

Oliver Stratton and Harriet Ann Brown

(1818-1879 and 1826-1871)

Oliver Stratton was baptized into the Church in March 1840, so he was probably converted about the same time as his parents. After joining the Church he met Harriet Ann Brown, who was born into the Church. They were both endowed in the Nauvoo Temple on February 2, 1846, and were married for eternity on that date. They had been married civilly in 1841, but the Nauvoo Temple was not completed for the endowment or sealing until December 10, 1845.

Harriet Brown was born in Tennessee to a very active LDS family. Harriet's frail mother died at Quincy, Illinois in 1842. A year earlier, Harriet had married Oliver Stratton at the tender age of 14, but from her own dear mother she had learned the ways of a pioneer woman and mother. She was an energetic, thrifty woman and skilled in the crafts of frontier women. She spun the wool into thread and did the weaving for clothes. She also knit the socks and sweaters to keep her family warm. She made molasses and dried meat, fruit and vegetables for their food supply. Her father married Phoebe Draper Palmer to help him with his family. Harriet's first baby, James Albert, was born January 14, 1844 in Hancock County, Illinois. The 26th of June, 1846, her father enlisted in the Mormon Battalion, and her brothers came to live with her.

The Calvin and Oliver Stratton families were living in Hancock County, Illinois during much of the persecutions, which finally culminated in the expulsion of the Saints from the state. There is evidence that both of these families were probably acquainted with Joseph and Hyrum Smith and their families since some of the family members occasionally worked for the Smith brothers in Nauvoo. Not only were they acquainted with the Smith families, and heard the Prophet speak, they were also interested in the Prophet's bid for the presidency of the United States, helped in the completion of the Nauvoo Temple and were aware of the much dissent that transpired in Nauvoo just prior to the Prophet's death due to William Law, Sidney Rigdon and John C. Bennett. They felt the personal loss of the Prophet Joseph and Hyrum at the martyrdom in 1844, and were prepared to defend their homes against the mobs that seriously harassed the Saints in that area after the martyrdom. Finally on June 1, 1849, Oliver, his wife and his two children, both under four years of age, and his wife's 3 younger brothers joined Captain Evans' Company and started for the Rocky Mountains.

While they were crossing the plains, a herd of buffalo stampeded and came close enough to the wagon train to frighten the oxen and to cause them to run away. Often the Indians would stampede the buffalo in the direction of the wagon trains in an effort to cause enough disturbance to drive off some of the livestock and horses, which the Indians subsequently retrieved. When the buffalo stampeded in the direction of the wagon train, the pioneers became very frightened. With their wagons being driven at a rapid pace to move out of the way of the buffalo stampede, one woman became so frightened that they would not make it that she jumped from the back of her wagon to run for safety. Her jump was unsuccessful and she was killed by the buffalo.

The family made their way across the plains for the Zion of their dreams where they could build a home and live in peace. This was a trying time for these displaced people out in the wilderness, poorly provided for and at the mercy of the elements, wild animals and Indians. Most of the families had fathers or brothers in the Mormon Battalion fighting the Mexicans or Indians or both and were walking

the long distance from Iowa to New Mexico, through Arizona to San Diego over miles and miles of desert where the water holes and streams were very far apart. They would go weeks with no word from their loved ones with the Battalion, but their prayers in behalf of their loved ones were not in vain. An account in John Weaver's diary says that one day as they were crossing the plains, moving slowly across western Nebraska, a horseman rode up to Harriet's wagon and handed her a letter. All stopped to read the letter as everyone was anxious to hear the news from her father who was with the Mormon Battalion near El Paso, Texas. When the letter was read, they looked up to thank the messenger and ask more questions but he was gone. One of the boys were sent forward along the wagon train to find him, but he was not to be found.

When the Captain of the Company heard of him, he sent a man on a horse to find him. He came to Harriet's wagon to ask about the messenger of the letter. Harriet said the messenger had come to her wagon near two cedar trees they had passed about a mile or so back. Two men were sent to the end of the train and past the two cedar trees mentioned, looking for horse's hoof prints where the rider could have come to the wagon train or where he may have left. No sign of a messenger nor any sign of horse tracks could be found. What better service to suffering Saints could be performed by one of the three Nephites than to give information and comfort to those weary Saints as they prodded along with little to comfort them other than hope of peace and rest eventually. The information in the letter gave comfort to the whole train.

Oliver junior was born in a wagon box while crossing the plains in Iowa. Oliver, his wife and three children, arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in the fall of 1849. Harriet's father arrived from California one week later. They took up their residence in Draper, Utah where they secured land and began to cultivate it, improving it, making their living and building a home. Besides farming, they had a small herd of sheep that the boys herded along the Jordan River.

Only students in Church history can have some idea of the anxieties and the sufferings of the Oliver Stratton family as they experienced the tribulations of the Church in Hancock County, Illinois, the martyrdom of the Prophet, their expulsion from the state at the hands of unscrupulous mobsters, and their bearing of children while crossing the plains. Harriet cared for 5 children and was pregnant during most of the trek across the plains. She was 23 years old. Noble is their heritage and great will be their reward.

When the Civil War broke out, it became impossible to get cotton from the South. Apostle Parley P. Pratt was sent to explore southern Utah to survey the possibility of cotton being raised in the Dixie country along the Virgin River. His report was favorable and President Brigham Young called twelve of the most successful farmers to go to Dixie to raise cotton and molasses cane. Oliver and his family were among those who were called to go. For the first time in their marriage they were beginning to prosper, to accumulate a few worldly goods and to build up a permanent home when the call came. Being true faithful followers of their faith and Prophet, without complaint they took what they could load in their wagon and made the long trip to this desolate desert land covered with sage brush, chaparral, and cactus. They lived among the rattlesnakes, scorpions and Indians along with a few more hardy souls with the same loving devotion for their Church and its leaders. At this time they had seven children.

They settled in a little canyon by the Virgin River which formed a pocket in the hills. The Indians called this area Pocketville. They lived in their wagon box when they first arrived in southern Utah, and farmed on the small deltas at the sides of

the river. Each spring when the floods came down, these hard working men would lose part of their top soil as the waters would wash their farm away. Times were very bad with barely enough food to eat. Oliver went over the hills a few miles south of Virgin where he found some flat, sandy soil. He cleared this land of the wild brush and planted grains for their winter bread. The boys would take turns herding the animals in the grassy area to keep the Indians from stealing them. The children took great responsibility for their age, helping their parents to raise the food that would keep them alive the coming winter. James Albert's daughter, Harriet Elizabeth, used to say that when they would complain of the food they had to eat he would say, "Maybe we haven't much, but we've never had to live on cane seed bread and molasses to keep from starving."

Oliver held the priesthood of a Seventy and served in several responsible Church positions. Because he was quite well educated for those times, and was one of the leading citizens, his talents were heavily relied upon in the establishment of the new community in Virgin and were later helpful to the organization and the building of the Saint George Temple.

Oliver and Harriet lived the rest of their lives in Virgin. They raised their 11 children in a log and adobe cabin. Originally it had a dirt floor and there were no windows. Later they put shingles on the roof and laid down a wooden floor. Harriet had not had an easy life. Children born in wagon boxes, hard labor every day, sustaining life for her family in the hot, dry Dixie country, yet she never saw life as a trial, but welcomed each day and each new challenge with enthusiasm, vigor and love.

Harriet's last child was born in Virgin. In the winter, Oliver went to Nevada to work in the mines and when the last child had been born, the father was away. This child was sickly and when it was six months old Harriet had an appendicitis attack which caused her death. Before she died, she asked her daughter-in-law, Emily Amanda Gardner Stratton, who had great love and devotion for Harriet, if she would care for her baby "until I come for him." Emily, who had two babies of her own and pregnant with her third, was glad to do for her dying mother-in-law whatever she asked. Harriet died on April 5, 1871. The father, Oliver, was sent for when the mother was taken ill, but by the time they could find him and he could return, she had been buried.

Emily said she cared for Frank Leon as if he was her own. Eight days after Harriet died, she was rocking little Frank in the rocking chair as he was very sick and restless. Emily said she strongly felt the presence of Harriet and late in the afternoon the baby died. Emily said immediately that her feeling of Harriet's presence was gone.

Oliver lived for eight and a half years after Harriet died, but after losing his beloved wife and companion, he lost much of his zest for life. Emily Amanda and his own children cared for him until he died in 1879.

Oliver and Harriet made major contributions to the establishment of Zion in the Rocky Mountains. Their many generations of offspring would do well to pattern their lives after such noble parentage.

References:

Family Bibles

Temple Record Church records from LaVerda Allen (granddaughter of Oliver Stratton)

Information from Paul Vineyard of Bakersfield, California

Temple Ordinance Records

Book "The Strattons", in possession of Mabel Stratton Perkins, Mesa, Arizona

Life History of Oliver Stratton and Calvin Stratton by Norene Stratton Payne (great granddaughter of Oliver Stratton)

Stratton Part of Brown's Story by Donna Stratton Harriet Brown Stratton by Margaret Lee Becker on Oliver and Harriet Stratton

Miscellaneous Records of C J. Stratton

Spelling and Punctuation left as originally written