

DUP AF Book 2
Biographical Sketch
of
Thomas Shelley
and Charlotte Elsmore

by George F. Shelley, son
and Mary E. Shelley Abel, daughter

Pioneer Year 1851
Sailed on the Ellen Maria

He was born 7 Apr 1822 in Bridgenorth, Shropshire, England
She was born 3 Aug 1828 in Kidderminster, Worcestershire, England

Married 18 Jan 1851

He died 8 Sep 1903 in American Fork, Utah

She died 6 Mar 1904 in American Fork, Utah

Thomas Shelley, son of James Boyer Shelley and Elizabeth Bray, was born in Claverly near Bridgenorth, Shropshire, England, April 7, 1822, the second of a family of seven children – five boys and two girls: William, Thomas, Martha, James, John, Joseph and Sarah. His father was a tiller of the soil and Thomas, along with the other sons, with the exception of James who was apprenticed to a shoemaker, were brought up on a farm.

Grandfather Shelley was an honest hard-working man and his family were taught to be honest and industrious. Notwithstanding the low price of farm labor, ten shillings (\$2.40) per week being considered a good wage, the Shelley family was getting along well in England so far as a livelihood was concerned.

Thomas Shelley's boyhood days were spent in the rural districts of old England, and we have nothing unusual to relate so far as his boyhood days are concerned. His father and mother were members of the Church of England and although Thomas was somewhat religiously inclined and often accompanied his mother to church, he failed to identify himself with any denomination in his youth. His mother afterwards left the Church of England and joined the Methodists, and although Thomas relates that he was more favorably impressed with that church than with the Church of England, he was far from satisfied with either.

In his diary he states that up to the age of twenty he had failed to identify himself with any religious denomination not being satisfied. About this time he relates that he began to be troubled in his mind about religion. If there was a God, as he believed there was, he was anxious to know something about Him and man's being on earth. One night when he came home, his mother handed him a book that a neighbor had loaned to her which she said belonged to a sect called Latter-Day Saints. Thomas read the book with interest and a short time afterwards, when the owner of the book came for it, he made an appointment to preach at Grandmother Shelley's home. Thomas was deeply impressed with what he read and heard, and he states that he could not rest until he was baptized. He and his mother were baptized by Joseph Wall, December 11, 1848 and the same night were confirmed members of the so-called Mormon Church. The other

members of the family were baptized, except Martha who married Edward A. Banks and lived in England until her death in 1878.

January 1, 1849 Thomas was ordained a priest, and on the 22nd of the following April was ordained an elder. In August of the same year he was appointed by President John Lyon to preside over the Claverly branch and during the time of his presidency many were added to the church in that branch. He was afterwards appointed to preside over the Bridgenorth branch.

On the 18th of January 1851, he married Charlotte Elsmore, the ceremony being performed under the auspices of the Church of England, and the next month they started for the land of Zion.

In company with other members of the Shelley family, except Martha, they crossed the ocean on the sailing vessel, "Ellen Maria," and after a voyage of several weeks landed in New Orleans on April 5, 1851. Within a few days the party proceeded by steamer up the Mississippi River and when near Memphis, Tennessee on April 13th a strange and sorrowful thing happened. Father's (Thomas Shelley) Mother (Elizabeth Bray Shelley), who had been entrusted up to that time with the family purse, containing a considerable sum of money, gave it to his father, saying she felt that it would be safer for him to take care of it. They decided that day to do a little washing. His mother, while attempting to draw a bucket of water, was drawn in by the swift current of the river and drowned, and her body was never recovered. This caused great sorrow to the other members of the family. Father could hardly be reconciled or comforted. If they had been able to get her body, it would have been some satisfaction, but her body was not found and his mind was troubled, and not until he received the manifestation I will relate from his Father in Heaven was he able to reconcile himself to such a sorrowful bereavement.

He prayed earnestly for comfort. Days passed as usual and at last he decided he must receive strength to stand the sore trial that had come to them. He fasted and prayed to his Heavenly Father that if his mother was all right and her spirit safely with him, that father might be allowed to see her and know that she was happy. He retired to bed, and upon awakening that night thought his prayer not yet

answered, when his room became light as noonday and just above his head his mother, as in life, bent over him with the same sweet smile as usual to her. He was so overjoyed he tried to speak to her but was not able to. She disappeared as quietly as she came. This was a great testimony to father and to his posterity that the spirits of our loved ones return to Father and are happy in their Heavenly home. Father felt had he asked for the privilege to speak to her it would have been granted to him, but he only asked that he could see her.

Upon reaching St. Louis the Shelley family, with the exception of William, his wife and four children, started across the plains by team for the abode of the saints in the Rocky Mountains where they arrived October 3, 1851. On October 8, 1851 they attended Conference in Salt Lake City and had the privilege of seeing and hearing the great leader and colonizer, Brigham Young, and rejoiced much that they had been counted worthy to be gathered here with the Saints of God. At one time while in Salt Lake City, father was in need of flour and went to President Brigham Young and asked for work to obtain this needed necessity for his family. President Young called one of his men to him and told him to bring father a sack of flour, stating that later he could work for it. This father refused until he had done the work in payment of it. This kindness was surely appreciated and often spoken of by father as well as other things, which to him spoke the kindness and big-heartedness of the President.

Father and mother remained in Salt Lake City until the fall of 1853 when they moved to American Fork. While in Salt Lake City their two oldest children: James Edward, October 23, 1851 and Elizabeth, October 24, 1853. On April 10, 1853 Thomas was ordained a Seventy under the hands of Brother Lorin Babbitt and Brother Harman. The following year, October 29, 1854, they were called to part with their baby Elizabeth, age one year and five days. This was a new experience for mother and she was greatly grieved, but she had implicit faith in Heavenly Father and knew He could help her. In her own words, "I knelt beside my bed and asked my Father in Heaven to remove from me the distress and sorrow death had brought and it was entirely removed the same day."

Six children were born to this happy union in American Fork: Charlotte, January 21, 1856; Thomas Ammon, August 25, 1858; Emma, July 8, 1860; John Franklin, August 30, 1862; Mary Ellen, June 2, 1865; and George Frederick August 1, 1871, making eight children in all.

On November 3, 1891, Thomas was ordained a High Priest and for many years had as his particular calling the Presidency of the Ward Teachers. On November 9, 1892 Thomas and wife received their Second Anointings in the Manti Temple, Anthony H. Lund officiating. Thomas had followed the occupation of farming in his native land, and continued this same work in this their new home passing through the hardships incident to pioneer life in the Great American Desert. In recording his death, the "Citizen" of September 12, 1903 said of him, "He assisted materially by his industry in making the desert as a blossoming field. For several years he served the people of his town as a member of the City Council and was a patriotic law abiding citizen. In Church matters he was ever a staunch and consistent Latter Day Saint, much of his time and energy having been spent in helping forward the work of the Church."

In the ordinary affairs of life as well as in Civil and religious matters he had the encouragement and aid of a faithful wife who was full of faith and good works. With her to be a faithful Latter Day Saint and an honorable citizen was greater than to be a King of any earthly kingdom.

His wife, Charlotte Elsmore, was the daughter of George Frederick Elsmore and Elizabeth Davenport and was born in Kidderminster, Worcestshire, England, August 3, 1828. In her girlhood she made her Heavenly Father her friend and her faith, then and all through her life, brought great comfort and blessings from her Heavenly Father as her physician and in faith implored Him for His spirit and promptings to know what to do in cases of sickness and was answered to their immediate recovery.

One incident, among many, I would like to relate. The dreaded disease diphtheria was raging at the time and many were its victims. Her youngest child, George Frederick, was stricken and had the

disease in its very worst form. One afternoon a neighbor came in and urged her to send for the doctor assuring her if she did not do so her boy would die. On the neighbor's leaving she said, "My Father in Heaven is my physician. I know that he can bless and inspire me to know what to do. If it is the will of the Lord that he should live, he will live; and if not, no power on earth can save him." In answer to an earnest sincere prayer that night she was told what to do for him. In a dream she saw in a lady's home a fireplace and was impressed with the lady burning only wood. She saw the black soot and was told to blow this into her boy's throat and he would be well. On arising the next morning so full of the faith (although she had never heard of such a thing before) that her boy would be healed, she sent to neighbor's home where she knew they burned only wood. She procured a cane from wild hay, sloped the one end, and did as she was instructed. His throat was nearly closed with the spongy material common in diphtheria, but the soot did its work. It ate every bit of it and soon cleared the throat, and from that time her boy improved rapidly and was soon well. Many things could be told in her life where blessings came to her. Her children grew up to look upon their Heavenly Father as a real father who had the power to give them blessings they desired if they live worthy and those blessings were for their good.

Mother was Treasurer of the Relief Society for several years before and after the division of the ward and labored faithfully in that organization until her death. She also labored for many years as a teacher in the Sabbath School.

Of her, her children join in the "Ode to Mother" written on her one-hundredth birthday by her daughter Mary Ellen Shelley Abel which we feel would be fitting to give here.

Dearest Mother: earth was not her goal
It's vanity and wealth. Her soul
Was on the things of God. Her great delight
Was to do the things well pleasing in His sight.

Unbounded joy was hers when she could see
Her children – clothed in sweet humility
Seeking His ways. Her cup of joy ran o’ver
‘Twas all she asked of them. She craved no more.

O Mother! Could you feel and know
How much we prize your life with us below
Your sweet example, your faith sincere
You’d feel “Twas not in vain” sweet Mother dear.

Your prayers of faith have reached our Father’s throne
And brought the greatest joy to mortals known
Your life of true devotion makes us see
That God was kind to grant us such as thee.

Your memory is the sweetest thought we claim
For you we dearly love and bless your name
And hope to live that your expectations may
Be realized in that Eternal Day.

December 19, 1869 Thomas took to himself another wife, Eliza Higgins, who was of English descent, daughter of William Higgins and Ann Idon, born January 29, 1821. She was a widowed lady with one daughter who came to Zion for the Gospel’s sake. She received her second endowments with Thomas and Charlotte in the Manti Temple, November 9, 1892. She lived to the age of 89 years. Passed away in American Fork, a faithful Latter-day Saint, June 26, 1910.

Thomas was called home by death September 8, 1903;
Charlotte, March 6, 1904, both in American Fork.

There are as the direct descendants of Thomas and Charlotte Elsmore Shelley 216 living descendants are now (1936) scattered in the states of Utah, Idaho, California and Arizona. As their direct descendants we feel to bless their memory, proud of their humble God-fearing lives. They were ever solicitous for the well being of their children and for the progress of God’s work on earth. We cherish their splendid example, their wise counsel, their loving

devotion to home and family. May the seed sown produce a good and an abundant harvest.

Compiled by: George F. Shelley and Mary E. Shelley Abel