about four feet. I was hurled or thrown head first from the load of hay as I passed the horses. I touched the team with my hand and called out, "Whoa." I got out of the way unhurt.

I will relate one other near escape of my life in the Fall of 1851. When I was living in Gravis, near St. Louis Missouri, Brothers Alexander and William Pyper paid a visit from St. Louis, both riding horses. When they returned to go home to St. Louis I hired a horse to convey them to St. Louis from Gravis. When about two miles from St. Louis my horse ran away with me. The harder Brother Alexander

Pyper tried to catch my horse the faster my horse ran with me. I thought, "If this horse runs into the city I will be killed."

An inspiration came to my mind to take my feet from the stirrup. I then stretched my two hands along the right neck with one sudden pull or jerk I threw the horse to the ground. As he fell, the girth of the saddle broke and I arose from the ground unhurt. I call this circumstance a great interposition of the Power of God in my behalf. I could relate many more escapes of my life, but let this suffice for the present this 30th day of November, 1902.