

Proctor Hancock Robison Report on the Exhumation of His Body

By Raymon W. Carling

November 11, 2011

Lisa
Dear Robison Family,

The following is a report of exhumation of the body of Proctor Hancock Robison sponsored by the Robison Family. This report explains why this project was undertaken and the results. I am sending this report to those family members that I contacted when the project was proposed as well as a few others who helped get things done. I appreciate your help and support, and I am sorry that the project has taken such a long time.

On March 16, 2007 Elder Marlin K. Jensen, LDS General Authority and Church Historian, called me and discussed how Proctor Hancock Robison was killed. Proctor was the fourteen-year-old son of Joseph and Lucretia Hancock Robison who lived in Fillmore, Utah. We discussed how Proctor came in contact with an unknown poison on September 20, 1857 and died an extremely painful death the next day in Fillmore.

Elder Jensen and I also discussed that a few weeks before Proctor was poisoned there was a group of California-bound immigrants from Missouri and Arkansas who had passed through the Fillmore-Meadow-Kanosh area. Soon after they left the area, a number of Indians at Corn Creek (Kanosh) became sick and several died. It was rumored that they were poisoned by this group of immigrants. These rumors were quickly passed from town to town in Southern Utah and it was thought by many that this group of immigrants had intentionally poisoned either some water or the carcass of an oxen which resulted in the death of the Indians at Corn Creek.

By the time these immigrants reached Parowan and Cedar City the rumors had already reached there. Because of this, and other factors such as the abrasive nature of some of the immigrants and the fact that Johnson's army was approaching Utah from the north, there was considerable tension between the settlers and the immigrants. These factors, and others, cumulated in the massacre of the immigrants by whites and Indians at Mountain Meadows which is located about 50 miles southwest of Cedar City.

It was after all of this had happened that Proctor somehow came in contact with an unknown poison between Meadow and Kanosh (see Appendix B, newspaper article) He died the following day and was buried in the Fillmore City Cemetery. Elder Jensen pointed out that many in the scientific community today believe that Proctor's death, as well as that of the Indians at Corn Creek, was caused by a deadly virus known as anthrax. This pathogen can be carried by cattle, and some believe that the immigrants cattle may have unintentionally contaminated water and soil which lead to these deaths. Of those that died (Proctor and the Indians at Corn Creek), the only burial location known today is that of Proctor.

Elder Jensen said a book was being written on the subject of the Mountain Meadows massacre, and the LDS Church had opened their entire archives for research on the subject, something that the Church has never done before. He said this would be the most factual and authoritative book ever written on the subject and would hopefully lay-to-rest many of the contentious questions and issues related to this incident.

To help answer this long-standing question as to how these deaths occurred, Elder Jensen suggested that the Robison family exhume Proctor's body and have chemical analysis done on soil samples taken from sites adjacent to the remains of his body. Elder Jensen further suggested that I be the family representative inasmuch as I am one of Proctor's close relatives (great nephew). He said that the James Sorenson Corporation, located in northern Utah, would pay for any costs and his scientists could be made available to help as needed. He also recommended that the very best science and techniques available today be used. I agreed to contact other family members and see if they would be in favor of this proposal.

Accordingly, through research I found at least one living descendant of each of Proctor's siblings (13 in number) who had children (only 9 have living descendants today). Each of these people were contacted by phone and presented with the proposal. Of the twenty people contacted, only one thought it best to not disturb Proctor's remains, although he was not opposed to the project. Appendix A contains a list of family members contacted. Because of this support from family members, I proceeded with the project and made the necessary arrangements with people (Scott Woodward and Ugo Perego) from with Mr. Sorenson's corporation to represent the science aspect of the project.

With the help of Scott Woodward and Ugo Perego, a project proposal was developed and presented to the mayor of Fillmore, David Christensen. Mayor Christensen presented the proposal to the city council who approved the project contingent upon the family obtaining the necessary authorizations from the Utah State Department of Health.

The State Department of Health said they did not have authority to issue a permit to exhume the body of Proctor as a death certificate was not issued at the time of death. Utah was only a territory at the time of death, and death certificates were not even issued for another fifty years. They said a judge or the court would have to issue an order for them to be able give the necessary approval. I then engaged Anderson and Anderson, attorneys in Monticello, Utah to so petition the court. Eventually they declined the case as the state laws were vague on the subject, and it would take more time than they had to complete the case. They did not charge for their time, and referred me to attorney Richard Martineau in Salt Lake City.

Mr. Martineau took the case and worked on it for nearly nine months before he was able to get statements from appropriate state and county officials stating that the proposal met with their approval, and further involvement by them was not needed. Mr. Martineau did not charge for his time either.

I again contacted the Utah State Department of Health, explained what had been done and was told it was sufficient. After submitting an application signed by four family members (see Appendix C).

On October 21, 2008 the body of Proctor Hancock Robison was exhumed, 65 soil samples were collected from various locations next to his remains. Also, several small bone samples were taken for DNA testing. The soil samples have been sent to the University of Northern Arizona to test for the presence of anthrax, and the results should be available in mid-December, 2008. The bone samples have been taken to a lab in Italy for DNA determinations, and results are not expected for about twelve months (October 2009).

The following are the scientists who exhumed Proctor's remains; they were employed by the Sorenson Molecular Genealogy Foundation.

Scott Woodward, Director/Chief Scientific Officer

Ugo Perego, Director of Operations

Alexis Brown, Forensic Scientist and DNA Analyst

These scientists exhumed the body of Proctor in a most respectful manner and followed state-of-the-art scientific procedures.

Proctor was buried six feet deep in a wooden coffin of which remnants were visible but crumbled easily to the touch. His bones were all well preserved and were exactly in the plot identified by cemetery records. It is interesting to note that besides the bones and remnants of the wooden casket, there were seven buttons found in the grave. Five were smaller and apparently from his shirt, there was one larger white button and was possible the neck button on the shirt, and there was a larger brown button that was probably used to fasten his pants.

It appears that Proctor's body was buried on his left side, his legs were crossed and drawn up and in a fetal position. The wood coffin was the same length as the body even though the body was not laid out to its full extent. It is thought that this was the position Proctor was in when he died, and the unusual position was probably due to the pain he was suffering at the time of death.

When Proctor died, the people of Fillmore had lived in the Pahvant Valley for six years, and were still living in the fort for protection from the Indians.

An interesting side note is that tombstone that stands at the head of the grave is engraved with the name "Proctor Hancock Robison" (see Appendix D). However, the written cemetery records in possession of Fillmore City has the name as "Phillip Hancock Robison". The genealogists at the LDS Church Family History Library researched the two names and concluded they were the same person, and that the name "Phillip" is most likely an error in the records. Lisa Crosland, Fillmore City zoning administrator with responsibility over the cemetery, said the written records were usually right. So, for 151 years there has been a question as to who is actually buried in the grave, Proctor or Phillip.

As the grave was being opened, the backhoe unearthed a small tombstone that was buried about six inches under the sod and was at the foot of the grave. This tombstone was engraved with the name "Proctor Hancock Robison". This tombstone effectively answered the question and that it was Proctor who was buried in the grave. This tombstone was slightly damaged by the backhoe, and has been repaired free of charge by Denny Brunson, monument dealer in Fillmore. Mr. Brunson also identified the marble rock used in this headstone as coming from the Left Hand Fork of Chalk Creek located a few miles east of Fillmore.

This small tombstone has been turned over to the custody of the Fillmore Territorial Statehouse Museum and will be displayed with the old tools that belonged to Peter L. Brunson. These old stone engraving tools were previously donated to the Museum by Denny Brunson, a grandson.

Also, to be absolutely certain as to the identity of the person in the grave, DNA samples were taken in the fall of 2007 from three living family members. The living family members had to be direct descendants of Joseph and Lucretia Robison, who were Proctor's parents. In addition, for proper DNA sampling techniques they had to be descents through the maternal line, or from Lucretia to her daughter, to her daughter, etc. to a living person who could be either male or female. Joseph and Lucretia had two daughters, Lucretia and Adelia, who lived to adulthood. Of the three living descendants who gave DNA samples, two come through Adelia (Mike and Paul Holyoak of Moab, Utah) and one through Lucretia (Dr. David Hatch Geddis of Ogden, Utah). The DNA analysis indicates that all three people sampled have a common ancestor, which is Joseph and Lucretia Robison. Mike and Paul Holyoak and Dr. David Geddis are third cousins and the second great-grandsons of Joseph and Lucretia Robison. Because of this DNA testing, we now know what the DNA pattern must be like, from the bone samples taken from the grave, to prove that the person in the grave is a descendant of Joseph and Lucretia Robison.

The remains of Proctor were placed in a casket and concrete vault and re-interred in the original grave. Another interesting side note was that just as the vault was being lowered into the grave, I received a call on my cell phone. It was Elder Jensen calling to inquire how the day had gone (I had previously left word with his secretary that October 21st was the day scheduled to exhume the body). I was able to report to him that everything went exactly as planned and the project was completed except for the lab results.

The following day, October 22, 2008, the grave was rededicated by myself (Raymon W. Carling), Proctor's great-nephew. The following family members from Fillmore and the surrounding area were present at the rededication. Raymon Carling and his wife Jane; Mary Davies Day, Phil Robison, President Durand Robison (counselor in the Millard Stake Presidency) and his wife Julie, Estell Robison Bennett, Faun Robison Guillette, Pearl Brinkerhoff Robison (wife of Melvin Robison Jr.), Wendy Robison Ellison, and Patsy Robison Johnson.

One final note - it took so long to get the necessary authorizations for this project that the book Elder Jensen referred to has already been published. It is entitled *The Massacre at Mountain Meadows* and was written by Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley Jr., and Glen M. Leonard. However, the information obtained by this project is still valid and will be useful, if even at a later date. The results of the lab work will be made available to family members and to Elder Jensen when it is received.

Results of Soil Sample Analysis: The analysis of the soil samples by the University of Northern Arizona took two years rather than two or three months as expected. Once the results were known, I was asked, by the science people portion of the project, to keep the results confidential until the end of May 2011. At the end of May 2011 I was asked to delay sending out a final report of the project for a few more weeks. Since that date has now passed, I am sending this report to Elder Marlin K. Jensen (Church Historian), and to members of the Robison Family I contacted when the project was getting started.

The soil samples were tested for the presence of anthrax the spores of which are known to lie dormant in the soil for many years. Most writers on the subject take the position that Proctor Hancock Robison was poisoned by anthrax carried by the cattle of immigrants bound for California. It is thought by many that Proctor came in contact with the anthrax when he skinned a dead cow (or came in contact with anthrax contaminated soil or water) near the immigrant trail just south of Fillmore, Utah. The other theory is that California-bound immigrants intentionally placed poison (such as strychnine which does not last in the environment for a significant length of time) in this area to avenge those who they perceived had done them an injustice.

The results of approximately one hundred soil samples taken from Proctor's grave were benign meaning that anthrax spores were not present. Neither was it detected in the analysis of bone samples taken from Proctor's body. There was an interval of 150 years between the time Proctor died and the time the soil samples were taken for analysis. However, some scientists are of the opinion that this interval of time is too great, given the environmental condition in the Fillmore Cemetery, for anthrax to remain in this soil and that if it ever was present it could not be detected today.

So, our efforts to try and determine if anthrax was responsible for Proctors death were inconclusive.

I wish to thank each person that participated in this process. The combined cooperation of all enabled this project to be carried out successfully from beginning to end.

APPENDIX A: - List of Family Members Contacted

Joseph and Lucretia Robison

Proposal by the living descendants of Joseph and Lucretia Robison to disinter the body of their son Proctor H. Robison who died September 21, 1857 and is buried in the Fillmore City Cemetery. Raymon W. Carling, 744 Hillside Drive, Moab, Utah (435-259-6654) was the family representative for this project. The following family members were contacted concerning this proposal.

	Child of Joseph and Lucretia	Born	Spouse	# Children	Family Members Contacted	
1	Alfred	1829	Eliza A. Wilder	1	No living descendants	
2	Benjamin Hancock	1831	Lillis A. Ander	10	Larry Robison, Scipio, Utah	1
			Susanna Turner	10	Venise R. Sepndlove, SLC, Utah	2
3	Joseph V.	1832	Martha Olmstead	10	Phil Robison, Fillmore, Utah	3
			Elizabeth Marshall	1	Elaine Robison Scott, Provo, Utah	4
4	Alvin Locke	1834	Mary C. Olmstead	6	Alvin Robison, Hanksville, Utah	5
					Don Lusko, Hanksville, Utah	6
5	William Henry	1836	never married	0	No living descendants	
6	Lucretia Proctor	1841	James Clark Owens	12	Jeanene Flake, Thatcher, Ariz.	7
					Alene Russell, Pheonix, Ariz.	8
					Michael Husk, Fresno, Calif.	9
					Marilyn Geddes Kerr, Logan, Utah	10
					David H. Geddes, Ogden, Utah (DNA donor)	11
7	Proctor Hancock	1842	never married	0	No living descendants	
8	Almon	1845	Ada E. Olmstead	1	No living descendants	
			Josephine Sweeting	0	No living descendants	
9	Albert	1847	Elizabeth Marshall	1	Beverly Rasmussen Dutson	12
10	Adelia	1848	Platte De Alton Lyman	9	Mark E. Lyman, Blanding, Utah	13
					Jed Lyman, Blanding, Utah	14
					Mike Holyoak, Moab, Utah (DNA donor)	15
					Paul Holyoak, Moab, Utah (DNA donor)	16
11	Franklin Alonzo	1851	Isabella E. Pratt	11	Steven Robison, SLC	17
			Harriet Thorpe	7	Mary Davies Day Fowler, Fillmore, Utah	18
			Lois Thorpe	10	Reed Robison, Fillmore, Utah	19
	TOTAL			89	Wendell Robison, Fillmore, Utah	20

APPENDIX B:

Millard County Chronicle Delta Utah August 7, 1930

Thomas W. Cropper, Indian War Veteran, Concludes His Stories of the Past:

Proctor Robison Poisoned and Dies

My notes say as to an event leading up to the Mountain Meadows Massacre he had the viewpoint that the massacre itself was mostly done by Indians and for an actuating cause influencing white participants to engage in it also was the fact that a bunch of immigrants from Missouri and Arkansas poisoned the waters of a particular spring or slough near Corn Creek between Meadow and Kanosh.

This poisoned water killed one of his best friends.

He was afoot [when] Proctor Robison came to him on horseback. Proctor had drunk of that water and was feeling sick he wished Cropper to ride with him to Fillmore. Cropper said Robison was on an old blue mare thin and none too strong so Cropper said to Proctor,

Why your old mare can't carry us both can she?

Robison thought she could so Cropper got on double. Proctor Robison was Almon Robison's brother. Proctor H. Robison of Delta was named after this uncle.

They rode toward Fillmore. There came up a bad rain. Robison's eye was shut and he was fast becoming very sick. It was bad going too under foot in the mud. So Cropper told him to ride on alone. Robison asked him to stay with him but Cropper said the mare would give out with both but that with only one she could make it. So Cropper slid off behind in the mud and drenching rain and told Robison to whip up at all speed and run for Fillmore.

When dawn came Cropper told his mother he was going to see his friend Proctor Robison. He found him with his head all swelled up [and] by then perfectly blind and he lived only to that night. It was the last of August or about the first of September.

(I read this section of these notes aloud to Proctor H. Robison of Delta last week and he says that he had almost forgotten but this recalled his dim memory to the fact that he was told his uncle Proctor Robison in whose honor he was named had met his death by drinking poisoned water. It was so many years ago that all detail of it was lost to Proctor).

So this is an amplified side light of the reputed poisoning of springs or water I have read of in histories which with other things was one of the contributing factors in the terrible Mountain Meadows Massacre.

Taken from Utah Digital Newspapers -

<http://udn.lib.utah.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/millard&CISOPTR=2073&CISOSHOW=2124&REC=1>

APPENDIX C: Letter to Fillmore City Requesting Permission to Exhume Proctor Robison's Body

Proposal to Exhume the Body of Proctor Hancock Robison

by Raymon W. Carling, Robison Family Representative

December 20, 2007

744 Hillside Drive, Moab, Utah 84532

Name: Proctor Hancock Robison

Born: 5 Mar 1842 Scroepole, Oswego, New York

Died: 21 Sep 1857, Fillmore, Utah, supposedly by poison (from Fillmore City cemetery records).

Burial Location: Fillmore, Utah City Cemetery.

Parents: Father - Joseph Robison, born 21 May 1804 Charleston, New York; died 3 Jun 1868 Fillmore, Utah. Mother - Lucretia Hancock Robison, born 24 Aug 1807 Shewsbury, Vermont, died 31 Aug 1899 Fillmore, Utah.

Narrative/Proposal: It is fairly well established that Proctor Robison died of poison, but what is not known is the kind of poison that killed him. From the date of his death until the current day, the Robison family, as well as many others in southern Utah, have thought he was killed by poison maliciously put in a water source by the Fancher-Baker immigrant party that were killed later that same year at Mountain Meadows in southern Utah. Recently the question has been raised that perhaps Proctor was killed by anthrax unknowingly carried by cattle driven along the immigrant trail to the California goldfields.

To answer this question the Robison family proposes to exhume the body of Proctor Robison and have experts from the University of Northern Arizona, who are particularly noted for their expertise in this field, test soil and bone fragments to see if it can be determined if Proctor died of poison or anthrax.

It is also proposed to do DNA testing on two or three small bone fragments that would be taken from the grave as part of the exhumation process. The results would be compared to DNA samples recently (within the past three or four weeks) taken from living descendants of Proctor's two sisters. The type of DNA testing proposed can best be done by testing a living person (either male or female) that is a descendant of Proctor's mother, Lucretia. This person must be a descendant exclusively through the daughter to daughter line. The results of this test will determine conclusively if the body exhumed is a descendant of Lucretia Robison. The DNA testing would be done at Sorenson Genomics laboratory in Salt Lake City as they are world renowned for their expertise in DNA analysis.

At the grave site, the tombstone bears the following inscription: A Proctor Hancock Robison; died September 21, 1857; Aged 14 Years, 6 Months and 16 Days. The written cemetery records, however, indicate that Phillip P. Robison who died September 21, 1857 is buried at the same location. Recently specialists at the Family History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints determined that Proctor and Phillip are the same person.

Robison Family Representative, Raymon W. Carling, has personally identified and contacted twenty family members who are descendants from Proctor Robison's eleven siblings. Mr. Carling discussed the proposal with each, and without exception, each of them enthusiastically support the proposal. Documentation of contacts made is available, if necessary, from Mr. Carling.

Relationship of Proctor Robison to Family Representative: Proctor was a brother to Raymon Carling's great-grandfather, Franklin Alonzo Robison, of Fillmore, Utah.

Other: Attached is a proposal recently given to the Fillmore City Council for their information and approval of the project if a permit to exhume the body is granted by the Utah State Department of Health.

/s/ Raymon W. Carling