kindex®
< Scan QR to view this original record online, or visit https://ezratclark.kindex.org/s/23747

Title: **The Abbreviated Life Histories of Ezra Thompson Clark (1823-1901) and Mary Stevenson (1825-1911)**
Category: **Document**
Person: **Mary Stevenson**
Date:
Provenance:

Ezra Thompson Clark was born in Lawrenceville, Illinois, in 1823, the son of Timothy Baldwin Clark and Mary (Polly) Keeler. He was the tenth of twelve children. When he was nine years old, a war bro

Ezra Thompson Clark was born in Lawrenceville, Illinois, in 1823, the son of Timothy Baldwin Clark and Mary (Polly) Keeler. He was the tenth of twelve children. When he was nine years old, a war broke out with the Indians. It was called the Black Hawk War. It was a dangerous period and necessitated that the family live inside forts for a time. Around this same time, the Clark family came in contact with the Mormon Church and Ezra's mother, father, and several siblings were baptized. Ezra, himself, wasn't baptized until the family had moved from Illinois to Missouri. His older brother, William, baptized him in the Fishing River when he was 13 years of age.

Ezra and his family suffered severe persecution by enemies of the church during his youth. The family was forced to leave Clay County, Missouri, and seek safety in Far West, but safety was not found. They lived there under wartime conditions, with men sleeping upon their arms. Many men were jailed, including Ezra's father, and Ezra witnessed mobs pillage, destroy, and take from them their family farm. Eventually, they left Far West.

When they fled Missouri, Ezra was entrusted to take a large herd of cattle across the states of Missouri and Iowa when he was only 16. They settled in Montrose, Iowa, across the Mississippi River from Nauvoo, Illinois. From there, the Clark family often went to Nauvoo to hear the Prophet Joseph Smith speak. They lived close to the Stevenson family during these years.

Mary Stevenson was born at the Rock of Gibraltar, an English colony, in 1825. Her parents were Joseph Stevenson and Elizabeth Stevens. She was the fifth of six children. They immigrated to America when Mary was two years old. They first landed in New York and slowly migrated west from there. Her father, Joseph, died soon after they moved to Pontiac, Michigan, in 1832, whereupon, Mormon missionaries found, taught, and baptized the Stevenson family into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Joseph Smith visited their home and discovered in their library the Book of Martyrs. He borrowed it, promising to return it when they met again in Missouri. After reading it, he later told Mother Stevenson that he saw those martyrs with the aid of the Urim and Thummim.

Mary experienced a singularly unique spiritual experience when she was seven years of age, shortly after her father's death. She said: "I had a dream of seeing the Savior. He took me in His arms. We sat in a circle. He blessed us and kissed us. It was only the members who accepted the Gospel that sat in the circle. I told Mother my dream. She said it was a good dream and for me to be a good girl." David Patten later baptized Mary in Far West, Missouri, when she was 12 years old.

The Stevenson family, without a father, moved to be with the Saints in Missouri in 1836. They, too, suffered persecutions. Fear, hunger, and uncertainty crowded around them. When they were driven from the state, they moved to Montrose, Iowa, where they lived in a room adjoining Brigham Young's. Mary was 14 when they arrived in 1839. Her brother, Edward Stevenson, the third child of the family, was 19. Ezra Thompson Clark, their friend and neighbor, was 16.

This trio of youth, Ezra, Mary, and Edward, along

with others, frequently went to Nauvoo to hear the Prophet Joseph Smith speak. The following is an account by one of Ezra's children of such an occasion:

"My father heard the Prophet Joseph Smith give many sermons. At one meeting the Prophet asked the Saints to give what money they could and their time to further the work and finish the Nauvoo Temple. As the time was short, he felt anxious for the temple to be finished. After the meeting, my father walked up to the Prophet and gave him all the money he had. The Prophet put his arm over his shoulder and said, 'Brother Clark, you will always be blessed spiritually, financially, and with the necessities of life and your children will be the nobility of the earth.'"

These three youth were also among the throng that met the entourage returning from Carthage with the bodies of Joseph and Hyrum after their deaths. Great confusion followed. Several individuals, including Brigham Young, Sidney Rigdon, James Strang, Lyman Wight, and Emma Smith, in proxy for Joseph Smith III, claimed leadership of the Church. However, Ezra had been present at a meeting before Joseph's death where the Prophet told those present that the leadership of the Church was being rolled upon the twelve apostles. It seemed clear to him that the apostles should lead the Church, with Brigham Young as their president.

Three weeks after the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum, a meeting was held where Brigham Young and Sidney Rigdon spoke, each vying to persuade the saints as to who should lead the Church. Ezra said he witnessed the following:

"[As] Brigham Young arose as the leader of the Church, I want to bear record that he spoke as Joseph used to speak; to all appearances, the same voice, the same gestures, the same stature. I bear this record to all the world, to my children, to my children's children...."

This miraculous event wherein Brigham Young was transformed before their eyes into the appearance of Joseph Smith was confirming evidence to Ezra and others that Brigham Young was the Lord's chosen leader. They would follow him.

About this time, Ezra fell in love with Nancy Porter, a girl two years younger than him and about the same age as his friend, Mary Stevenson. Nancy also loved Ezra, but Mary's brother, Edward, wanted to marry Nancy, too. Nancy couldn't make up her mind whom to marry, Ezra or Edward. One day, she received a letter, signed by Ezra, releasing her from any commitments so she could marry Edward. Nancy decided to do this. However, Ezra had not sent such a letter; it is suspected that Edward had sent it and forged Ezra's signature. Ezra was very sad that Nancy chose Edward, but he didn't wait around moping. One month after Nancy and Edward were married, Ezra married Edward's sister, Mary Stevenson. He was 21 and she was 19.

As religious persecution increased, a decision was made to move the Saints west to the Rocky Mountains. Brigham Young began to administer the temple endowment to faithful Saints in the temple, even though the building was not completely finished. On the first day of 1846, when Mary was 6 months pregnant with their first child, Ezra and Mary received their temple endowments in the Nauvoo Temple, along with other close friends and family. They were then sealed on February 4, 1846, the last day that ordinances were performed in the temple. Three days later, the temple was damaged by fire and never functioned as a temple again. Seven weeks later, their first child was born.

Ezra, Mary, and their 3 month-old baby soon traveled west with the saints. Not all of Ezra and Mary's brothers and sisters joined them. Some chose to stay in Illinois because they didn't believe that Brigham Young should lead the church. Those migrating westward laid-over in Winter Quarters for an extended time while dealing with Indian troubles, but finally arrived in Utah in 1848. Ezra had Mountain Fever for many months. The first two winters were spent in the area called Bountiful today, whereupon Ezra and Mary acquired land in nearby Farmington. They suffered, as everyone

did, from a scarcity of food and exposure to harsh weather.

It was in Farmington that they gradually established a profitable farm. Initially, they grew wheat, but later branched out to other crops, including hay and sugar beets. They also had peach and apple orchards and developed a herd of cattle. Ezra was an industrious landholder and astute businessman. Over the next several decades he accumulated a large number of properties and built a substantial estate.

In the course of time, Ezra served five missions for the church, in the fulfillment of which he crossed the U.S. eleven times. The two most notable missions were a two-year mission to England in 1856 and a one-year mission to the Midwest in 1869. He was called home from his mission to England due to fears that a war would break out in Utah with Johnston's army. Upon arriving home, he found his family in Payson, Utah, having abandoned their home in Farmington at the direction of Brigham Young. Once it was safe, they returned to Farmington. On his mission to the Midwest, he was able to reconnect with many of his family members in Illinois who had never joined the Church. They were pleased to receive him and hear his message.

While in England, Ezra became well acquainted with the William and Sarah Leggett Family. In 1861, Susan Leggett, a teenager at the time Ezra knew her, was sent alone to Utah. With Mary's permission, Ezra took Susan Leggett as a plural wife. Mary and Susan liked each other and, for a time, lived in the same house. Eventually, they lived in homes across the street from each other in Farmington.

In a remarkable turn of events, Ezra married his third wife in 1870. He was called into Brigham Young's office and told that he should marry Nancy Porter Stevenson. She is the woman whom he had originally wanted to marry in 1845, but who had married Edward Stevenson, his future brother-in-law, instead. The marriage between Nancy and Edward had failed and she had obtained permission from President Young for a divorce because of serious problems between herself and Edward. The divorce was granted, whereupon Brigham turned around and asked Ezra to be sealed to her. Ezra did this because of his desire to be obedient. They had a happy marriage and there was great tranquility between the three wives. Indeed, Ezra Thompson Clark was regarded as one of the most successful polygamists in Utah, as measured by his temporal prosperity as well as the harmony demonstrated among his wives.

In time, Ezra had 10 children with his first wife, Mary, and 11 with his second, Susan. No children were born by Nancy, as she was 45 when they married, but she did have five children from her first marriage. Of these 21 offspring, many were called to serve missions for the church. Sadly, two sons died while serving missions. Ezra James Clark died while returning from a three-year mission to England and John Alexander Clark died of smallpox while serving in Haifa, Palestine. He was buried in a cemetary at the foot of Mt. Carmel. It is noteworthy that the presence of Elder Clark's grave in Palestine, now Israel, later served to prove that the Church had a historical presence in the Holy Land, thereby allowing the Church the right to build the BYU Jerusalem Center. Ezra Thompson Clark may be the only person in the history of the Church to have had two sons die while in missionary service.

Ezra was asked to help colonize several far-flung areas of the Utah Territory, including Iron County, the Muddy Mission, and Bear Lake. Sometimes he went himself; other times, he sent family members. He built mills in several areas as well.

During the enforcement of the Edmunds-Tucker Act in 1887, U.S. Marshals hunted Ezra because of his practice of polygamy. He avoided capture for many months, but was eventually caught, tried, and imprisoned for five months. While in prison, he was shorn and shaved, rendering him unrecognizable by his family. Upon leaving prison, he paid $100 for his room and board and a $300 fine. It was noted that he was one of the few prisoners who had the means, and the disposition, to do so.

Ezra Thompson Clark was an intimate acquain-

tance of the early prophets of this dispensation. As noted, he knew Joseph Smith and Brigham Young well, but perhaps his closest friendship was developed with Wilford Woodruff. President Woodruff considered Ezra his "bosom friend," despite a 16-year difference in age. Whenever President Woodruff could steal some leisure time, he liked to spend it in Ezra's home. Where they first met is unknown, but President Woodruff was ordained an apostle in Ezra's father's home in Far West, Missouri. President Woodruff's wife also resided in the Clark home while he served a mission, and one of their children was born there. In 1867, President Woodruff gave Ezra and his first two wives their second anointing, a very special ordinance that can only be performed in the temple. Because of its geographical location, the Ezra Clark home served as a frequent way station for Church leaders. Ezra provided transportation for them with wagons and teams as needed.

Ezra Thompson Clark's personal qualities made him a well-known and venerated early citizen of Utah. He was known for his quiet nature, love of animals, kindly disposition, industrious work ethic, personal generosity, diligence in living the Word of Wisdom, and the absence of profanity in his language. He was also known for his astute business dealings and financial prosperity. He organized his large family's financial affairs after the principles of the United Order and called it the Clark Firm. At one time, the Firm owned 700 acres in Davis County and 1200 acres in Bear Lake County. He started the Davis County Bank, where he served as president, and capitalized it with $25,000 gathered from prosperous local farmers and businessmen. Undoubtedly, his contribution was significant.

Ezra was faithful to the restored gospel throughout his life, often choosing to follow the prophet when others in his family did not. He served many missions and filled a variety of callings, including the high council of the Davis County Stake. He was also an ordained patriarch for the Church. He and his wives were loyal Church members and possessed strong testimonies to their last breath.

It can safely be said that the prosperity he enjoyed in his personal life, in his temporal activities, in his large family, in his Church service, and in spiritual endeavors, was a fulfillment of Joseph Smith's promise to Ezra that he would be blessed for contributing his last dollar to the building of the Nauvoo Temple.

Ezra died in 1901 in Farmington, Utah. Mary Stevenson passed away in 1911. Susan Leggett died in 1902. They are buried in Farmington. Nancy Porter lived only until 1888 and was buried in Elba, Idaho.

My Connection: Ezra Thompson Clark and Mary Stevenson begat Charles Rich Clark who begat Lela Clark who begat Mardon Clark Lamb who begat Stephen E. Lamb

Sources:

Noble Pioneer: A Biography of Ezra Thompson Clark, Antone Clark

Ezra Thompsons Clark's Ancestors and Descendants, Robert F. Gould, 1975, 118-19

"Edward Stevenson, Life Sketch"

"Testimony and Message of Ezra T. Clark," July 24, 1901

"Autobiography of Mary Stevenson Clark," FamilySearch

August 2016